

RESEÑA

Mezi pannou a babou [Between Maiden and Grandam]. A New Novel by Eda Kriseová

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Recibido agosto-2019. Revisado: octubre-2019. Aceptado: noviembre-2019.

The Czech author Eda Kriseová entered the literary circles in the 1970s. Unofficially, her proeses were then published in socialist Czechoslovakia in *samizdat* and in exile publishing houses abroad. After 1989 Velvet Revolution she returned to the official literary scene and continued writing. At the end of 2018 she published her latest novel *Mezi pannou a babou [Between Maiden and Grandam]*.

In publishing Eda Kriseová's book, Práh Publishing House rightly served its narrative placed in one storyline in the late 19th century, because the book's design emulates the ethos common to the late 19th-century publishing decorum, let alone illustrations derived from contemporary autotyped prints. The decorativeness of the volume truly strengthens the marriage of arts and crafts which concomitantly gave rise to New Art.

The author's images of late summer and coming autumn thus successfully fashion the echo of a floating *belle époque* ornament through stylising beauty at the moment of its death. The rendered landscapes are permeated by brightly coloured light, filled with the smell of decaying leaves, involving the reader in the flow where fortunes of the whole portrayed family are destined to rise and fall. The image of a stylised Decadent ornament is also suggested by a heavy flow of long sentences, at times stopped by a pause, slight or long, conveying the impression of unforceful rolling movement. Furthermore,

the effect of this wavering motion is enhanced by the intermittent setting of the text. It is here that the text takes a big breath, enlivening through Kate's photographs, letters and recollections the hundred years of her family memory. A gripping zonal composition provides the protagonist with a prism to see her own life by analogy to her granny's, or perhaps to other family members' fates, enabling her to become aware of her family togetherness. The linear narrative, when employed in the presentation of individual fortunes, at the same time evokes the course of flying time, which is enhanced by fluid «syntax» and ample natural reflexion.

In her forties, Kate believes that, having been retold to her granddaughter one day, the story will expand the family remembrance over two centuries. The search for life integrity in the footmarks of family memories may be intensified by locating the main story line in the years of Czechoslovak normalisation whose ideological disinterpretation of history induced an intentional denial of the country's historical continuity. Their personal history thus reveals the nation's past. In Kate's perspective, the time of World War I was a paramount historical break followed by fall. The novel is limited by two historic milestones – the Great War and the 1989 Velvet Revolution. Though neither served as a theme of the book, in the narration both events represent a dividing line between life changing epochs. While perceived by Kate as harmonious, the post-revolution time may only denote the starting point of the oncoming decline, as the family memory reminds her that history teaches us by analogy. Both individual stories – as told by Kate and her granny Agnes – in this way help to survey and overarch Czech modern history. Factually, through presenting the two end-of-century eras, the narration refers to the «decline of the West».

Not surprisingly, the disillusionment of the late 90s opened the way for the rediscovery of Spengler's book (*The Decline of the West*). All things considered, Eda Kriseová's story communicates the widespread discontent at the turn of the century, alluding to the decline and fall at the outburst of beauty. It is where Kate's love died, as did her granny's love, like Central Europe's prosperity in the early twentieth century, which, in all likelihood will be followed by the general collapse of the beautifully depicted times after the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

In this text Kriseová unpretentiously offers another continuation of her favourite theme, namely, man's confrontation with history. Many of her writings highlighted the absurdity of «normalised» Czechoslovakia and the imperativeness of one's search for individual existence. In contrast to samizdat texts completed before Velvet Revolution, here normalised Czechoslovakia becomes only one period in our history, a singularity in the course of time. Through maintaining the awareness of historical continuity, the narrator lets the reader, at least momentarily, dream of exquisite beauty, clinging to a hope for continuous family togetherness as juxtaposed against the subject worship established by the twentieth-century modernity.

Stylistically, the reader registers the author's peculiar features continuing her samizdat efforts. The same reference can be made to the theme of fools who show a deeper understanding of the world than the so-called normal people – the text first introduces Slávka, her favourite character portraying a semiliterate, female dwarf fortune-teller. Similarly, to Kreiseová's reader already familiarised with her stories, no novelty is the theme or background of predatory and agonised love. It needs be admitted, though, that in her best love stories like *Pompejanka*, or in her new novel *Mezi pannou a babou* the theme of love only serves as a setting to evoke a story in a particular period.

