
Rolf Bauerdick. *The Madonna on the Moon. A Novel.* Trans. from German by David Dollenmayer. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. 401p.

ALBRECHT CLASSEN
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Produced in a truly bibliophile fashion characteristic of Alfred A. Knopf (binding, paper, print type), Dollenmayer's translation of Rolf Bauerdick's *The Madonna on the Moon* (*Wie die Madonna auf den Mond kam*, 2009) introduces a rather unusual and yet fascinating contemporary first novel written by an author who is otherwise well known for his journalistic essays and photos. Situated in post-war Romania, and focusing on the life of its protagonist, Pavel Botev, a young man who grows up in his Sinti and Roma community in the fictional village of Baia Luna, the use of the term "gypsy" throughout seems rather irritating. Critics have already reacted quite controversially about the author's attempt to depict this cultural world in Transylvania (see Wikipedia's entry on Rolf Bauerdick) primarily under the Socialist regime, so it might not be quite appropriate here to attempt an in-depth review of his thick and quite complex novel in which numerous characters appear and interact with each other. Rather than analyze the quality of the translation, we examine some of the literary themes and topics and try to reach for an evaluation of this book as a literary effort by a 'fresh' author.

Bauerdick has obviously done extensive research on the Sinti and Roma communities in Romania, but it remains unclear what might have motivated him to pursue that goal, considering his own very different cultural background (born and raised in western Germany). The reader also faces the problem of not really knowing where the novel takes place, who the individual figures are, and what the historical background might be. All this emerges slowly, but only in a fragmentary fashion. Overall, we can figure out that the novel traces the history of that rural world in Romania from the time of the Nazi regime to the 1950s and from then on until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, while the Second World War is only mentioned in passing. Most importantly, Bauerdick situates the events in the time of the cold war and many of the characters talk about the race for the moon and space exploration that pit the USSR against the USA. At the same time, the young protagonist is also attracted to the Catholic Church and the role of the Virgin Mary, which helps explain the central motif, the theft of a sculpture of Jesus's mother and the conflicts among various ethnic groups within that rural community.

The reader is surprisingly drawn into the events evolving before our eyes, since they are told through countless direct conversations involving the protagonist and his family members and friends. Bauerdick demonstrates an amazing skill in the personalized characterization of his many different figures, whom we regularly encounter through Pavel's eyes. However, the narrator is also heavily present, and the indirect interaction between both makes for a really fascinating read. It proves to be difficult, however, to get a clear idea of who is who, of what is really happening, and what the historical-political background consists of. The number of conflicts is large, since we learn about the tensions between Sinti und Roma on the one hand and the German, Hungarian, and Romanian population on the other. Then there are the conflicts between the Church and secular society. Moreover, the impact of the socialist regime in Romania is ever pervasive, and all this is framed by the global conflict between East and West, as encapsulated by the space race (Sputnik, etc.). The author also spices up his novel with

erotic allusions between Pavel's teacher Angela Barbulesca and the young man, but then a horrible murder occurs, the secret police appear on the stage, political and military developments enter the picture, and we are plunged into an abyss of personal and public problems. The translation reads smoothly, though I would criticize that "Transylvania" is not to be rendered as "Transmontania." Altogether, *The Madonna on the Moon. A Novel* is quite promising since the author demonstrates an impressive narrative ability which appeals to many different audiences, as the numerous translations into French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Dutch, and other languages indicate, and this English translation also confirms.

Olga Bezhanova. *Growing Up in an Inhospitable World: Female Bildungsroman in Spain*. Tempe: V Premio de Crítica Victoria Urbano, 2014. 228p.

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Olga Bezhanova skillfully breaks with prevailing assumptions about female Bildungsroman to identify and define trends in contemporary female novels of formation in Spain. Through her analysis of some of the most representative female Bildungsromane over three eras (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Franco's dictatorship, and the post Franco era), she explores connections among female novels of formation, history, and Spain's social context.

The main challenge Bezhanova faces is critical expectations for how Bildungsroman should be defined. She points out that critical debate hinders this genre from progressing. Antiquated concepts about the Bildungsroman genre prevent the inclusion of more novels which could enrich the genre and broaden our perspective in defining novels of formation. Most fascinating about this book is the way she debunks traditional views of novels of formation to highlight the "impressive capacity [of the Bildungsroman genre] to transform and to adapt to changing historical, social, and cultural norms" (13). Bezhanova proves that Bildungsroman is not static and formulaic, but rather a genre that can evolve and even draw from other genres. She successfully synthesizes the evolution of theoretical perspectives and the female Bildungsroman genre in Spain. In addition to its chronological structure, the arrangement of chapters challenges critical assumptions, explores relevant thematic and stylistic features in detail, and studies relationships to previous or future Bildungsromane. Her analysis of Fernán Caballero's *Las dos Gracias*, Pilar Sinués' *La vida íntima*, and Concha Espina's *La rosa de los vientos* in the first chapter demonstrates that, despite critics' expectations, female novels of formation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries acknowledge the importance of women's growth, offering some possibilities through which women could develop in a rigid patriarchal system. This section allows for a better understanding of the position that women occupied in society and their limited options in developing and protecting their rights.

Bezhanova goes on to examine how their initial desire to advance in life became unattainable during Franco's dictatorship. The importance of the Bildungsromane discussed in this section derives from the creation of a common space in which female writers could discuss and voice their concerns during a time when their characters were forced to stunt their growth and regress to a metaphorical state of eternal childhood. Her analysis of Rosa Chacel's *Memorias de Leticia Valle*, Teresa Barbero's *El último verano en el espejo*, Ana Moix's *Julia*,