



by Irena Brežná
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Fiction

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The Thankless Stranger

Die undankbare Fremde

review

The Thankless Stranger is an account of the immigrant experience, fuelled by autobiography, which succeeds in conveying a real sense of intimacy and authenticity regarding the immigrant experience.

The main storyline charts the struggle to come to terms with an alien culture – a situation which is compared to being a young, passionate woman forced to endure an imposed marriage with a stern and much older man. However, as the narrator matures, she has a growing awareness of those aspects of her new homeland which are positive. Interwoven with the main narrative are a series of ‘mini-dramas’ arising from the narrator’s experiences as an interpreter mediating between immigrants, medical and legal authorities, and social workers. These often very moving episodes highlight the tragedy and vulnerability of those who flee impossible conditions at home and hope, often against overwhelming odds, to make something of their lives in a new country.

Brežná’s fluid writing style has a lyricism and lightness of touch which communicate her amusement and bemusement at the collective behavioural traits of the native people in her host country of Switzerland. And her moving depiction of the plight of other immigrants ensures that the serious underlying issues concerning poverty, exploitation and political persecution are not underplayed.

about the author

Irena Brežná was born in Czechoslovakia in 1950 and emigrated to

Switzerland in 1968. She works as a court interpreter, as a war correspondent (Chechnya) and as a humanitarian helper for the Red Cross. She has been awarded multiple literary and media prizes for her autobiographically inspired novels and war reportage, such as the Theodor-Wolff Prize and the EMMA Journalist Prize.

Previous works include:

Die beste aller Welten ('The Best of All Worlds', 2008)

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