



British-Bulgarian Society Autumn 2016 Newsletter

Illustrated books by Zanara: inspiration of Bulgarian folklore Reviewed by Frank O'Reilly

Zanara is the artistic name of new B-BS member, Sabina Nedelcheva-Williams, an artist of strong eclectic influences, a graduate in Illustration from University College Falmouth. Some time ago she had an exhibition of her paintings at BCI and in early September she was part of a display in St. Pancras Church.

Actually I got to know Sabina through Waltham Forest (where we both live) connections rather than through the Bulgarian network. In fact B-BS was indirectly involved as our committee member, Rod Holmes, knew her from the Walthamstow Migrants ESOL group. [<http://esol.wfcw.org>]. This group in itself is a source of initiatives on migrant welfare and language issues, which is of interest to our society. I directed Sabina to the B-BS Facebook page and then she expressed an interest in and joined the real-life society. So this does show that our Facebook site can have results.



I think that Zanara's works should be intriguing to our society as they overlap with so many areas of our interest. First of all, there are the fields of children's history and nature. Our editor, Chris Buxton has written a popular children's book and Ekaterina (Ina) Kozuharova of Sofia University, whose contacts with our society are longstanding, has produced a delightful illustrated story (both English and Bulgarian editions), which can be rendered in English as 'Robin Redbreast builds a nest'. It can be viewed at book.store.bg under the Bulgarian title of Червеногушко строи дом: Екатерина Кожухарова. Ina's drawings of bird life are first-rate. Needless to say, ornithology is a strong area of interest for our society.

Sabina kindly sent me two of her books, both short but lavishly illustrated. The larger book is entitled 'Love and Madness' and is based on a Bulgarian parable. It's one of those once upon a time stories, in this instance a time 'when all human feelings and qualities were joined together.' Later, feelings like Love, Jealousy, Madness and the rest play a dynamic game of hide and seek till by the end Love is blinded and Madness becomes her guide. The second book is called 'The independent life of my thoughts' This describes how thoughts have a life of their own and we must be open to their benign influence but also be ready to combat the Unwanted Thoughts, which will 'turn my world upside down, erase all colours from my dreams and take away all the magic.' Indeed, the text of these books is sharp, succinct and thought provoking, but, for this reviewer, it is the illustrations that bring that extra magic to the works. 'Surreal' is the word that comes to mind, combining objects and personages, often hinted at rather than fully drawn, with startling colour combinations. It puts me in mind of Salvador Dali, but I am not sure what Sabina's influences were. It is difficult to do justice to them without an artist's vocabulary but the accompanying picture gives some idea...just a little idea, as there is nothing repetitive or samey about these images. One thinks after a few pages that one has got the hang of the style but then something totally unexpected meets the eye on the next page. We can certainly say these paintings are not representational

but then neither are they abstract or rather, although they are not abstract in the painterly sense of the word, they have some affinity with the term 'abstract' in literary terms, in other words a résumé, which hints at rather than elaborates the subject matter, leaving out many details and concentrating on the key aspects of an image. In another sense, they are like symbols in a dream dictionary. But view the works and make your own judgement.

I would hesitate to classify Zanara's work as 'children's literature.' Certainly children should be able to read the words (with a few exceptions) without difficulty, but the understanding behind the words is another matter. Rather they are myths for our time. Sabina recalls her childhood in the open air '[sitting] around the fire...telling or listening to fascinating stories.' But the art of the storyteller in Bulgaria as well as in Britain and Ireland was a realm for young and old; each type of person got what they could from the stories appropriate to their age and understanding and each helped the others to interpret and apply



the morals. Needless to say, folklore, folk song and dance and storytelling constitute an important part of B-BS events, notably at recent Martenitsa celebrations.

So I see Sabina's writings and paintings as forming a sort of bridge between the cultures of Bulgaria and Britain (which of course is also reflected in her own educational background). In this sense they might not only stimulate interest in Bulgarian folklore among British readers of all

ages, but could also prove useful as study material in Bulgarian schools in Britain.

Sabina's works can be viewed on www.zanaraart.com and she is keen to get feedback. I would recommend reading with pleasure these works as well as the more naturalistic 'robin book' of Ina. Meanwhile we welcome Sabina to our society and hope that we will benefit greatly from her talents and enthusiasm. Perhaps she will be encouraged to write for his newsletter.