

## **“The Stars We Wrecked”**

The novel is not a typical novel. Just like Arnold Lane says – it’s just a collection of memories from a period of his life, more an image of this period, a kind of document and reflection of his “ego” back then. As for the genre of this “work”, it’s difficult to call it a memoir, let alone a novel. It’s more a memory and an analysis. To some extent it is a testimony, a document, but most of all a dramatic monologue written in dialogue form, tinged with a taste of documentary. Of course, it’s just a game, a kind of fiction heading towards the final episode, towards an uncertain conclusion.

The main character, who is a writer, or more specifically an agent reflecting on himself, is very complex. Lane himself admits to be a split personality, simply because as a CIA agent he has to act under a different identity. His undercover name is Peter and he is given the assignment to monitor E.P. and report on his thinking and effort to comply with the system and not losing face.

The reminiscences are not just agent Peter’s memories of the King (E.P.), but a social analysis. Gradually we find out that the society is not just historical, but eternal. Its duration is permanent and it’s still very topical. The work that has been changing into a kind of dramatic dialogue between agent Peter and Elvis precisely shows the ambivalence of the human ego and the life of a “gifted artist”. Little by little, we arrive at the point in which the agent, who is monitoring, and the gifted E.P., who is being monitored, appear to be in fact one person in two bodies. Their conversation only seems to be a dialogue between two people, two personalities. One person wants to get ahead by means of his own intellect and opinions, the other, however, is constantly adjusting to the general hypocrisy. One part of the ego agrees with the opinion of those who have the power and control the society, while the other attempts to escape the reality and fights against those in power.

The dualism of the inner ego and the presented struggle with one’s self ensures that the writing is easy to read, straightforward and – despite the length – riveting.

We slowly come to realize that the confusion in the souls of both characters has brought about a dramatic climax and that another person has appeared – a personality symbolizing the restless spirit captured by a deformed society.

While reading we try to understand the mentioned duality of the main character, agent Peter, and we get to see that however we’re trying to comprehend the artist or the calculating agent, we are limited by our own inability to protect ourselves against the system and the relentless requirements of the society.

The author reminisces about and describes how the merciless dictator of the manipulated society is hovering above the gifted artist’s talent – and it is this dictator who, backed by the general approval of the public, controls every creative soul.

The desire to have a career and a portion of fear turn the CIA agent into a hypocrite who keeps his own opinion to himself, while presenting a total opposite of this opinion to the public. At the same time, he feels compassion and perhaps a hidden, undeclared love and admiration to the gifted artist who is caught in the cobweb of the society.

Arnold Lane’s friend words in the book’s prologue say it all: this pathologically ironic book is an imitation of life. It means that we’ll get to see the true face of Janus, the true face of society witnessing a battle between good and evil, between talent and shoddiness, between mediocrity and originality. But we’ll also get to see the double-facedness of the human ego which accommodates the struggle between desires and needs, freedom and submissiveness, tenderness and violence.

To some degree I could consider these memories to be the confession of a generation, a confession in which reality blends with a surreal dream. The hero is a split personality, he doesn’t know what he

wants, is totally confused. He despises the entire society, but cannot stand up against it. He tries to live a normal life. He doesn't want to earn money at the expense of others, but is forced to do it. This psychodrama is about the search for spiritual peace, human values and artistic freedom.

The text is in no way just mediocre literature for lovers of cheap bestsellers, but a serious reflection on ourselves intended for demanding readers.

**Written by Ľudovít Kossár**