

The sharp wisdom

A speech by Prof. Bogdan Bogdanov on the occasion of Vera Mutafchieva's 80th birthday anniversary celebrated at New Bulgarian University

Dear Vera, we, especially I, value highly a quality of yours, which is indeed very rare. It is hard to describe it in one word – that is the mastery of being non-platitudinous. In all that Vera Mutafchieva does she acts against the commonplace. And platitude is not a rare thing, even at a celebration such as this one, although modest and inside out institution, we are nevertheless faced with the danger of being banal, of saying banalities.

The special dual role of Vera Mutafchieva – of a historian and a writer. Of course when we look deeper we see that her deed has two facets which cannot be separated. Because in history Vera fights with the rhetorical surface of the regular historical research, which seemingly relies on facts, but in fact depends more on non-facts, which are hard to prove. In her academic endeavors Vera Mutafchieva does the reverse. She works for some truth, she thinks of it beforehand, then she finds proof, which in the end corroborates her hypothesis. It is the same in her creative writing. Vera works for the real imagination, which is more valuable than the details of some facts.

A long time is needed for the study of Vera Mutafchieva's several styles, through which the general style – the one against banality - shows. When needed, it is directed towards a clear purpose and reason. In other instances she develops a way of expressing, which is unique in our Bulgarian intellectual circles. I would like to call it “остра мъдрост”. I am also inclined to wisdom, I try to say wise things from time to time, with me they are mild; hers are sharp, clear and abrupt. This seems to be the most cherished side of her expressivity and also of her personality.

At NBU we will try and decipher what she has written from the point of view of several styles. Let me end with the style that impresses me most. The sharp wisdom: the wisdom of a historian, who does not doubt that man lives historically and in a multitude of different events and on the other hand, unlike most historians, never forgets that man cannot be totally different. Therefore in her work, in her wonderful afterwords she always reminds us that yes, people were faced with such and such events, but in the end they cannot have been much different from us. This is a special type of humanism. I call it “sharp wisdom”, but it merits more consideration and better interpretation.

Vera, I wish you all the best, God bless you and I hope you remain all the more unswerving in your thinking!