



Le Vin de solitude

Irène Némirovsky

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Largement autobiographique, *Le Vin de la solitude* retrace le destin d'une famille russe réfugiée à Paris. Le déracinement, l'isolement, mais aussi la farouche volonté de s'affranchir de tous les carcanes sont au cœur de ce huis clos familial oppressant. Irène Némirovsky brosse le portrait sans concession d'une jeune fille qui tente d'échapper à l'emprise de sa mère, une grande bourgeoise mariée à un "juif obscur", pour laquelle elle n'éprouve que de la haine.

Récit d'une douloureuse libération, ce roman subversif confirme, s'il en était besoin, le talent d'un des plus grands écrivains du XXème siècle.

Le Vin de solitude Details

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Hannah says

Yet again, I've picked up another Némirovsky book that I could not put down. I was immediately pulled into this story about a young girl named Hélène who spends her loveless childhood watching her neglectful parents fall to their own vices, and how she tries to forge her own path in life. Hélène's greatest struggle throughout it all is to find a way to forgive and forget. There are echoes of *Anna Karenina* throughout the text, with allusions to its opening lines of "*vengeance is mine; I will repay*" and "*all happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.*"

What is highly interesting about *The Wine of Solitude* is the fact that it's the most autobiographical of Némirovsky's works. Though the subject matter is quite heavy and sad, I couldn't stop turning the pages because of the way that Némirovsky turns pain and suffering into such beautiful writing. Hélène experiences much sorrow, anger, and hurt, but she also finds happiness in *les petits bonheurs de la vie* such as reading, swimming in the sea, and being in nature. These little moments throughout the book make it shine.

"But she loved studying and books, the way other people love wine for its power to make you forget. What else did she have?"

"The night was crystal clear now, a transparent blue. She sat down by the window, humming softly. Never had her heart felt so light; a kind of joyous passion flowed through her blood."

"She lay down in the water, looked at the sky above and laughed, thinking with gratitude, 'It's impossible to be unhappy when you have all this: the smell of the sea, sand running through your fingers... the air, the breeze...'"

"'I'm not afraid of life,' she thought. 'The past has given me my first experiences of the world. They have been exceptionally difficult, but they have forged my courage and my pride. And that immutable treasure is mine, belongs to me. I may be alone, but my solitude is powerful and intoxicating.'"

Silvia Romano says

Hace años que no leía tantos libros buenos del mismo autor. Hay algo que tiene esta autora que traspasa las hojas y trastoca los sentidos. Es su ironía, su forma punzante de describir a los personajes, es la forma dolorosa de transmitir sus pesares al lector. Muy pocos autores logran ese embrujo entre lector, el escritor y la obra. Hay una escena maravillosa y triste cuando está Elena, la protagonista, en medio de la bruma con su institutriz (no contaré más). Solo por esa escena, casi cinematográfica, vale la pena leer esta obra. Por Dios, ¡cuánto desasosiego! ¿Cuánto de realidad había en esa ficción? Nunca lo sabremos aunque dicen que mucha. En esta obra magistral, Nemirovsky se adentra en la psiquis de una niña que crece bajo la tiranía, el desprecio y la indiferencia de su madre. La relación entre ambas es el eje de esta historia. Es esa soledad de hija abandonada lo que le da potencia para salir adelante, para ser, pese a todo un ave fénix que puede contra todo. La relación con su padre y con su institutriz también resulta conmovedora y recuerda a esa niñez que todos llevamos que se ha ido despedazando a base de pequeñas decepciones. Justamente, de las decepciones de una niña trata esta novela. Altamente recomendable.

Fábio Martins says

Servido em copos cristalinos, em que apetece pegar, mas, no fim, não consigo deixar de sentir que merecia uns maiorzinhos. Como bom vinho que é, merece ser partilhado. E este, está ao dispor de amigos.

Krista says

She loved studying and books, the way other people love wine for its power to make you forget. What else did she have? She lived in a deserted, silent house. The sound of her own footsteps in the empty rooms, the silence of the cold streets beyond the closed windows, the rain and the snow, the early darkness, the green lamp beside her that burned throughout the long evenings and which she watched for hours on end until its light began to waver before her weary eyes: this was the setting for her life.

Learning that *The Wine of Solitude* – a story of a lonely and loveless childhood – is considered the most autobiographical of Irène Némirovsky's novels makes me want to quote Tolstoy's truism that all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way, and that feels appropriate beyond the obvious: in its tone and subject matter, this book feels like a feminine counterpoint – a yin to Anna Karenina's yang – that rounds out Tolstoy's masculine history and politics with a more female emotional perspective. This feels like a classic Russian novel, but in addition to the balls and sleigh rides and the boom of distant cannons, there is also a little girl determined to harden her heart against those who would try to break it. I loved the whole thing. Spoilers ahead.

The Wine of Solitude begins in the lead-up to WWI with eight-year-old Hélène Karol living in a shabby chic Kiev apartment with her beautiful and distant mother, her hardworking father (the “little Jew” who is expected to improve the extended family's fortunes), Hélène's dependent maternal grandparents, and her beloved governess, the only one who can reliably show affection to the little girl, Mademoiselle Rose. With parents who fight constantly, Hélène's life becomes both more quiet and more lonely when her father leaves Kiev for two years to build his promised fortune; two years in which Mrs Karol joins the ranks of other upper-class Russian women who spend their evenings on the arms of dashing young soldiers; two years in which Hélène's distaste for her mother grows into hatred and dreams of revenge.

She nurtured in her heart a strange hatred of her that seemed to increase as she grew older; like love, there were a thousand reasons for it and none; and like love, there was the simple excuse: 'It is because of who she is, and who I am.'

The family is transplanted first to St. Petersburg (where Hélène's father becomes more emotionally distant and her mother is more brazen about her newest young lover), and then to Finland to escape the Bolshevik

Revolution. When their village is found to be on the wrong side during the local civil war, Hélène's family finally moves to Paris; the city that Hélène's family has often visited throughout the years and which Hélène herself has been taught to love through her French governess. Having grown from girl to young woman during these years, and having experienced a sexual awakening, Hélène plots to use her newfound powers to take her ultimate revenge against the mother who had always put herself (and her lovers) above the emotional needs of her only child. In the end, however, Hélène resists the urge to destroy her mother for fear of becoming her. When her father dies just as the worldwide stock markets are collapsing, Hélène makes her own bid for freedom.

I'm not afraid of life. The past has given me my first experiences of the world. They have been exceptionally difficult, but they have forged my courage and my pride. And that immutable treasure is mine, belongs to me. I may be alone, but my solitude is powerful and intoxicating.

There are so many lovely little truthful emotional moments in *The Wine of Solitude*, and simply delightful evocations of time and place. Having read this after *Suite Française* (and learning at that time that Némirovsky was eventually rounded up from France during WWII and killed at Auschwitz), there's a horrible irony to watching Hélène arrive in Paris and believe herself to be safe and free at last. I shudder to wonder at just how true to life this sad childhood might have been and marvel at Némirovsky's ability to turn pain into art.

Kirsty says

The Wine of Solitude is one of Jewish Ukrainian author Irène Némirovsky's earliest novels. The author, whose family fled from Russia to France in 1918, was tragically killed in Auschwitz in 1942. She is best known for her book *Suite Française*, a collection of her memoirs compiled by her daughters, which was first published in 2004.

The Wine of Solitude opens with the character of eight-year-old Hélène Karol, an only child who lives with her parents, grandmother and governess in a tiny town in the Ukraine: a 'sleepy provincial town, lost deep within Russia'. Through Némirovsky's careful prose, we get to know the characters almost immediately. These range from kind and gentle governess Mademoiselle Rose to Hélène's grandmother, 'only fifty but she looked so old, so weary'. Hélène's own childish thoughts have been woven throughout the story, and as such, the reader feels such sympathy for her. The animosity within her family becomes fiercer as her story progresses. Her mother sees her as 'a living reproach, an embarrassment', and she is described as an 'impatient, ungrateful, deeply irritated child'. Némirovsky portrays the way in which 'whenever she opened her mouth, everyone eyed her scornfully' incredibly sensitively, sharing the reader's anguish for Hélène's plight.

It is made clear to the reader that her family life is far from ideal. Her mother, Bella, is more preoccupied with reading about the latest fashions than being kind to her daughter, and her father, Boris, perceived by Bella's family as an 'insignificant little Jew', is a quiet presence who often works away from home. The only fondness in Hélène's heart is for her father: 'She felt related and close to him alone, part of his flesh and blood, sharing his soul, his strength, his weaknesses'. Her mother, on the other hand, both revered and loathed, is described as 'a tall, shapely woman of "regal bearing" and with a tendency to plumpness, which she fought by using corsets'. She is given animalistic characteristics throughout, ranging from her 'claw-like

nails' to her rather savage actions: 'In the rare moments when she displayed any maternal affection... her nails almost always scratched Hélène's bare arm or face'. Boris and Bella are forever squabbling with one another: 'their quarrel was constantly interrupted by sudden moments of calm when they paused to gather their strength in order better to rip each other apart'. Only Rose and Hélène are kindred spirits, finding refuge and solace in one another's company.

The descriptions from the outset are wonderful. The wind which blows into Hélène's hometown from Asia 'filled the air with a howl that faded as it disappeared towards the west', and 'the pale sky was like a crystal ball with the glowing traces of a pink fire at its heart'. The entire novel is incredibly well built up, from its descriptions to its characters. The Wine of Solitude is extremely evocative of the places and period in which it is set, from St Petersburg to Paris, and from Finland to rural France. The different sections of the novel all encompass one or two of these settings, the descriptions of which are perfectly balanced and really build up a picture of each city or tiny town in the mind of the reader.

Sandra Smith's translation of *The Wine of Solitude* is faultless. She captures the turns of phrase from the original text incredibly well, never losing any of the original details of the story or of the wonderful descriptions. The human psyche has been portrayed incredibly well and so poignantly by both author and translator, and we follow Hélène's formative years to several different countries as she falls in and out of love and loses her innocence.

First published in 1935, *The Wine of Solitude* feels wonderfully contemporary. The novel is both intriguing and engrossing, and the characters and varied settings are wonderfully constructed. It is certainly one of Némirovsky's finest novels, one which has been perfectly realised and is written with such tenderness and compassion for its young protagonist.

Gumble's Yard says

Partly autobiographical story of a Ukrainian girl – Helene – growing up in a French speaking family who lives with a rich, loving but distant father and a frustrated disinterested mother (and her lover) and a beloved governess. Helene grows up through the First World War and Russian Revolution, first in Kiev, then a permanently damp and foggy St Petersburg, then exile in Finland (albeit in a Red village which then is invaded by the Whites), further exile and eventually post war in Paris.

Very much a story of a young girl, consciously growing up old beyond her years and struggling against her realisation that she has inherited the cynicism, hatred and manipulative nature of her parents (deliberately starting an affair with her mother's lover so as to punish her).

In many ways the upheavals and betrayals of the domestic setting, played out against a background of privilege, mirror the wider betrayals of the period.

A slow burn of a book but one that is evocative of place and time.

Elsa says

D'un ton plus noir et amer que ces autres romans, Le vin de solitude de Némirovsky s'attache à l'histoire

d'une famille juive, vivant en Russie, où la pauvreté et les pogroms, marquent son quotidien. Encore enfant, l'héroïne demande asile à des lointains cousins, eux bien installés dans leur confort et leur richesse. Et c'est là qu'elle tombe éperdument amoureuse d'Harry. Lorsque sa famille fuit la Russie, espérant trouver à Paris la promesse d'une vie festive et fantasmé, la jeune femme comprend que rien n'a réduit la distance qui la sépare d'Harry, héritier de la banque de sa famille. Elle se met à peindre et sa route finit enfin par croiser celle d'Harry, même si c'est pour l'abandonner rapidement.

Le récit est peut-être moins bien amené que dans les feux d'automne, mais on sent vraiment la noirceur, l'expatriation, l'errance de cette famille, les espoirs déçus. Le récit est poignant, bien écrit et le caractère de l'héroïne bien trempé. Un beau livre sur l'amour, l'abandon, l'espoir.

Jim Fonseca says

This is my fourth book by Irene Nemirovsky (the others are Suite Française, Fire in the Blood and David Golder). She was born in 1903 – about the time of the young girl in this story and this book is considered Nemirovsky's most autobiographical novel.

Spoilers Below:

A young girl grows up in a Jewish family in Kiev before the Russian Revolution. The young girl hates her domineering, self-centered mother who only scolds and denigrates her. She wants to be French like her nanny. She's an only child in a household that includes a grandmother and grandfather, cook, maids and the nanny.

Her father is loving but distant and consumed by business. She's appalled by the conversation her father has with business men at dinner, wolfing down their food without even knowing what it is. She parodies their table talk something like this: "...petrol; millions; buy, buy; millions; pipelines, millions, sell, sell; ships, millions...." When the conversation touches on the Russian Revolution and rumors of war, the talk turns to how to profit from the war and includes talk of bribery of officials.

While her father is obsessed by business, her mother takes a young lover who is a constant fixture in the house. As the girl matures and comes to understand what is going on, she can't stand the daily hypocrisy of mother and lover pretending nothing is going on, and the father sharing in the pretense and ignoring it all. She writes: "There is no virtue, no love in the world. Every household is the same. In every family there is nothing but greed, lies and mutual misunderstanding."

But her father's business goes well. The family becomes nouveau riche, buying books by the yard (she's the only one who reads any) and silver by weight (with other families' monograms on them).

There is no mention of observance of Jewish religious customs in the family and in fact her French nanny takes her to daily mass at a French church. This is probably paralleling Nemirovsky's life although her non-observance of Jewish customs did not save her or her husband from death in the concentration camps.

The Revolution hits. The family moves from Kiev to St. Petersburg. But it's from the frying pan into the fire: from here the young girl can see gun fighting and executions out of her bedroom window. They cross the

border into rural Finland where they live for a while in a communal group -- Russians Jews and non-Jews. The girl, now 15, spends all her days outdoors skiing and sledding alone with a 30-year old married man. Neither his wife nor her mother mind or even seem to notice. But the young girl learns her power of attraction to men.

They move to Helsinki and later Paris where, now 16, she develops the idea of revenge upon her mother for ruining her childhood: she will attempt to steal away her mother's lover.

We have a lot of great nature writing that reminds me of both Nabokov and Woolf. A sample: "A hazy, reddish light lingered low in the sky; the wind brought the smell of the Ukrainian plains to the city, a mild yet bitter scent of smoke, cold water and rushes that grew along the riverbanks. The wind blew in from Asia...it brought with it whirls of yellow dust that cracked between the teeth; it was dry and biting; it filled the air with a howl that faded as it disappeared towards the west. Then all was calm. The setting sun, pale and dull, veiled behind whitish clouds, sank deep into the river."

There's also a nature theme in the seasons: the hot Kiev summer; winter in St. Petersburg and Finland and, of course, springtime in Paris. A good read. Translated from the French although Nemirovsky also wrote in Russian. What a tragic loss her murder was to the literary world.

photo of Kiev around 1910 from chess.com

photo of Helsinki in winter from visithelsinki.fi

piperitapitta says

Di Irène, per Irène.

Ricordo ancora quando nel 2006 cominciai a notare "Suite francese" nelle librerie, nei supermercati, ovunque andassi che vendevano libri, al punto che chiesi anche a mio zio, "lettore forte" e punto di riferimento in famiglia per l'amore verso la letteratura, se l'avesse letto e se, secondo lui, fosse importante farlo.

Non sapevo niente della Némirovsky a quell'epoca, per cui, quando mi decisi dopo qualche tempo ad acquistarlo e successivamente a leggerlo, mi accostai al romanzo con la più totale inconsapevolezza nei confronti dell'incontro che stavo per fare.

Fui subito colpita dall'epicità che il romanzo sprigionava, dalla pacata dolcezza dell'autrice, da un senso di sgomento e ineluttabilità che sembrava pervadere le vicende e i protagonisti dei due "movimenti" che compongono *Suite francese*.

Ma ancora di più fui colpita dall'appendice in cui veniva raccontata, in maniera piuttosto esauriente e documentata, la tragica vita dell'autrice, dai primi anni trascorsi in Russia, alla fuga in Finlandia con la famiglia, all'arrivo in Francia, fino alla morte ad Auschwitz: quell'appendice diede il "la" ad una passione e ad un interesse nei confronti di Irène Némirovsky e della sua produzione letteraria che non mi hanno più abbandonata.

Una lunghissima premessa per dire che forse, mai come in questo caso, conoscere la biografia dell'autrice, è imprescindibile per arrivare a riconoscerne tra le pieghe delle opere ogni singolo respiro; perché Irène Némirovsky mette tutta se stessa in ogni cosa che scrive, ogni sua parola è una sua lacrima, ogni tramonto è un suo sorriso.

Solo dopo aver letto poche pagine di una sua biografia sommaria (ma agli appassionati consiglio *La vita di Irène Némirovsky* di Patrick Lienhardt e Olivier Philipponnat) non sarà più possibile non riconoscere nei suoi racconti o nei suoi romanzi la figura del padre Leonid, verso il quale nonostante una vita improntata esclusivamente all'accumulo di denaro e al benessere materiale avrà sempre una conclusiva parola d'affetto, e della madre Fanny: donna terribile, dedita esclusivamente al proprio piacere fisico, alla propria bellezza e completamente incapace di amare la figlia o di provare il benché minimo istinto materno.

Il vino della solitudine si inserisce in questo contesto, prepotentemente, come il più autobiografico tra i romanzi dell'autrice ed è sconvolgente rendersi conto di come sia riuscita a mettersi a nudo, non tanto nella narrazione di eventi totalmente riconducibili al proprio vissuto, ma quanto, soprattutto, nei sentimenti, nei momenti di dolore lancinante, nella delusione progressiva che l'ha avviluppata sin dalla tenera infanzia, nell'odio assolutamente razionale nei confronti della madre.

Eppure, nonostante un'infanzia vissuta affettivamente nell'abbandono - l'unica figura di reale riferimento sarà per lei la tata francese - nonostante il trauma di una fuga dalla terra russa - sia pur verso la tanto amata Francia - nonostante lo sradicamento culturale e materiale, Irène Némirovsky è stata capace di recuperare se stessa e di fare della propria passione per la scrittura una costante terapia contro il dolore dell'animo, una fonte di equilibrio per la propria persona e nutrimento per lo spirito, di donare a noi lettori un'autrice dal valore inestimabile e restituere a se stessa una donna capace di fare del proprio trauma infantile la propria grande forza, capace di amare teneramente la propria famiglia di un amore che lei stessa non aveva mai vissuto.

Una donna che è la stessa donna che pur scrivendo che «non essere stata una bambina quando era il momento di esserlo forse fa sì che non si possa mai maturare come gli altri; si è appassiti da un lato e ancora acerbi dall'altro, come un frutto troppo esposto al freddo e al vento...» o anche «Vita bella e terribile!», arriva ad affermare, nel giro di poche pagine, che «Non si può essere infelici quando si ha questo: l'odore del mare, la sabbia sotto le dita...l'aria, il vento...»

Mi piace credere che questo romanzo, pubblicato nel 1936, lo stesso anno in cui fu pubblicato anche *Jezabel*, ma posteriore a *Il ballo* - entrambi rappresentativi del suo conflitto interiore e del rapporto con la madre - fosse il preludio a quella pace interiore che la Némirovsky sembrerà aver raggiunto con *I doni della vita*, una vita che con lei non fu comunque mai benigna, avendole negato da figlia il diritto di poter godere dell'affetto della mamma e poi avendola privata in maniera definitiva della possibilità di poter donare il suo affetto di mamma alle proprie figlie; quella stessa pace interiore che, mi piace credere, la madre Fanny non sarà mai arrivata a raggiungere; una donna che fu incapace di accogliere le nipoti ormai orfane arrivando persino a dichiarare di non essere loro parente e alla cui morte, ultra novantenne, furono trovate nella cassaforte alcune copie intatte dei romanzi della figlia.

Ecco, voglio pensare che quel «di Irène Némirovsky per Irène Némirovsky» scritto dalla stessa Irène sul retro del quaderno di *Suite francese* stilando l'elenco delle sue opere accanto al titolo di *Il vino della solitudine* pochi giorni prima di essere arrestata, fosse un suo modo di far pace con il passato, un mettere la parola fine alla sua triste infanzia e di essere finalmente pronta a raccogliere *i doni della vita*.

Purtroppo non è stato così, a noi restano la rabbia sempre maggiore per essere stati privati di un grandissimo talento e le parole "di Irène per Irène", circa Irène, riguardo Irène.

classic reverie says

You always hear the adage write what you know & that is so true of Irene Nemirovsky's novels. She knows

being Russian, living in France, mother-daughter troubles, the 2 Wars & the Russian Revolution. Wine of Solitude was written in 1935 & Irene was living in France. This short coming to age story is about the Karol family living in Ukraine and barely having enough to make ends meet. Helene Karol is the main character who growing up with a mother who only wants "love" & not from her daughter or husband. Bella Karol is beautiful & thinks of only her pleasures in life & uses her feminine wiles to obtain what she wants not caring for others except when it is her desire to do so. The family dynamics are very dysfunctional & you hope that Helene will rise above all the emotional distress which is constantly in her life. This story starts before World War 1 & goes through the Russian Revolution and takes you into 1920's. Irene's characters are so realistic in having failings but also good qualities. An interesting story & what makes it more interesting to me is when an author has lived through the times they write about. These passages I found interesting because of the times being during the Russian Revolution & how life seemed so hopeless at times. "Who, for God's sake, would have had the time to take care of her? What was the health and life of a human being worth these days? What did it matter whether one person lived and the other died? All over the city people carried dead children to the cemetery tied up in sacks, for there were simply too many to afford a coffin. A few days before, during a break between lessons, she herself had watched a man being executed; and she was just a little girl in a smock, with fat curls round her neck and fingers stained with ink; she stood glued to the window, staring out, without looking away, without crying out, with no outward sign of emotion except for a gradual draining of colour in her face until her lips turned white. Five soldiers were lined up opposite a wounded man who stood against a wall, his head bandaged and bloody, swaying as if he were drunk. He fell to the ground; they carried him away, just as on another day they had carried away some dead woman on a stretcher, wrapped in her black shawl, just as a starving dog had come to[...]" "Far, far away in the distance, they heard the muted sound of a cannon. They only half listened to it. For months now the low rumbling was so constant that they had stopped hearing it. But where was it coming from? Who was firing? Whom were they firing at? When faced with a certain level of horror the human mind becomes saturated and reacts with indifference and egotism"

Debbie Robson says

In The Wine of Solitude Helene is a troubled, neglected young girl with a difficult self obsessed mother, a mother who in a slightly different incarnation appears in Le Bal. It's hard not to wonder what Mrs Nemirovsky was like and how much her personality affected the young burgeoning writer that was Irene. Helene her counterpart in The Wine of Solitude is a fascinating character and very apart from those around her. "She looked at the people around her. They didn't even see she was there, but to her as well they were unreal, distant, half-hidden in a mist: vain, insubstantial ghosts, lacking flesh and blood; she lived on the sidelines, far away from them, in an imaginary world where she was mistress and queen."

The novel begins in Ukraine where: "A hazy reddish light lingered low in the sky; the wind brought the smell of the Ukrainian plains to the city, a mild yet bitter scent of smoke, cold water and rushes that grew along the riverbanks." The family dynamics are deftly portrayed and also the precarious nature of the family fortunes. In Helene's young life the most important person is her nanny. As the novel unfolds and the family moves from the Ukraine to Paris Helene gradually becomes more aware of herself and those around her. I'm still haunted by some of the locations in the novel particularly the cottage in the woods where the Karols live during the First World War and the Russian revolution. Paris is beautifully evoked, including the apartment the Karols live in and even the buildings and the streets. The final sentence of the novel is, I think, one of my favourite endings of a novel.

Again Nemirovsky doesn't disappoint. I love her novels and was particularly interested in this early one

recently published that evidently is the most autobiographical of all. After reading this book it has really fired my interest in her rather than satisfied it. I have bought the biography by Philipponnat and Lienhardt and will read soon. I value Némirovsky not just for her writing skills but for bringing to life people and places, ways of living that have disappeared since the war that claimed the author's life. Highly recommended.

Samantha says

3.5

Simona says

Il vino della solitudine è un calice amaro, malinconico, triste, difficile da bere per la Némirovsky. Un calice che ha il gusto della solitudine, della mancanza di amore di cui Helene soffre. Un gusto, un sapore che invade tutta la famiglia, un sapore difficile da digerire, ma che lascia alla fine qualcosa di "aspro e inebriente", il cosiddetto sapore della libertà che illumina la via e il cammino.

Mr. Kovach says

A depressing but very good book about a girl growing into woman-hood in Ukraine, Finland, and then Paris under an abusively neglectful mother and rich but gambling-addicted father. I like this author, previously read her posthumously released Suite Francais. How tragic that this brilliant writer with so much to say about life died at the hand of the Nazis. One interesting thing about The Wine of Solitude is how, throughout, the weather replicates Helene's moods and life events. When an intricately described storm approaches, you knew something dramatic and foreboding is going to happen to her. When the sun shines brightly on a clear day, Helene is about to have a moment of extreme clarity in her thinking. I suppose this is a common literary device, but Némirovsky pulls it off beautifully.

Lucrezia says

Avete presente la seconda parte del incipit di Anna Karenina?

Ogni famiglia infelice è infelice a modo suo...

Irène Némirovsky alias Hélène Karol questo lo sa molto bene...

Anche se crede che le famiglie infelici siano uguali esattamente come le infelici.

Ma la nostra Hélène (esattamente come Irène) è una combattente.

E se è vero che "da un' infanzia infelice non si guarisce mai".

Tuttavia ci si può sempre vendicare di chi ce l'ha resa tale in questo caso Bella (no no tranquilli Twilight non centra).

E scegliere l' amaro calice della solitudine e una corazza di ferro per difendersi dal mondo...

Lena says

"..."

Att inte vara barn när det var tid för det gör att man aldrig tycks mogna som andra; man är övermogen på en sida och grön på den andra, likt en frukt som alltför tidigt utsätts för kyla och vind..."

J. says

Tender, difficult memoir of the Russian diaspora during and after the Soviet revolution. Nemirovsky has centered her narrative on the cities, Kiev, St.Petersberg, Helsinki, and Paris, each a stage in the flight across Europe, and in the maturity of her heroine.

Covering the ages of about fifteen to twenty, we get the full emotional uproar of the onset of womanhood, as experienced against a fairly catastrophic background. Nemirovsky is more interested in the fluid psychology of her protagonist than in the Jamesian jigsaw puzzles that the story may resemble. Touchingly, precisely laid out, though, and perhaps truer to life than those other, more famous European labyrinths.

Bethany says

I think this book should've been called *The Wine of Loneliness Which Leads to a Drunken Need for Revenge*.

Catchy, non?

This might be my favourite Némirovsky reading experience. The descriptions (especially of nature) were beautiful. The cover says this is the most autobiographical of her novels. Which is sad, regarding what happens, but also makes me think she was writing with a sense of nostalgia. But she wrote in such a way that connected with some of my memories, so there were times I was feeling the nostalgia along with her, particularly in the first half. There were only a handful of such moments, but they were warmly gratifying.

As for the characters... well I did like Hélène. She is, I suppose, the only character one could care about, besides poor Mademoiselle Rose.

Hélène was a paradox of dispassion and passion. I both understood and couldn't comprehend her. (Ha. Speaking of paradoxes...) I did find her plan for revenge stupid, but she realized that eventually herself. And the ending... the ending was perfect.

Till the (perhaps nonexistent) day we get our half star ratings, I shall say it here: 3.5 stars.

Diane S ? says

3.5 Said to be her most autobiographical novel, the reader first meets Helene when she is only seven. The

daughter of a narcissistic and extremely self involved mother and a father she loves but is himself addicted to gambling. He loves his wife to the point of self delusion. We follow Helene as she ages, learns to hate her mother, the only love in her life is from her governess Madame Rose. This is a novel about the quest for revenge against the backdrop of the Great War and the Russian Revolution. A novel about the dysfunction in a family and how it effects its members. At last it is a novel about self realization and learning if not to forget at least to forgive. Love the title of this novel and loved the very atmospheric writing. ARC from publisher.

Sally Wessely says

This the second book written by Irene Nemirovsky that I have read. Having read "Suite Francaise" a few years ago, I was interested in reading this book in order to learn more about the author. Autobiographical in nature, I found the story Nemirovsky's early life fascinating in many ways. At times, I wondered how a child raised in such an atmosphere could ever emerge to become an author of such renown as Nemirovsky did. Upon further reflection, I decided that her childhood certainly gave her much material about which to write.

I found the descriptive language of the book beautiful, especially as she describes the various settings for the story. I also found her characterizations of her mother, father, grandparents, and other figures in the book interesting. I found myself asking many questions about the gaps that I felt were missing in the story.

The story is a dark story. As a child Irene was neglected beyond belief by her parents. Her mother is the very picture of a narcissistic personality. Wealth is depicted in very relative ways. I found it fascinating how the family used the wealth they acquired as props more than having any type of emotional attachment to the trappings of wealth. Irene seemed more attached to places such as Paris than to things or people. Given her upbringing, this is understandable.

I'm glad I read this book. I wonder if some of the nuances of the story were lost in translation. I think I may read at least one more of her works so that I have a better understanding of her, her times, and her writing.
