

Stone and Shadow

Burhan Sönmez

Alexander Dawe

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In Burhan Sönmez's literary novel *Stone and Shadow*, an Istanbul cemetery is the site of loves lost, recast, and reunited.

In the 1930s, a traveling flutist introduces an orphaned street musician, Avdo, to a gravestone carver. Avdo apprentices in the stone trade and gains a home. He falls for unhappily-engaged Elif on a job and invites her to run away with him. But on the night of their planned escape, Avdo murders men who are following him. He spends the next seven years in prison, and Elif marries another man. After being released, Avdo lives in a Sufi monastery within an Istanbul cemetery; there, he meets a runaway who's connected to Elif's family and to the flutist.

Complementing the Sufi belief that "human beings slowly approach ... the creator ... becoming one with the creator," Avdo and Elif, the runaway's mother and father, and the flutist have changing, overlapping chronologies, with the cemetery as their stationary axis. Avdo dispenses with some of those who threaten the order of his orbiting progression, though he is civil and compassionate with others, including the police who track the runaway and the deceased whose headstones he makes.

The book includes long, lyrical passages in which Avdo contemplates time with cemetery visitors. These come between the book's short, active sequences, which cover events like Avdo's escape and the flutist's travels. The prose is high-minded, idealistic, and piquing, finding beauty, gentleness, and dignity even in difficult circumstances. Ending mid-storyline, in acknowledgement of the yet-written future, this open-ended story leaves its audience spinning in harmony with Avdo.

Spiritual and cyclical, the novel *Stone and Shadow* follows the rotation of an unstable world around love—a stabilizing force.

MARI CARLSON (May / June 2023)

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