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A plurality of origins

Social change is breeding a new form of “home literature”, with Switzerland having long metamorphosed from a country of emigrants into a country of immigrants. This is reflected not least in Swiss writing, which no longer focuses on the idylls and traditions of yesteryear but critically engages with the question of origin. In searching for their own roots, authors easily drift off to faraway regions. This internationalism is a key component of Switzerland’s new multicultural literature. Nine years ago, Melinda Nadj Abonji won the Swiss and German book awards for her novel “Fly Away, Pigeon”. This work, which chronicles the hard-won assimilation of a family who have immigrated to Switzerland, hit a raw nerve at the time.

Back in 1970, “Tra dove piove e non piove” (Where it rains and where it doesn’t) by the Ticino author Anna Felder provided an empathetic portrayal of how the “latchkey children” of Italian guest workers coped in unfamiliar surroundings. Felder was followed by



Melinda Nadj Abonji, author of the novel “Fly Away, Pigeon”, was delighted about winning the German book award (archive photo, 2010).

numerous other writers such as Dante Andrea Franzetti and Franco Supino, who would go on to tell the story of the Swiss-born generation of “secondos” (second generation immigrants). In French-speaking Switzerland, Agota Kristof used the language of her new home to reminisce about Hungary, her country of birth. Books by Max Lobe (Cameroon) and Elisa Shua Dusapin (Korea) in French, and Dorian Catalin Florescu (Romania) and Kathy Zarnegin (Iran) in German are indicative of how the search for family roots is truly global. Works such as these have expanded the scope of Swiss literature. New cultures entail new stories and new images that lend colour and plurality.

BEAT MATZENAUER



“Unhaltbare Zustände”

It is 1968, and the world is in uproar in the aftermath of strikes and student protests. The wind of change has swept through Berne too, where Stettler works as a respected window dresser in the city’s largest department store. Just into his 60s, Stettler is assigned a younger colleague with fresh ideas to work with. His window displays, which used to be admired, now feel staid and stuffy. Stettler’s world begins to crumble. Feeling threatened, he succumbs to his own rage and seeks revenge. The story ends in a furious finale, with one of Stettler’s previously unseen window creations sealing his downfall. Reconciling with the new zeitgeist is beyond him. The window dresser also misses the chance of a romance with a female pianist.

Sulzer’s novel is clever, subtle, precisely written and beautifully told. Alain Claude Sulzer was born in 1953 and currently lives in Basel. He has written numerous novels and essays.

RUTH VON GUNTEN

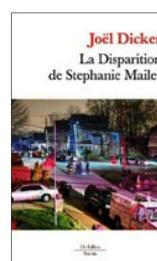
Alain Claude Sulzer, “Unhaltbare Zustände”
(Untenable circumstances) Verlag Galiani, Berlin 2019
267 pages; CHF 33.90
E-book (epub): approx. EUR 19.00

Further recommendations (German)

Arno Camenisch, “Herr Anselm” (Engeler)
Witty, exquisitely melancholic monologue of a straight-talking school janitor.

Ivana Žic, “Die Nachkommende” (Matthes & Seitz)
Brilliant literary debut that tells a stop-start story about identity and belonging.

Ruth Schweikert: “Tage wie Hunde” (S.Fischer)
A moving diary of the author’s fight with breast cancer.



A thriller without a thread

Who killed the journalist working in a small seaside town in the Hamptons? Who is the real culprit behind the quadruple homicide the young woman was investigating? This is the subject of the fourth novel by Joël Dicker from Geneva, an author whose work has been translated into over 40 languages. The seg-