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Sibylle Berg



First her novel, “GRM.Brainfuck”, scooped the 2019 Swiss book award. Then she won Switzerland’s top literary prize, the Swiss Grand Prix Literature. Author Sibylle Berg has finally made it in her adopted home country. She is clearly delighted, as she explained in an interview: “What is nice is that, after 24 years, the public are starting to see me as I have long seen myself, that is, as a Swiss author”. Sibylle Berg was born in 1962 in Weimar. After emigrating to the West in 1984, the first thing she did was travel to Ascona to attend a course at the Scuola Teatro Dimitri theatre conservatory. She then studied the disparate subjects of oceanography and political science in Hamburg, before returning to Switzerland in the mid-1990s, settling there for good and eventually becoming a Swiss citizen. Her first work, “Ein paar Leute suchen das Glück und lachen sich tot” (A few people search for happiness and laugh themselves to death), was an instant hit, laying the foundation for an internationally acclaimed literary career that currently spans 15 novels and two dozen plays. Berg’s provocative style is one of the reasons for her success. She has been referred to as a “hell-raiser of the theatre” and the “hate preacher of the single society”. Her latest novel, “GRM.Brainfuck” (see page 30 for more details), underscores this reputation but has a serious message too. It is an uncompromising piece of writing and a furious indictment of contemporary society. “GRM.Brainfuck” explores our near-future, where segregation between rich and poor is absolute and human endeavour has become worthless. It makes for extremely uncomfortable reading, but is a vision of what may happen one day.

BEAT MAZENAUER

Climate activists celebrate “historic” judgement

January saw the acquittal of 12 climate activists at Renens district court (canton of Vaud). The activists stormed a Lausanne branch of banking giant Credit Suisse (CS) in November 2018. Wearing whites and wigs, the group staged a mock tennis match inside the branch to highlight CS’s “hypocrisy” in using Roger Federer’s squeaky-clean image for their advertising campaign while investing in environmentally damaging fossil fuels. In court, the judge rejected CS’s charge of trespass, concluding that the activists had been acting on grounds of “justifiable emergency”. He said that their behaviour had been “necessary and appropriate” in view of the impending climate catastrophe, and that there had been no other way for them to elicit a reaction from the bank. The activists’ lawyers called it a “historic verdict in Swiss case law”.

(MUL)

Large bank Credit Suisse in turmoil

Swiss large bank Credit Suisse (CS) has been rocked by boardroom turmoil. CEO Tidjane Thiam resigned on 14 February 2020 after Swiss media reports had revealed that CS had spied on its own senior executives. Thiam said that he had been unaware of the surveillance.

(MUL)

The “father of the solar sail” dies

Johannes Geis, the University of Berne physics professor who developed an experimental device designed to collect solar wind on the moon (see “Swiss Review” 3/2019), has died. Geis’s foil contraption was used on the first successful moon landing. The “spiritual father of the solar wind sail” passed away at the end of January aged 93. Through his research efforts, Professor Geis helped to bring international renown to Swiss space science. He also played a significant role in the European Space Agency scientific programme.

(MUL)

President of the Swiss Confederation meets Holocaust survivors

Ahead of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp, President of the Swiss Confederation Simonetta Sommaruga (see also page 12) met Holocaust survivors who live in Switzerland. President Sommaruga also invited history students to this meeting, remarking that one of the aims of doing so was to ensure that this “dark chapter in Swiss history” was never forgotten.

(MUL)