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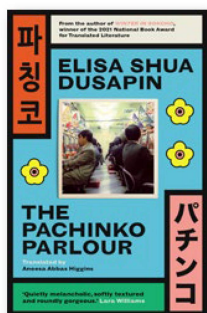
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Elusive fulfilment



ELISA SHUA DUSAPIN:
The Pachinko Parlour.
Translated by Aneesa
Abbas Higgins.
Daunt Books
Publishing, 2022.
120 pages, approx.
CHF 25

“Lost in Translation” was the name of the 2003 film that depicted the experience of feeling lonely and linguistically isolated in a foreign land. Like the movie, Elisa Shua Dusapin’s novel “The Pachinko Parlour” is set in Tokyo. Claire, aged 30, has arrived in the city from Switzerland to visit her grandparents and accompany them on a trip back to their home country of Korea. But Claire’s time with them is an oppressive experience. She speaks Japanese and knows the culture, but her grandparents insist on talking Korean, a language that she has forgotten in Switzerland. Claire’s interaction with them is painfully laboured – reduced to simple words, gestures, and facial contortions.

Playing games like the Swiss version of Monopoly helps to bridge the gap. Claire’s grandmother, in the early stages of Alzheimer’s, is a Playmobil fan. Her grandfather runs

a small Pachinko parlour that has seen better days. Claire divides her time between her grandparents and tutoring a ten-year-old girl, Mieko, in French. At least she and Mieko are gradually able to bond and overcome their cultural differences.

“The Pachinko Parlour” is both a jarring and a beautifully tranquil book, its emotional rawness reflected in the book title. Pachinko is a lonely arcade game played by the masses in Japan, who sit in tightly packed rows, oblivious to those on the slot machines next to them. Players launch their pinballs hoping for a moment of fulfilment that remains elusive. There are no cash prizes to win – only underwhelming teddy bears and chewing gum packets.

Using sparse prose, author Elisa Shua Dusapin infuses the novel with the subtle melancholy of the Pachinko parlour. The summer is hot and humid, the city loud and hectic. The twinkling, pulsing Pachinko amusement arcades feel as contrived as a Disneyland parade. By no means is Claire unhappy – boyfriend Mathieu awaits her in Switzerland. But she feels strangely listless, stuck in limbo between different languages and generations both familiar and unfamiliar. It gradually dawns on her that her grandparents are reluctant to return to a Korea from which they have become estranged. All that the elderly couple have left is their Korean mother tongue in a foreign country. As Claire boards the ferry to make the crossing to Korea, her grandparents are unable to walk up the gangplank with her.

BEAT MAZENAUER

“We are ambassadors for the canton of Ticino”



ORCHESTRA
SVIZZERA ITALIANA
The Rossini Project:
Vol. II, The Young Rossini,
Concerto Classics 2020
Rossini: Symphonies and
Operatic Arias, Concerto
Classics 2018

A concert guest from Zurich may wonder during the interval, while taking a breath of fresh air and watching the shooting stars fall over San Salvatore by the light of the moon, why lightness of being is always a feature of Lugano concerts. Instead of wheeling out the traditional Mediterranean clichés or talking about the permanent holiday atmosphere in Ticino, they might be better off seeking an explanation in the concert’s start time: 20.30.

This gives people time to nip to the pizzeria for dinner and enjoy a glass of Merlot on the piazza after work. Everyone is refreshed, relaxed and happy by the time they arrive at the concert.

However, we learn over this glass of Merlot on the piazza that this late start is dictated by Ticino radio: first the news is broadcast, and then the music. That suits us just fine – and the orchestra too: the fact that all subscription

concerts are broadcast means that the Orchestra Svizzera Italiana (OSI) can be heard throughout the canton, and even the world.

Take your seats, please! The orchestra follows its principal conductor, Markus Poschner, with enthusiasm and plenty of energy, and has developed its own signature sound. As the final applause rings out, we think back to the words of the conductor, who had told us over cappuccino that afternoon: “This orchestra’s talent for playing with great virtuosity and great delicacy is tremendous. It is a small sports car that is very sensitive and precise in its movements.” No wonder that its recordings over the past few years have been universally acclaimed – its versions of rare Rossini works are the jewel in the crown of any music collection.

Poschner says, without a hint of modesty, that the OSI was the toast of the town at Bayreuth over the summer: “We also need to be present on the European market: we are ambassadors for the canton of Ticino, and we are looking for competition.” As if he had sensed our doubts, he said: “We have a lot to offer that other orchestras don’t: here, we have our own perspective on music.”

To cite a few facts in support of his statement, he launched enthusiastically into an account of a concert in Vienna in spring 2022, where they played Tchaikovsky’s “Pathétique”, despite the fact that the Vienna Philharmonic, under its star conductor Franz Welser-Möst, performed exactly the same piece the day before and the day after.

Although the OSI is in a good place, you also feel it needs to be very flexible in order to survive. As they like to say in Ticino, there is still work to be done. Visually at least, the orchestra has a cool northern look. Together with Estonian celebrity photographer Kaupo Kikkas, they travelled up the Gotthard mountain range and posed for some unique snaps.

CHRISTIAN BERZINS