

Book of the Month October 2010

Melinda Nadj Abonji: „Tauben fliegen auf“ („Doves Fly Up“)

Jung und Jung Verlag

The highly influential German Book Prize of 2010 was attributed to largely unknown Serbian-Swiss author Melinda Nadj Abonji and her cross border novel “Tauben fliegen auf” (Doves Fly Up), a debut published by a tiny Austrian publishing house, Jung und Jung.

The story portrays the Serbian family Kocsis, who moved from Vojvodina, a multiethnic border region between Serbia and Hungary, to Switzerland to escape the economic ordeal in a faltering Yugoslavia. This emigration occurred years before the Balkan War had started. In their new home in Zurich, the parents run a cafeteria while their daughters Nomi and Ildiko assimilate to Swiss society.

The plot is largely autobiographical. Born in Serbia in 1968, Melinda belongs to the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, and her tale focuses on her alias, Ildiko, a teenager, who experiences the struggle of living between opposing cultural worlds, in the Balkans and in the West.

Although the novel parades many comical situations drawn from every day oddities (like the moment when the Kocsis, sitting in a chocolate brown Chevrolet, as visualized on the cover of the book, rattling down an impassable road), it shows deep insights into the difficulties of life as an immigrant. Instead of blaming and moaning, Abonji, in her remarkably gentle tone, pleads for a mutual notion of respect.

The German Book Prize decorates the best German book of the season and is arguably the most relevant award when it comes to boosting a novel on the German book market, and as a result, also translation rights of the book have been sold for several languages.

