Un hijo cualquiera
Author:
Eduardo Halfon
Reader's name:
CRISTINA DE LA TORRE

I enthusiastically recommend this book for translation into English. In fact, I was so taken with the text that I would like to offer my service for this purpose!

- UN HIJO CUALQUIERA is highly suitable for the English-speaking market. First, and very basically, it is short. Not only that but it consists of short stories which are easier to read for people today with notably short attention spans. The language is simple and basic. In the economy and austerity of his style it reminds me of Hemingway without the dry, sandpapery texture of Ernest´s writing, his macho swagger. Halfon´s words—few, carefully chosen and placed--rest on tender and very human soil since, as the title signals, the stories are evoked from a father´s perspective, contemplating the world his child will inherit, where love and death go hand in hand. The stories themselves vary in length (although they are mostly quite short), and ranging from the very personal (a first kiss) to the political (emigration due to turmoil in Guatemala, the author´s country of origin). Halfon looks back on his own formative experiences, sometimes while holding his small son in his arms, and implicitly wonders what the future holds for this precious child. It is very touching without being syrupy sweet or cliched. In fact it is interesting how the theme of intimate father-son relations is coming into focus for literature after the surge of mother-daughter narratives—historically mostly ignored or silenced--during the last half of the twentieth century thanks to feminism. Traditionally, father-son relations involved competition and violence, ie. Oedipus rex. One of the ground-breaking books on this topic was another Latin American text, EL OLVIDO QUE SEREMOS, by Colombian Héctor Abad Faciolince that went on to become quite a sensation. So, in terms of topic, I think the moment is ripe for considering these reflections on such a universal experience from a new perspective. So, to address the issues suggested in the reader´s guidelines, yes the overall idea seems different and unusual, and it deals with a common theme but treats it in an original way. Here is the opening sentence: “Estuve ahí las siete horas que duró el parto de mi hijo. Lo vi entrar al mundo. Oí su primer grito… lo miré como si estuviera mirando al hijo de alguien más. Un hijo cualquiera.” (Un pequeño corte, p. 11) The text captures the slow development of Halfon´s deep and abiding love for this child, sometimes explicitly, always as an undercurrent of his new take on the world after awakening to the wonders and horrors of fatherhood: “Un hijo que, de pronto, me obligó a escribir como padre.” (back cover)

Halfon has a talent for catchy opening lines that instantly draw the reader in. Example: “Quería preguntarle si de verdad había tenido que comerse a su propio perro.” (Beni, p. 75). Who is the

reader who could put down the book after such a first sentence? Halfon´s writing although simple is powerful. He uses repetition to create a rhythm, and appeals to all our senses to make the reading experience come alive. He “draws” the scenes using colors, smells, sounds. In my mind, his style of thick brushstrokes evoked primitive paintings. He also gives his stories clear time frames by referring to the age of the characters, the season of year, the time of day. Then he explores tiny but highly significant life moments by wrapping them in sensorial details and contextualizing them either in his own biography or in history. But Halfon offers no answers—easy or otherwise. He just ponders the questions and wallows in uncertainty where everything is relative and doubtful, beginning with memory and perception. “…y como en un sueño, con toda la textura nebulosa de un sueño, recordé o quizás soñé que recordé…” (La pecera, p. 107)

Final verdict. Halfon is well known in the Spanish speaking-world. He has merited countless literary awards. This book is FABULOUS. It deserves all the praise it has received. Again, YES, by all means, have it translated and add this touching and measured voice to the chaotic cacophony of so much of contemporary expressions.