



by Lin Hiersé
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Fiction

The Disappearing World

Das Verschwinden der Welt

review

The second novel by Berlin-based author Lin Hiersé, *The Disappearance of the World* is a highly evocative tale about the decline of an old Shanghai apartment block, spanning several decades from World War II up to the present day. With a vibrant cast of characters – one of whom is the building itself – this carefully considered novel combines openness of perspective with architectural confines to explore how we cope with loss and a world that is always in flux.

Marta, a newly single woman in her thirties who has recently lost her mother to dementia, moves to a run-down apartment building on the river in Shanghai. Having sought solace, she finds herself watching the slow disappearance of trees and houses across the water, and feels alone in the building. The only thing that punctuates her aloneness are the bowls of fruit left outside her door. It transpires that these come from another occupant, Mr Yi, who is caring for his sick wife and mourning the mysterious disappearance of his son.

Through Mr Yi, Marta meets the other inhabitants of the building: the Poetess, who came to Shanghai as a child fleeing the Nazis, and Lu, a young man trying to recreate his lost childhood home. They all calmly accept the eviction notice that arrives one day, either leaving the building, dying or retreating into the world of VR. Marta, however, is in despair, keen to fight to preserve the building and all the memories it contains. Eventually, she realises this is in vain, strips the

wallpaper from her room and sets fire to the building rather than let it be razed.

This main narrative is bookended by chapters in which the apartment block tells its story – or at the end of the novel, the story of what will later become of Marta. Having come to terms with losing her mother, partner and home, we see her living a full and happy life, recovering from these experiences.

Hierse's writing is quiet and thoughtful, offering detailed insights into the minds of her characters yet also keeping them slightly reserved. She writes about loss with great compassion, exploring the theme in various contexts – ageing and illness, eviction, bereavement and mental decline. Poignant without being melodramatic, *The Disappearance of the World* is a beautiful novel that pays tribute to human resilience in the face of geographical loss and life's constant changes.

Find out more:

<https://www.piper.de/buecher/das-verschwinden-der-welt-isbn-978-3-492-07278-6>

about the author



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Lin Hierse was born in 1990 in Braunschweig, and read Asian Studies and Human Geography. She lives in Berlin and since 2019 has been an editor with the German newspaper taz, publishing a regular column on 'Poetical Correctness'. Her first novel was 'Wovon wir träumen' (Piper, 2023).

Previous works: Wovon wir träumen, Piper (2022)

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