

Book Review: Intermezzo
By Sally Rooney

I added Sally Rooney's latest novel, "Intermezzo," to my reading list after seeing several glowing reviews. Far be it for me to question others' taste in books, but this review is headed in the opposite direction, for several reasons.

Let's start with the title. By definition, *intermezzo* refers to a brief piece of music or dance inserted between longer sections of a performance. OR, in the case of food, it's a light palate cleanser served between courses in a meal. Neither of those definitions relate in any way to the content of the book, leaving me a bit perplexed.

Okay, now on to the book itself.

The story revolves around two brothers, Peter and Ivan Koubek, separated in age by about ten years (Peter is the older at age 32), and the relationships in their respective lives. Specifically, Peter is involved with two women – one significantly younger than him – and Ivan has just entered a relationship with a woman fourteen years his senior as the story opens.

But that's not at issue here.

The writing is, in my opinion, bizarre and uncomfortable to read. Rooney seems to be striving to capture a stream of consciousness inside Peter's head. Which is nearly impossible to do in a smooth fashion because thoughts pass through our brains at such rapid speed. Attempting to capture them, put them on paper, and make them coherent just does not work. All you get is lengthy paragraphs of sentence fragments. It left me wondering, what is going on here?

Then there's the narrative format. There's no use of quotation marks to indicate when someone is speaking. The spoken word is woven into the narrative right in the middle of a paragraph, with no indication that we've now switched from third-person narrative to first-person spoken word. I don't know if this is due to Rooney being an Irish novelist. I have read

books by English and Irish authors who use a similar style and it's very off-putting. So, note to self: steer clear of these novelists.

For a story that is very much character driven, I felt very little empathy toward or identifying with any of these characters. For example, Peter and Ivan don't get along. Why? Peter was in a serious relationship with Sylvia until she was in some horrible accident and now, they're just friends. But we're given little if any information about the nature of the accident. Ivan, a master chess player, is described as very shy and introverted. Why?

Backstory is non-existent.

The book is long (448 pages, with some chapters spanning 35 pages), the pace is plodding, and the narrative is missing a clear focus to drive the reader onward.

The most interesting aspect of the book is its cover. Beyond that, I can muster no more than two stars for what for me was a very disappointing read.

But perhaps you'll disagree.