

★ **Among the Almond Trees: A Palestinian Memoir****Hussein Barghouthi****Ibrahim Muhawi, Translator**

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"Nothing comes to the surface in solitude except that which is already hidden deep within us," yet, when faced with the solitude of his own mortality, Hussein Barghouthi found within himself an entire lineage of Palestinian people and places. *Among the Almond Trees* is a memoir transformed into a powerful testament; it glimpses beyond the horizon line of life and death into a place of art, memory, and the poetics of the ordinary.

Born in the village of Kobar, Palestine, in 1954, Barghouthi returned after a voluntary exile of thirty years only to discover shortly thereafter that he was not only unwell, but probably dying of lymphoma. With a wife and young son by his side and a lifetime's worth of local change to confront, Barghouthi asked, "Not when or how I am going to die, and not even about the duality of hope and ruin, but what am I going to make of myself now—how to make my end a sublime celebration of my beginnings."

He walks the places he used to know; the land becomes liminal, permeated by story, memory, and a transcendent sense of being. The familiar—whether childhood memories, his relationship to his body and family, or the landscape itself—is rearranged in subtle and seismic ways. While the confrontation between the past and the present threatens to overturn his fundamental sense of well-being, those same sources offer succor. His attention is repeatedly drawn to the connections that persist between himself and the land.

A spiritual memoir that's concerned with the mutability and impenetrability of language and life, *Among the Almond Trees* creates a taxonomy of presence and absence that makes continuity from seeming opposites, one that's filled with nuance and largesse for both the Palestinian people and the nearer pain of Barghouthi's own illness and looming death.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January / February 2022)

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