

Distant Fathers

Marina Jarre

Ann Goldstein, Translator

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Distant Fathers is a memoir about displacement, disorientation, an identity fractured, and a family cracked by time, history, and the conditions and events of World War II Europe.

Marina Jarre, who was born in 1925, writes about being haunted, about never knowing quite where she was, and about “not belonging.” She was born in Riga, Latvia, to an Italian Waldensian Protestant mother and a Latvian Russian Jewish father. After their divorce, she and her sister lived with their grandmother, a French-speaking Waldensian, in Italy. Jarre’s first language, and the one with which she felt most comfortable, was German.

After her move to Italy, Jarre learned Italian, French, and Waldensian history, “a tragic history of the persecutions and battles of distant fathers.” Though her town was occupied by the Germans for a time, Jarre, self-absorbed in the way of adolescents, felt the war as distant and “unreal.” Distance was also personified by her mother, who worked abroad, and her father, whose death at the hands of the Nazis she only learned about ten years later. When she married and became a mother, Jarre came in touch with the traits that had been passed down to her through generations.

Time is not linear in Jarre’s narrative, which jumps from accounts of childhood events to her astonishment at discovering that she is getting older. Taking the tone of meditations on old photographs picked up at random and observed from a detached, dreamlike state, Jarre reports on her life with imagery that ranges from poetic and contemplative to graphic and even disgusting, revealing herself as unafraid to show what is often kept hidden for fear of judgement.

The eloquence of Marina Jarre’s insightful memoir reflects what had always been, even more than people and events, her true passion: words and stories.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July / August 2021)

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