

Invisible Dreamer: Memory Judaism and Human Rights

Marjorie Agosn

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This wonderful example of a literary potpourri offers readers poetry and essays on such varied subjects as language, travels, exile, family, Judaism, memory, Latin America, human rights, painters, and Jewish women. The beautifully written material is grouped into four categories: Trespassing Language: Writing and Exile; The Cartographies of Love: Families; Mending the World; and The Persistence of Memory: Human Rights in the Americas. The author is a human rights activist, teacher, writer, poet, anthologist, and critic. She was raised in Chile but fled with her family to the United States at the age of sixteen when Pinochet came to power, an event that she deems deplorable and that she attributes to “the CIA and the not-so-secret puppeteer Henry Kissinger.” Although Agosyn has made numerous trips back to Chile, she is a permanent resident of the United States, now living in Maine. Writing in Spanish, and relying on translators for the English versions that appear here, she considers herself one who is “writing in exile.”

Using lyrical language, Agosyn tells about her Jewish forebears, especially the women. She recounts the hardships they endured in escaping from the Nazis and settling in Chile, and she lovingly describes their deep influence on her. The difficult experiences she had as a Jewish child in Santiago are set forth with sensitivity. Agosyn’s skills as a critic of literature and art are fully manifest in her astute essays on Latin American writings and paintings, in which she discusses a number of writers and artists who are not well known in the United States. She makes a good case for why they deserve recognition, asserting that they help readers “to understand the meaning of astonishment.” Finally, Agosyn examines “memory and dignity” in human rights issues as encountered in Argentina, Chile, and the Holocaust. She identifies the ethical perspectives of Judaism as having helped to generate her commitment to human rights.

There are many profound and moving thoughts in this potpourri, this remarkable assortment of comments on the human condition. Agosyn’s personal ideas are imaginatively phrased and poetically presented. Her book richly merits heedful attention.

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