

Lies, First Person

Gail Hareven

Dalya Bilu, Translator

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Hareven's brilliant writing is simply irresistible as she traces two sisters' emotional journeys through recovering from a childhood trauma.

In *Lies, First Person*, by Gail Hareven (translated from the Hebrew by Dalya Bilu), sisters Elinor and Elisheva have their lives changed forever when Elisheva is sexually assaulted by their uncle, Aaron Gotthilf. The powerful story of the aftermath reveals the emotional shroud wrapped around all who are associated with this heinous act. Eventually, madness, suicide, and lives set adrift drive Elinor down a path of revenge in this account of the effects of trauma on an ordinary family.

When the story opens in Jerusalem, the rape is buried deep into the subconscious pasts of both sisters. Elinor lives in a self-described "Garden of Eden" with her husband, Oded. Their two sons live in America, as does Elisheva, who has married. Elinor is happily ensconced in her husband's extended family yet has nothing to do with her own since her mother committed suicide and her father left town and remarried. Uncle Aaron, whom Elinor variously refers to as Satan, the Not-man, and First-Person, calls Elinor; he wants to meet with her when he visits Jerusalem for a conference, where he will apologize for a book he wrote called *Hitler, First Person*. When the past begins to bubble up, Elinor slowly begins her descent into madness as she recalls what happened to her sister and her own failure to prevent it. With her paradise dissolving into nothingness, she makes a decision to right the wrongs that ruined her family.

Most of the power of this book lies in Hareven's exquisite ability to portray the emotional transformations of the sisters. She digs deep to reveal the psychological troughs into which the sisters have fallen.

Lies, First Person is a gripping tale of trauma and its aftereffects that is full of religious undertones and references to Hitler that flesh out the main characters' lives. The lurking question of whether Elinor will complete the task she sets for herself makes this story race to the spectacular denouement, leaving the reader breathless until the end.

DIANE PROKOP (Spring 2015)

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