ForeWord Reviews

Madre, Hablanos de la Guerra (Mother, Speak To Us of War)
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Betty Jean Craige, editor
Betty Jean Craige, translator
Sherman Asher Publishing
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This Jewish-Latina-Chilean-American author has turned out a zinger of a collection that will raise eyebrows in some areas, gratitude in others, and ire among the perpetrators of the outrages she documents in these bitter poems. Sparse and naked as the victims of man's inhumanity to man who populate these brief histories, each vignette outlines a different example of the human reality of war.

The bomb-scorched children of Baghdad, the gaunt shadows of Auschwitz, the *desaparecidos* of Chile look back at readers from hollow eyes, and every poem ends with an unuttered "Why?" Irony is not lacking here. Peeking out from images of desolation, single lines resonate with an acerbity only mitigated by the dispassion of stark objectivity: "During the bombing of Iraq / In the United States / The President plays golf / A man watches television / Some girls are raped in a bar / A woman paints her nails / Without blinking."

Occasionally, a moment of poignant beauty, laced with an anguished compassion for the young who are swept away in the rising tide of violence like random chips swirling down the eddies of an indifferent river, reminds readers that this is poetry: "The Vanished: One girl walked transparently / As if by a river / The other walked lifelessly / As if through a tunnel / One carried coins to buy blue flowers / The other wore a belt around her childish waist / They met midway / Embraced by death / Conspiring with hate // In an instant / The body of the girl in search of flowers / And the body of the other in search of heaven / Lay together / Asleep / Reconciled perhaps / In the dreams of the dead."

Both the preface, from the author herself, and a lengthy introduction by her translator make it clear that these poems are not merely a spontaneous emotional reaction to any single event, or even to the horrors of war itself, but are based on a lifetime of observation and even personal grief occasioned by the accelerating indifference of modern social groups to human rights and human suffering.

Agosín will be familiar already to readers of *ForeWord* from a review of her previous collection of poems, *Poetry for Josefina*, also released by Sherman Asher. It was a tribute to her

Chilean grandmother, forced to emigrate to America in the wake of dictatorial oppression. Kudos to her publisher for having the chutzpah to publish this book. If readers make it past the mud-slinging reactions of international oil magnates and homeland patriots-of-new-formation, they can breathe a collective sigh of relief and believe again for a few moments that it's still safe to live in America.

Sandy McKinney