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Return to Latvia

Marina Jarre
Anne Goldstein, Translator
New Vessel Press (Feb 21, 2023)
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Memory, family, and generational trauma guide Marina Jarre's steps in her Holocaust memoir *Return to Latvia*.

Jarre was young when her parents separated. She left Latvia and grew up in Italy with her Italian mother; she maintained no relationship with her Jewish father. Her memories of her Latvian hometown, Riga, and of her abusive father who perished there in the Holocaust, were few and fragmentary. Forbidden to speak of him while her mother was alive, Jarre took on her mother's trauma and burned her father's photographs and final letter.

This volume centers on the life and memory of Jarre's lost father, a subject that Jarre only touched upon in previous books. But it also centers Latvia, the home she once lost, and the Latvian childhood that she barely remembered. As an older woman, Jarre returned to Riga and found the city to be familiar yet strange. The once polyglot metropolis had become a community of few languages that still attracted people from all over the world. Tracing her own footsteps, she walked the streets of her childhood, piecing together memories to bring the anonymous victims and righteous gentiles of the Holocaust back from obscurity and to break open the secret that hid within her parents' acrimonious divorce: her father's unheard pleas for help to escape and the divorce decree that came through after he was dead. Extensive quotes from other texts mix in, with Jarre going on tangents that resemble the ways of her mind while reminiscing.

Return to Latvia is an introspective memoir that reckons with the generational trauma and fragmented memories found in the long shadow of the Holocaust.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (March / April 2023)

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