

BOOK REVIEWS

WOMEN OF EXILE: German-Jewish Autobiographies Since 1933

Edited by Andreas Lixl-Purcell, Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, 1988.

Frieda Forman

Before I begin the review of *Women of Exile: German Jewish Autobiographies Since 1933*, I must introduce an autobiographical note of my own: I, too, was a Holocaust refugee during the Nazi era in Europe and the bond I feel with these women is therefore immediate, familial and profound.

In the excellent introduction to the book, the editor, Andreas Lixl-Purcell, states the significance of this collection of female memoirs: "In the simultaneity of affirmation and negation of tradition, these autobiographies force the reader back to the political questions of our own times. They restore the terrible truth — without glib catchwords and without reductive phrases — of what it means to be alive in this century." Unlike other refugees who retain the hope of returning to their native land, the German-Jewish women of exile in this volume can never return: their former world has been shattered and has effectively ceased to exist for them. And



Lea Grundig. "Painter from Germany," pen and ink, Palestine, 1941. From *Women of Exile*.

yet, because they survived the Holocaust in exile, rather than in the midst of the ultimate terror of Nazi concentration camps, their memoirs speak in voices that are familiar to us in their expression of grief, loss, bewilderment — but also of hope and expectation.

This is a book of memoirs, and memory is a central character, reflecting not only individual impulse, but the collective Jewish commandment to remember, to not forget. Many of the authors respond to the call of memory late in life: Else Gerstel, in the chapter entitled "Times Have Changed," opens her remembrance with, "For you, my grandchildren, I am willing to put down, without any pretension, memories that flit through my head —

little stories, many of which I may have told you already, that may amuse you and show you how manners, customs, and moral views have changed, and may explain the so-called generation gap." Hers and others' are stories not only of disrupted lives, but of resourcefulness and redemption, informed always by a humane and ethical sensibility.

For feminists, who understand deeply the centrality of our history in forging a new politics, this book is an ingathering of women's history and Jewish women's experience. We are greatly indebted to the archives (the Leo Baeck Institute, the Houghton Library at Harvard and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem) which have made these memoir collections available to us and to the editor whose imaginative and engaged research brought them to light.

The structure and design of *Women of Exile* allow the content (to my knowledge, the first collection on this theme) to emerge in all the fullness it deserves: preceding each of the twenty-six memoirs is a brief biography; the geographical range of exile spans five continents; numerous photographs enhance the already vivid terrain; a very useful bibliography of German-Jewish history, focuses on the literature of women's exile, including recent feminist literature on the topic.

This is a book we must read, remember and pass on to future generations as is the will of the authors.

THE MEASURE OF MIRANDA

Sarah Murphy. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1987.

Isabel Waldman

I have had a fairly long history of involvement with Latin American solidarity groups, and so, when I began to read *The Measure of Miranda*, I believed I had

heard all the shocking stories about fear and torture and hate in Latin America. I didn't think I could have my head or heart opened in any new ways.

However, this powerful novel affected me greatly. The author, Sarah Murphy, draws together situations, which, although they seem to be different, have much in common. It seems that women share the experience of oppression no matter where they live, or what their social and economic position might be.

On one level the book is about Miranda, a young Canadian woman, the perfect 21 year old — beautiful, intelligent and graceful. Always protected from the world by her parents, who tell her, "No one will hurt you, no one means to hurt you ..." (as long as you listen to us and keep your eyes closed to the reality of the world around you). Miranda's parents live their lives as if they are characters in rerun T.V. soap operas, "...where the girl goes off to explore the world in technicolour and comes