

BOOK REVIEWS

WOMEN OF EXILE: German-Jewish Autobiogra- phies Since 1933

Edited by Andreas Lixl-Purcell, Green-
wood 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

back to family and apple pie and the boy next door all happy to know the truth of home, completely unchanged."

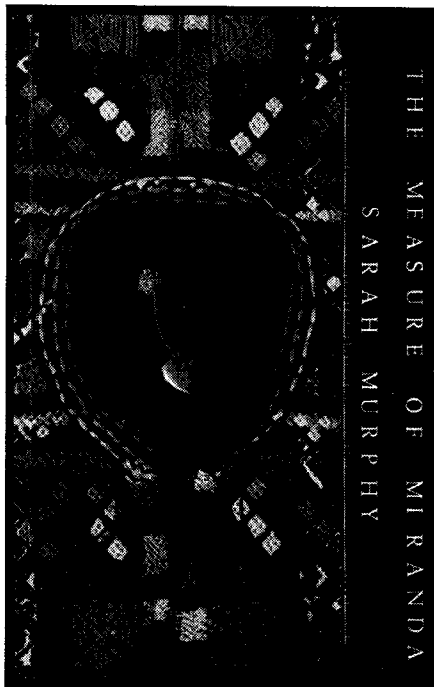
Miranda's father is head of a subsidiary of a large corporation, based in a Central American country, probably El Salvador. Her mother writes to her, telling her that, of course, life is wonderful in this beautiful country. They have a large and luxurious house, many "happy" servants and peasants, "Who are really different than us, Miranda."

But Miranda, living in Canada and attending university, meets a group of people who help her to see the realities that are around her, the world so different from what her parents wish her to see. She moves into a commune with Jim, her political science professor who has become her lover. He wishes to "awaken" her and liberate her from the mold her parents have cast her in.

Miranda meets Amparo, a miraculous woman, a Chilean political refugee, who also lives in the house. It is through her relationship with Amparo that Miranda is truly awakened, not only to the truths of the oppression, torture and fear that run rampant in Latin America, but also to the world around her, a world Miranda finds increasingly intolerable.

I have a friend who was jailed and tortured in Argentina — a beautiful, serene woman, whose insight, gentleness and unwavering political commitment have always moved me deeply. For me, my friend and Amparo are one and the same person. Amparo goes through hell for her commitment to change and to a better and more humane world, and yet does not lose her gentleness or political insight. She is able to rise above cruelty and thoughtlessness and hate; to see beyond mere actions.

A special image I have of my Argentinian friend, like a snapshot in my mind, is of her serenely sitting in a sunny garden, sewing and talking of her family in Argentina, her hands always busy. At one



point in the novel, Amparo, who is always knitting, is asked at a student gathering Jim is having in the garden, "Do you always knit? ... I mean, don't you have work to do? I mean important work. Work that's more important?"

She is asked this strange question by a "politically correct" student, one who felt that she had to distance herself from such mundane, unimportant, woman's work.

"Important. Ay, I will tell you a story about important." And Amparo tells the story of the man she lived with in Chile, who "naturally" was the one with greater political understanding, who knew what important was. In their relationship Amparo did the domestic duties for her *companionero* (her man), cooking, cleaning, knitting, woman's work that kept the home together and sustained him. But her man (like the student who reproached her), told her she should spend her time doing "important" work; as if her work didn't nurture and make so many things possible. Amparo's strength and humanity flowered and grew, and when finally there

was the "Nazi knock" on the door, and she and her man were kidnapped, then imprisoned and subjected to the ugliest tortures imaginable, Amparo never lost her strength and beliefs. She maintained a dignified defiance towards her torturers. She found a love and sisterhood with her fellow prisoners and their children (who were often thrown in prison with their mothers, or born there).

But Amparo's man was broken like a small child. She tells them how the tortures were too much for him and he finally could not help but betray those he loved and worked with. And so, one must ask, what is important, what tasks and strengths must we acquire in our lives?

Everyone in the room is silenced by Amparo's story, unable to move, especially Miranda. Miranda has seen Amparo's pictures of the tortured mutilated bodies of the victims of the oppression in Chile. The tortured woman, lying dead, with her baby, also dead, beside her. These pictures are imprinted forever in Miranda's mind, and she is unable to leave them and return to the world of her parents and their suffocating comfort. Jim appears no different than her parents. He wished to liberate her to his own reality and thus control her in his way. She is a beautiful object to him that he can use to enhance himself.

If Amparo is an immigrant, a political refugee learning to live and understand a new country, Miranda is also an immigrant, a refugee suddenly thrust into a new reality, into a world that all those who have tried to control her have denied. It is only through a final radical act of courage and despair that Miranda is able to free herself and the souls of the tortured women in Amparo's pictures.

The novel is written in a "stream of consciousness," ignoring many rules of grammar and composition. Although this sometimes makes the story difficult to follow it also adds to its great emotional impact.

WHENCE THEY CAME: Deportation from Canada 1900-1935

Barbara Roberts. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988.

Carol Greene

Contrary to what Canadians believe, Canada has not historically been a welcoming refuge for the world's dispossessed and oppressed. Barbara Roberts' *Whence They Came* is a powerful and important indictment of Canada's immigration policy between 1900 and 1935. The policy is distinguished not only by its discriminatory and restrictive aspects, but by the fervent, covert and often illegal

deportation practices carried on by its administrators. The poor, the unemployed, the disabled — and all those considered political "agitators," "reds," or "troublemakers" — were victims of arbitrary deportation practices decided upon by a few government bureaucrats: *de facto*, self-appointed judges operating in an extralegal system. Parliament had little control over and evidently little interest in