

down in the false security-prosperity dilemma. This means that the challenge is to understand security not as an individual and national matter, but as an opportunity to create a region whose members can overcome their deficiencies and successfully take on the challenges. So, for our country, the task is to find the arguments and carry out the policies needed to convince the United States that we are indispensable in the North American regional security equation.

This book has what it takes to have an important impact in its target area of studies: simple but at the same time profound language; a tight-knit but broad historic vision; a sophisticated but pedagogic analysis; and something no less important, which is that its ideas

are clear and certain at the same time that they border on the polemical. The content and references are so learned that the schools where future national security analysts are being educated would do well in using it as a textbook. **MM**

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Writing Toward Hope. The Literature of Human Rights in Latin America

Marjorie Agosín, ed.

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September 11, 2001, very much alive in the world's memory today as a dramatic date is, in fact, historically speaking, the "other" September 11. In its death-marked tragic nature it was preceded, in 1973, by "the day the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende was toppled by Chilean military forces, backed by the intervention of the CIA." This date also marked the beginning of a period in Latin America to which the present book bears witness by compiling a wide range of different writings, poignant testimonials of (un)known moments of anger, fear, truth, justice, peace and, of course, hope.

A book such as this one constitutes an assertion of the intrinsic need, more so than ever in these, our post-September 11, 2001 times, to activate the politics of memory in unprecedented directions. One of the core messages of *Writing Toward Hope* is, indeed, the urgent need to address selective historical amnesia.

As editor Agosín states with great clarity of purpose in the introduction, "This anthology presents an impor-

tant group of literary voices specific to Latin American culture. The voices are varied and from many countries, but they have much in common. All respond to an understanding that collective history is an experience that affects all citizens dominated by authoritarianism and fear. All share an ethical and artistic vision born of the peculiarities of political violence and social injustice. The clear understanding that the personal is political and historical is one of the principal components of this literature which denounces through realistic and direct rhetoric or through ambiguous and subtle poetry."

It seems *à propos* that in these times, riddled with overt and subtle new forms of sustained and reiterative fear, at present no longer circumscribed solely to Latin America, having reached, on September 11, 2001, further north into the American hemisphere, that these writings are now being made available to the reader, lured by a single yet highly charismatic concept: "hope."

It seems relevant as well as significant today to have access to a compilation that aims to bring together a wide range of texts that are, in one way or another, centered on human rights issues (implemented, in case we have forgotten, "by a group of Western nations in response to the moral crimes that occurred during World War II") through literary and testimonial prisms. For at

the time of these various writings, we are reminded, literature “gained a sense of urgency and became vital, an act of courage and denunciation, of resistance and hope.”

These moving first-person autobiographical-poetic-political writings are rooted in pain and suffering, common denominators for the human condition, yet—and this is clearly the axis of the anthology’s intentionality and one of its outstanding features— what emerges with fresh clarity is the intensely perceived presence of pristine sentiments, a testimonial urgency to share bare and irrefutable truths and, of course, the deeply bonding text(ure)s of hope.

Particularly striking, too, is the transformative agency of subjects exposed to pain, torture, to the most degrading of experiences, yet still able to win the hardest battle of all: within and against their own impulse to react with fear and, above all, with hatred. Excerpts included, such as those by Chilean Gladys Díaz Armijo, for instance, are highly revealing. Díaz Armijo, working for the clandestine newspaper *El Rebelde* (that provided inside information, via Mexico, outside Chile), was detained in February 1975 and held prisoner for two years, three months of which she spent in Grimaldi: “Yo estuve en la torre de la Villa Grimaldi, y de la torre soy prácticamente una de los poquísimos sobrevivientes. Casi todos los detenidos que pasaron por allí están muertos” (I was in the Villa Grimaldi tower, and I am practically one of its very few survivors. Almost all those detained who went through the tower are dead.)

Díaz Armijo’s writings included in this volume shed interesting light on how pain and fear can, in fact, become a shortcut to hope and personal inner spiritual development. As she herself explains, “En Villa Grimaldi se despertó en mí una capacidad de amar impresionante. O sea, la tortura, con todo lo brutal y horrorosa que fue, la relativicé sufriendo más con la tortura de los otros. A mí se me produjo un fenómeno que supongo es de crecimiento interno y que sólo he venido a entender ahora: soy capaz de ponerme en el lugar del otro, de integrarme” (In Villa Grimaldi an amazing capacity for living awoke in me. That is, I was able to relativize my torture, as much as it was brutal and horrendous, by suffering more with the torture of others. This produced something in me that I suppose has to do with internal growth and that I have only now come to understand: I am capable of putting myself in the shoes



Writing Toward Hope

The Literature of
Human Rights in
Latin America
Edited by
Marjorie Agosín

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of the other, of integrating). This may well bring to mind Susan Sontag’s now oft-quoted words: “No ‘we’ can be taken for granted when the subject is observing another’s pain.” In Díaz Armijo’s case, a bonded “we” was created through the fusion of the others’ pain with her own.

Writing Toward Hope is a substantial, 639-page anthology, the contents of which are suitable for a variety of different academic courses across several disciplines, in addition to being very good reading. It is conveniently divided into eight sections, for each of which there is a brief introductory text that facilitates the different thematic segments to be dealt with separately. The titles of each of these sections are inviting

in their conciseness: I-Bearing Witness in the Dark; II-Guardians and the Guarded; III- Voices of a Silenced Memory; IV- Where Fear Nests; V- Memory and History; VI- Exile; VII- Women Have the Word; VIII-Writing Toward Hope. Also included are some vivid artwork color plates and brief biographical and explanatory notes on each of the participants.

This anthology features a wide range of writers and writings from all Latin America, including U.S. Latino perspectives, all of which do credit to what editor Marjorie Agosín states in her introduction: “Throughout Latin America, writers creatively and peacefully counteract the culture of fear through art.” Among the 57 very diverse writers included in this anthology are many names that will be easily recognized: Claribel Alegría, Isabel Allende, Diana Anhalt, Homero Aridjis, Ruth Behar, Gioconda Belli, Mario Benedetti, Rosario Castellanos, Roberto Castillo, Carlos Cerda, Julio Cortázar, Roque Dalton, Delia Domínguez, Ariel Dorfman, Rigoberta Menchú, Gabriela Mistral, Angelina Muñoz-Huberman, Pablo Neruda, José Emilio Pacheco, Heberto Padilla, Isabel Parra, Violeta Parra, Alicia Partnoy, Elena Poniatowska, Nela Ríó, Reina Roffé, Nora Strejilevich, Marta Traba, Luisa Valenzuela, Daisy Zamora.

Although the title, the “Introduction” proper and the introductory notes to each section are in English, the texts (including the biographical note on each author) have been included in their original Spanish. This refers us immediately to the potential readers of the present anthology, who, implicitly at least, must be to a certain degree bilingual, or at least are expected to make a bilingually-oriented reading effort, to comprehend the fascinating wide range of texts included in this volume.

Nowadays, when it has become popular to publish Latin American texts translated into English, when the effort to read texts in their original language is losing

ground, it is unusual to find a volume of this nature in which English serves as an introductory language, although no intermediary translating agency intervenes in the direct reading experience, thereby underscoring the very resistance-based nature of the central issues raised in the texts themselves. There would seem to be a quiet yet unequivocal subversive statement made in this volume through the resistance to translation, in this way underscoring that, partly due to their nature, these texts need to be, should be, indeed *deserve* to be read in the original for their full impact, to be fully appreciated for what they are and represent.

Marjorie Agosín’s prophetic statement that “Some day, this literature will be part of Latin America’s cultural history and will not be seen as an isolated element within history” hails these texts for their strength in core human values and virtues, as well as for their cultural, aesthetic and historical contribution and dynamics. This quote also contains an unwritten assessment of these texts as travelers from obscurity and clandestinity into new light, into college classrooms, libraries and the minds/memories of present and future generations. There lies, too, further hope.

The testimonial, historical, social, aesthetic and literary contents of *Writing Toward Hope* have an immediacy that powerfully touch the underside of pain, the underside of fear —the underside, too, of hope. This may remind us that in Spanish there is a well-known saying: “la esperanza es lo último que muere” (Hope is the last thing to die). So be it. **MM**

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