
Lejos de donde

Author: Edgardo Cozarinsky

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Edgardo Cozarinsky is an Argentine writer whose books often focus on questions of identity for people caught between a Europe falling apart through war and racial hatred and an Argentina in which they cannot feel at home. This feeling of being trapped between two harsh worlds provides the title to his latest short novel: *Lejos de donde* means *Far From Where?* and serves to underline that none of the characters in the book know where they really belong.

The short (160 page) novel is divided into five parts, which take the reader from the end of the Second World War in Poland, to the former East German city of Dresden after the re-unification of Germany in 2008.

The first part of the book centres on a woman who is desperately escaping from one of the extermination camps for Jews in Poland. Cozarinsky is good at capturing the mood of her desperation and the grim realities of the final months of the war. In the second part of the book we follow her life in Buenos Aires at the end of the forties and early fifties. The novel is symmetrically constructed, and in the third and fourth parts the woman's son emerges as the central character. He has grown up in Argentina during the fifties and sixties, but like his mother he cannot really identify with the young revolutionaries he becomes involved with at university in Buenos Aires. In fact, in part four of the novel we find him fleeing from Argentina, as his mother had done decades earlier from war-torn Europe. The final part of the novel shows him living in Europe. Once more, in a similar way to his mother in Argentina, he finds it hard to feel at home in any of the countries he comes to know.

Cozarinsky's new novel is an intriguing addition to his earlier explorations of the lost worlds of characters who cannot find a home either in Europe or in the new world of Argentina. He questions what it might mean to be Jewish. Cozarinsky also questions ideas of nationality and guilt, and how characters are an accumulation of circumstances and historical events they are witnesses to but play little active part in.

Far from Where seems to me a worthy continuation of the themes Cozarinsky previously explored in *The Bride from Odessa* and *The Moldavian Pimp*. It is reminiscent of the work of Joseph Roth, with individuals immersed in often cataclysmic historical events they have little or no grasp of. The book would translate well into English, offering no specific problems of register or vocabulary.

This is a summary of the reader's report by Nick Caistor

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