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Memoirs

SOPHIE HUGHES

Homero Aridjis

THE CHILD POET

Translated by Chloe Aridjis

153pp. Archipelago. Paperback, \$16.

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The Child Poet, which is partly a dream diary and partly a poetic memoir, now appears in this lissom translation by Homero Aridjis's daughter. And it is Chloe Aridjis whom Homero had to thank for this book appearing in the first place. In 1970, an expectant father (with Chloe), Homero began dreaming vividly about his own childhood, and in transcribing those dreams – “made out of life . . . but modified by one's own memory”, according to an interview with the author – he produced a self-portrait.

Inspired by dreams, *The Child Poet* obeys an oneiric schematism: the story of Aridjis's childhood in the small Mexican village of Contepec is recounted for the most part in isolated vignettes punctuated by local detail: the merciless cacique (local “boss”); the campesinos selling corn; our poet child walking among the magueys. Aridjis is a lifelong environmental activist and his remembered self an appropriately Wordsworthian child of nature. The poet's childhood is understood as the emotional foundation for his adulthood: “The Child is father of the Man”. Still, the young boy's innocent eye is occasionally belied by the erotic adult poet's taste for detail: in the market, “sensing the fleshy pulp beneath the texture of their peels and, having decided on a plum, my eyes would then wander towards a peach”.

There are also some colourful, entertaining characterizations: “In your compositions on winter”, Aridjis's teacher tells his class, “don't forget about snow”; his near-blind Aunt Inés, with her “elderly body and virgin heart”, depicts herself as “young and beautiful” to “garner interest” in the personal ads of a magazine. A central poem – “The Poem About Shadows” – brings

together the book's running motifs of light and dark, and exemplifies Aridjis's ability to hypostasize the unreal to meaningful effect: "shadows, I thought, confer reality on objects by serving as their negatives or ghosts and dragging themselves across the floor or sliding down the wall as insubstantial doubles". In *The Child Poet*, Aridjis's dream-induced memories confer reality on his forgotten history. The result is not an "insubstantial double" of a bucolic childhood, however: here, thanks in part to Chloe Aridjis's exquisite translation, the shadows themselves are "green".

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