"Unlucky Lucky Bodies: Generational and National Trauma in the Memoirs of Irene Vilar"

Friday, March 25, 2011
Eddy Hall Room 102
2:00pm

Light Refreshments served

Summary of Impossible Motherhood: Testimony of an Abortion Addict (Other Press, 2009) by award-winning feminist writer and activist Robin Morgan:

Irene Vilar was just a teenager, a pliant young college undergraduate in thrall to a fifty-year-old professor, when they embarked on a relationship that led to marriage—a union of impossible odds—and multiple abortions. Vilar knows that she is destined to be misunderstood, that many will see her nightmare as a story of abusing a right, of using abortion as a means of birth control. But it isn't that. Her nightmare is part of an awful secret, and the real story is shrouded in shame, colonialism, self-mutilation, and a family legacy that features a heroic grandmother, a suicidal mother, and two heroin-addicted brothers. Hers is a story that touches on American exploitation and reproductive repression in Puerto Rico. It is a story that looks back on her traumatic childhood growing up in the shadow of her mother's death and the footsteps of her famed grandmother, Lolita Lebrón, revered political activist for Puerto Rican independence who in 1954 sprayed the U.S. House of Representatives with gunfire, wounding several congressmen, and later served twenty-seven years in prison. Vilar seamlessly weaves together past, present, and future, channeling a narrative that is at once dramatic and subtle.

Impossible Motherhood is a heartrending and ultimately triumphant testimonial of shame and servility as told by a writer looking back on her history of addiction. Abortion has never offered any honest person easy answers, and Vilar’s dark journey through self-inflicted wounds, compulsive patterns, and historical hauntings revisits the difficulties this country has with the subject and prompts an important, much-needed discussion—literary, political, social, and philosophical. Vilar’s is a powerful story of loss and mourning that bravely delves into selfhood, national identity, family responsibility, and finally motherhood itself.

Irene Vilar was born in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Her memoir The Ladies’ Gallery (Other Press, 2009, originally published in 1996) was a Philadelphia Inquirer and Detroit Free Press notable book of the year. Her latest memoir, Impossible Motherhood (Other Press, 2009), is being translated into many languages, is a bestseller in Italy, and won the 2010 IPPYgold medal for best memoir/autobiography. Both memoirs explore generational and national trauma. She is series editor of the Americas at Texas Tech University Press. Vilar is literary agent for Vilar Creative Agency, and co-agent in the U.S. for Ray-Gude Mertin Literary Agency, an agency specializing in Spanish, Latin American, and Portuguese authors.