



Feminine Fiction from Iran

Reviewed by Evelyne Accad

There are too few such collections of short stories by Iranian women available to be used for classroom material. This one would make an excellent textbook. It is also a book to educate oneself and others on another culture--most specifically women in that culture--and it is entertaining as well.

"The Walnut Sapling on Masih's Grave," is a very sad story about a mother giving birth to a child who is taken away from her. The mood of the city, the expectations concerning a forthcoming revolution come out strongly. There is a lot of interesting symbolism to be analyzed. This story chosen as the first one is well placed, setting out the most recurrent themes of the collection: the condition of women and the Iranian revolution.

"After the Last Day," and "Peyton Place: Tehran, 1972," by Mahshid Amirshahi, I have already spoken about. Even though the second one is set in Tehran, it does not give us any understanding of that particular place. And actually, the author intended it this way as is expressed in the opening descriptive paragraph written about her. She does write well.

"Haj Berekallah," by Mihan Bahrami is a beautiful, very moving story, well-written with suspense, sensuality, and is very revealing about women's role, the importance of love. Why translate Barakallah as bravo? The literal translation is God bless you.

"The Story of a Street," by Simin Danishvar is also a beautifully

narrated story on the evils of polygamy, the roles of children, mothers, wife. It is full of symbolism to be analyzed and comes out very strongly.

"Congratulations and Condolences," by Mahdukt Kashkuli is quite telling about today's problems specially as they are reflected in violence and the problems of Iran, both historical and present.

"Gawhar," by Zahra Khanlari is a very moving story, once more on the condition of women, the tragedy of polygamy, a woman driven to madness because of it. It is a very powerful story I would probably use for one of my courses on women and literature.

"The Starling Spring," by Shukuh Mirzadahgi is a beautiful story, well-written, but I did not understand why it was labeled as belonging to the science fiction genre. True, it has some supernatural elements, but that does not make it science fiction, but more like surrealist.

"A Visit with the Children in the Upper Village," by Huma Natiq is interesting in terms of the rendering the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, and because of its ecological awareness.

"The Tale of the Rabbit and the Tomatoes," by Giti Nikzad is short but sharp and well narrated. It does not necessarily refer to Iran and could belong to any collection of short stories. Is this why our introducer liked it so much?

"Sara," by Shahrnush Parsipur is a strange story, quite informative as to the Iranian revolution. It gives us some insights as to the desire to give birth to martyrs and what it requires.

"There Is No Truth," by Zhila Sazgar is a surrealist story with strong symbolic implications.

"The Great Lady of My Soul," by Goli Taraghi is interesting because the female author talks through her male character. The story suggests and gives strong indirect insights as to the problems of revolutionary Iran. It brings out the distress and anguish of post-revolutionary Iranian society.

"Someday," by Goli Taraghi is a very moving story about a mother looking forward to her grown-up children's visit and then her disappointment, the questions about her life, the anxiety that visit brings her.

Most of the stories have to do with aspects of Iranian women's lives and with Iranian society. The theme of the plight of the Iranian woman is very well rendered by these "inside" voices. And this is what makes these stories so moving and worthwhile to read and analyze •

(*) translated by Soraya Sullivan, introduction by Farzaneh Milani. Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas, Austin 1991

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