Published: December 15, 1999
Last Updated: May 28, 2013

FICTION, II(E)

FICTION

ii(e). POST-REVOLUTIONARY FICTION ABROAD

Not only were the novel and short story imported genres, it should be noted that the very first works of Persian fiction, including Āḵūndzāda's *Setāragān-e farīb ḵorda* and *Sīāḥat-nāma-ye Ebrāhīm Beg* by Zayn-al-ʿĀbedīn Marāḡaʾī, and later works such as Hedāyat's *Būf-e kūr,* were either written or first published outside Persia. Some later writers, including Moḥammad-ʿAlī Jamālzāda, Bozorg ʿAlawī, and Taqī Modarresī, wrote many of their works abroad. However, it was only after the Revolution of 1979 that large numbers of already-established or prospective writers, voluntarily or otherwise, left their homeland to settle abroad, and used the experiences of exile in their writings.

The almost two decades of post-revolutionary fiction abroad, diversified in theme, language, and aesthetic structure, can be divided in two phases, initial shock followed by reconciliation. But these two phases occur at different times for different individuals, or indeed the reconciliation may have never happened for some (Falakī, pp. 7-15; Tamīzī, pp. 76-85). The first group of Persian writers in exile, most of them former political activists, robbed of their identity and habitual environment, and ill-prepared for what was to come, exclude the host country from their writings. Instead, their narratives are haunted by the revolution and transpire in the homeland. These early exilic works of fiction were often edited and published by their authors in small printings. They are usually either direct autobiographical accounts or draw on

the writer's personal experiences, including more often than not, prison, torture, and war. With the slow process of adaptation, the haunting image of revolution, although never absent, is gradually relegated to the background. Memoir-like narratives of a troubled past are replaced by narratives directed to the less visible aspects of life in exile, and set against the backdrop of the host country rather than the homeland. The polar opposites of home and exile give way to the polarity of reception and rejection by the host country, and the sense of exile is internalized. Foreign words seep into Persian narratives, and bilingual texts are produced.

As was the case with post-revolutionary fiction inside Persia, the very first accounts of exile were also written by already well-established novelists such as Ḡolām-Ḥosayn Sāʿedī and Mahšīd Amīršāhī (b. 1940). Sāʿedī's Parisian *Trilogy* (1981-83), is a "series of more or less disjointed episodes within each story which are held together by no more than the writer's ever-present obsession with the depiction of unbridled brutality" (Karimi-Hakkak, p. 258). The bipolar notion of home and exile, set against the backdrop of war and revolution, is implicit in Amīršāhī's choice of locale, Tehran and Paris, for her two exilic and politically charged novels, *Dar ḥażar* (At home, 1987) and *Dar safar* (In exile, 1995), arguably a sequel to the first (Elāhī, 1996). The two are written in the first person and recounted by a female narrator. Their episodic narratives, reminiscent of Amīršāhī's earlier style as a short story writer, may also be understood as mimetic of the narrator's perception of the revolution as a disjointing and fragmenting blow dealt to a country and its culture (Yāvarī). Her *Mādarān o doḵtarān* (Mothers and daughters, 1998) the first of a multi-volume project, was also published in the United States. Golī Taraqqī (b. 1939) in her autobiographical collection of stories, *Ḵāṭerahā-yeparākanda* (Scattered memories, 1993), moves from a sheltered life at home to a turbulent life in exile and reconstructs a lost childhood as an imaginary haven (Lewis and Yazdanfar, p. 2; Rahimieh, pp. 561-68). Home, shaken by revolution and inhabited by mysterious squatters, is Moṣṭafā Farzāna's title and theme for his surrealistic novel *Ḵāna* (1983), published in Paris after the revolution. Author of several other novels, short stories, and plays, Farzāna—who has spent most of his life in Paris—has also written extensively on Ṣādeq Hedāyat. Maḥmūd Kīānūš (b. 1934), is yet another established short story writer of the previous generation. His first short novel, *Mard-e gereftār* (The ensnared man, 1964) was published in Tehran, and his *Ḡawwāṣ o māhī* (The fisherman and the fish, 1989) in London. *Ḡawwāṣ o māhī* is a well structured, engaging story which follows the career of an idealist who abandons the affluent life of his family in

search of a simple life (Yār-e Šāṭer). Another significant writer is Bahman Forsī (b. l933), author of several collections of short stories and plays. His novel *Šab-e yak, šab-e do* (Night one, night two, 1974) was published in Tehran and his collection of stories, *Davāzdahomī* (The twelfth, 1991), in London. The veneer of flippancy and nonchalance with which he camouflages his serious intent is reminiscent of the style of Āl-e Aḥmad and Hedāyat. Mention might also be made of a group of formerly active writers who ceased all literary activity in exile, foremost among them Ṣādeq Čūbak and Ebrāhīm Golestān (see above).

Different in many ways, but linked with shared feelings of loss, Bahrām Ḥaydarī (b. 1942), Nasīm Ḵāksār (b. 1943), Reżā Dānešvar (b. 1948), Akbar Sardūzamī (b. 1951), and Dāryūš Kārgar (b. 1952) are among a large group of writers who had published some works in Persia but made their literary reputation abroad. Ḥaydarī chose *Lālī*, a backward southern township, ravaged by both nature and aggressive industrialization, as the title and subject of his first collection of short stories, published in Tehran in 1980. He has retained the same township as the setting for most of his works in exile, including *Manzelgāh-e bādhā-ye sorḵ* (Home of the red winds, 1991) and *ʿAlaf ke namīšekanad* (But a grass leaf doesn't break, 1997), both published in Uppsala. Ḵāksār published one novel in Persia, *Gāmhā-ye peymūdan* (Steps to take, 1981), and two in the Netherlands, *Bādnamāhā wa šallāqhā* (Weather-vanes and whips, 1991) and *Qafas-e ṭūṭī-e Jahān Ḵānom* (The cage of Jahan Khanum's parrot, 1991), the latter a novel distinguished by a complex structure and a compassionate language. His fictional characters are crushed by political vicissitudes and confused by competing ideologies. Reżā Dānešvar's *Namāz-e mayyet* (Prayer for the dead, 1971), a psycho-fiction based on the collapse of boundaries between two ideologically charged concepts, loyalty and betrayal, was published in Tehran. In *Ḵosrow-e ḵūbān* (King of the beautiful, 1994), written in exile, he mixes, in kaleidoscopic arrangements, a sharply edged realism with fantastic and dreamlike elements. The book is a mythologized retelling of the 1979 revolution (Šeydā) through an imaginary trip undertaken by fictive travelers to the Alborz mountains. A. Sardūzamī has published several collections of short stories, two of them in Persia. His two long narratives written in exile, *Barādar-am jādūgar būd* (My brother was a sorcerer, 1992), and *Man ham būda-am* (So was I, 1993), in which scenes, symbols, monologues, allusions, and structural devices are not so much intellectually meaningful as emotionally evocative, are both centered around loss and deprivation. Dāryūš Kārgar, the editor of *Afsāna*, a literary journal published in Sweden, has written *Īnak waṭan tabʿīdgāh* (Homeland the land of

exile, 1980) before he left Persia, and *Pāyān-e yak ʿomr* (The end of a life, 1994) in Sweden. Qāżī Rabīḥāwī (b. 1954), whose novel *Gīsū* (Hair, 1992) was printed in Tehran, now lives in London, where he published *Čahār faṣl-e Īrānī* (Four Persian seasons, 1996) and a novel, *Labḵand-e Maryam* (Maryam's smile, 1996). The ubiquitous presence of revolution and exile lurks in the background of the fiction of Moḥammad Rahīámīān, Šahrīār ʿĀmerī, Amīn Najafī, Morteżā Mīrāftābī (the editor of *Sīmorḡ*, a journal published in Los Angeles), Masʿūd Noqrakār, and Sīāvaš Bāmdād, just to mention a few among many. Šokūh Mīrzādegī (b. 1944) is yet another author whose fictive characters, blessed or cursed, are victims of the revolution and their own strong feelings of nostalgia. The alienation of Lūbā, the narrator of Mīrzādagī's first exilic novel, *Bīgānadar man* (An alien in me, Uppsala, 1992), centered on the theme of personal and political betrayal, engulfs her whole entity and language. She goes from Prague to London to escape the haunting memory of her slain revolutionary father, from London to Tehran where she loses her Persian husband to another revolution, and back again to London to get away from a revolutionary son she can no longer recognize.

Post-revolutionary fiction abroad has also witnessed an unprecedented surge in the number of women writers. Differing widely in their tone, content, narrative strategy, and approach to the revolution, to host countries, and to exiled communities, their fictional works nevertheless share significant features. A gradual and occasionally painful move from a sheltered introspective life to one of overt actions and decisions features prominently in most of these narratives (Tamīzī, pp. 83-84). Mehrnūš Mazāreʿī's *Borīdahā-ye nūr* (Slivers of light, Los Angeles, 1994), and Qodsī Qāżīnūr's *Farżīya* (Theory, Netherlands, 1994), are among the many which underline this slow process of transformation. The female characters of these works are highly involved in women's issues and strive to unravel the nuances of the female psyche and forge bonds with each other. The male characters are presented in contrast as emotionally barren and condemned to dysfunctional relationships. Mention should be made, among many others, of works such as Fahīma Farsāʾī's (b. 1951) *Yak ʿaks-e dasta jamʿī* (A group photo, Frankfurt, 1989), which consists of two group of stories written in Persia before the revolution and in Germany after the revolution, and Šahlā Šafīq's (b. 1954) well structured short stories in *Jādda, mah, wą*(Road, mist, and..., Los Angeles, 1998). Both are highly colored with nostalgic memories of a lost past. Mehrī Yalfānī has published several collections of short stories, such as *Jašn-e tawallod* (Birthday party, 1990), and longer narratives, such as *Kas-ī mīāyad* (Someone will come, 1990), both

published in Canada. The latter title is borrowed from a poem by Forūq Farrokzād (Elāhī, 1995, pp. 643-45). In her latest novel, *Dūr az ḵāna* (Away from home, New York, 1998), Maryam, the protagonist, who suffers the hardships of exile and life in a shelter in Canada, struggles to achieve independence from her native traditions which bar women's development and progress.

Whereas most exilic narratives recount the increasingly desultory experiences of their authors throughout the events leading up to the revolution and end with their subsequent departure from Persia, others, though fewer in number, have striven not to confine themselves to the experience of exile. These writers, have produced works of fiction that can be described as supra– or post–exilic literature. A quintessential example is Maḥmūd Masʿūdī's (b. 1949) *Sūrat al-ḡorāb* (The verse of the raven, 1984), which appeared for the first time in *Zamān-e now,* a Paris-based literary journal. As an adaptation of ʿAṭṭār's *Manṭeq al-ṭayr*, the novella recounts contemporary man's quest for the truth, led this time by a raven, traditionally a harbinger of mischief and evil. Through his reconfiguration of "Truth" as always elusive, fluid, and unstable, in a novel in which the characters switch, the tortured replacing the torturers, and the boundaries between I and the other are blurred, Masʿūdī tells the tale of the millions who are experiencing manifold transformations in exile and confronts them with their desire to resist the disconnectedeness of life in a disconcerting and surrealistic fashion (Anūša; Nūrī ʿAlāʾ, 1993; Ḡorāb). Masʿūdī has also published *Bağhā-ye tanhāʾī* (The gardens of solitude, 1996), containing two short stories. Reżā Qāsemī (b. 1949), a playwright and director, is yet another writer who attempts to study the present and the past by redefining conceptions of language, culture, and identity. In his best known novel, *Ham-navāʾī-e šabāna-ye orkestr-e čūbhā* (The nocturnal harmony of the wood orchestra, Los Angeles, 1996), Qāsemī provides a vivid critique of revolutionary ethics, and moves beyond the more simplistic exilic narratives which rely on a dichotomy of good and evil (Nūrī ʿAlāʾ, 1997; Qāsemī). Jawād Jawāherī's (b. 1962) collection of subtly structured short stories, *Roḵ* (Cheek, l989), published in Paris, Ḥosayn Āzarnūš's *Dīvār-hā-ye sāya-dār* (Walls with shadows, 1995), and Sāsān Qahremān's *Gosal* (Rupture, 1994), operating through suggestions, nuances and allusions, convey a more humane and less judgmental view which transcends the essential grammar of life in exile (Rowšangar; Ṣāremī). The same propensity for creating a complex and compassionate narrative can be found in the works of Sardār Ṣāleḥī (b. 1954). He presents novel accounts of historical events, such as Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's

third trip to Europe, in his *Az pas-e šāna-ye šāh* (From behind the shah's shoulders, 1997). Memorable, too, is Maḥmūd Falakī's *Sāyahā* (Shadows, 1997), published in Hamburg, whose narrator delves into his childhood to recover his uncle's murderer in his self-image.

It is interesting to note that concern with the themes of immigration and exile is not confined to those authors who have actually undergone such experiences. Writers living in Persia, such as Esmāʿīl Fasīáḥ in his *Ṭorrayā dar eğmāʾ*,Hūšang Golširī in his *Āʾīnahā-ye dardār,* and Manṣūr Kūšān in *Tabʿīdīhā* (Exiles, 1991) and *Wāhemahā-ye zendagī* (Anxieties of life, 1993) have grappled with these same issues.

A younger generation of writers is also emerging, with diverse linguistic, literary, and cultural backgrounds, which is less afflicted by a sense of exile. More assimilated in their host countries, facing situations with the power to provoke major transformations, and usually with better employment and economic prospects, they have a less immediate organic tie with the culture of their original homeland. Furthermore, the country of exile may variably influence the world vision, sensibiliities, and preferences of these geographically dispersed writers. So far most of their works, rather than being specifically classifiable as a genre, point to the severing of organic and primeval ties with a culture they are keen on capturing and a language they try to employ as a communicative device.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(for cited works not given in detail, see "Short References"):

M. Anūša, "Morğ-e jamāʿat," *Andīša wa enqelāb* 16, 1988, pp. 10-17.

N. E. Berg, *Exile from Exile*, New York, 1996.

S. Elāhī, "Dar ḥażar-e ḥasrat wa dar safar-e nefrat," *Īrān-šenāsī* 8/1, 1996, pp. 146-62.

Idem, “Kas-ī mīāyad,” *Īrān-šenāsī* 7/3, 1995, pp. 639-45.

M. Falakī, *Dāstānhā-ye ḡorbat*, Washington, D. C., l992 (in addition to a representative sampling of post-revolutionary exilic short stories, the book highlights the underpinning factors for the flourishing of the Persian short story in recent decades as an independent genre).

A. Ḡorāb, “Negāh-ī ba *Sūrat al-ḡorāb*,” *Makṯ*, no. 1, 1995, pp. 8-21.

D. Kārgar, *Ketāb-šenāsī-ye dāstān-e kūtāh dar ḵārej az kešvar…*, 2 vols., Uppsala, l994-95.

A. Karimi-Hakkak, “Up from the Underground: The Meaning of Exile in Gholamhosayn Saʿedi’s Last Short Stories,” in A. Fathi, ed., *Iranian Refugees and Exiles since Khomeini*, Costa Mesa, Calif., 1990, pp. 257-75.

M.-M. Ḵorramī, “Qeṣṣa wa qeṣṣa-nevīsī dar tabʿīd: tārīḵča-ye esteqlāl-e adabī,” *Īrān-šenāsī* 5/1, 1372 Š./1993, pp. 183-94.

F. Lewis and F. Yazdanfar, eds., *‘In a Voice of Their Own’: A Collection of Stories by Iranian Women Written Since the Revolution of 1979* ,Costa Mesa, Calif., 1996.

M. Meḥrābī, *Moʿarref-ī-e ketāb…*, Cologne, 1993-.

N. Mohājer, *23 dastān-e kūtāh-e Īrānī dar tabʿīd*, Berkeley, Calif., 1995 (provides biographical data about each author).

P. Nūrī ʿAlāʾ, “Šoʿūr-e šakk wa ḥamāqat-e yaqīn,” *Barresī-e ketāb* 4/13, 1993, pp. 1398-406.

Idem, “Gostaraʾī deraḵšān az ḏehnīyatī ḵallāq, *Barresī-e ketāb* 7/27, 1997, pp. 180-84.

K. Pārsī, “Cūnān ḏarra-ye ḡobār mīān-e lāyahā-ye rang,” *Barresī-e ketāb*, 1/4, 1996, pp. 47-49.

R. Qāsemī, “Goftogū bā Reżā Qāsemī,” *Barresī-ye ketāb* 7/27, 1998, pp. 207-15.

N. Rahimieh (N. Raḥīmīya), “Magical Realism in Moniru Ravanipur’s Ahl-e gharq,” *Iranian Studies* 23/1-4, 1992, pp. 61-75.

“Ḵāṭerahā-ye parākanda,” *Īrān-nāma* 12/3, 1994, pp. 561-64.

M. Rowšangar, “Āvāragī: ḵaṭābī jahānī wa tārīḵī,” *Barresī-e ketāb* 5/20, 1995, pp. 2138-43.

H. Ṣāremī, “Tā žarfā-ye īn gosal ka ḵod-e māʾ-īm,” *Barresī-e ketāb* 5/20, 1995, pp. 2146-58.

B. Šeydā, “Tārīḵ az manẓar-e osṭūra,” *Sang*, no. 1, 1996, pp. 51-56.

B.Tamīzī, *Naqd-e femīnīstī: mohājarat dar āṭār-e zanān-e dāstānnevīs-e īranī*, Los Angeles, 1997 (studies from a feminist perspective the portrayal of women in the works of several female novelists writing in exile).

E. Yār-e Šāṭer, “Ḡawwāṣ o māhī,” *Īrān-šenāsī* 2/3, 1990, pp. 482-85.

Ḥ. Yāvarī, “Dar ḥažar,” *Īrān-nāma* 7/1, 1988, pp. 161-71.