



## FICTION, II(F)

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### FICTION

#### ii(f). BY PERSIANS IN NON-PERSIAN LANGUAGES

Persian fiction is not limited to works written in the Persian language, or to works written within the geographical boundaries of Persia herself. Many Persians who have left their homeland for a variety of reasons and lived abroad for a long time, have attempted to produce fiction in other languages. The contemporary history of these works begins with Amineh Pakravan (1890-1958), the first Persian writer to produce a fully-realized work of fiction in French. Born in Istanbul and raised in Europe, she penned several books of biography and fiction, almost all on the Qajar period. Her first novel, *Destinées persanes*, which she wrote in 1925, was the last to be published, posthumously in 1960. Her novel *Le prince sans histoire*, “a sensitive and evocative novel about the tragic fate of an orphan Qajar prince, a cousin of Mohammad Shah, [which] depicts in a lively manner life under the Qajars and the court environment and intrigues” (Yār-e Šāter /Yarshater, forthcoming) was awarded the Prix Rivaro in 1951 and praised by literary critics. Fereydoun Hoveyda (b. 1924) is another Persian novelist, essayist, and film critic who has written extensively in French. He published his first and well-received novel *Les qurantaines* in 1962. The novel revolves around the life of Sami Salem, the novel’s Egyptian intellectual protagonist who lives in Paris. Shuttling from Cairo to Paris, the book dramatizes the problematic bridging of the two cultures exemplified by the two cities. *Les qurantaines* was translated into Persian by Moṣṭafā Farzāna as *Qarantīna* (1966). Hoveyda’s second novel



*L'aerogare* (1965), was followed by *Dans une terreétrangée* (1968) and *Le losange* (1969), a collection of science fiction stories. His novels concentrate on characters subscribing to two or more cultures simultaneously and on civilizations and religious systems which he believes complement each other rather than merge together (Chelkowski).

Although French was the first language used by Persian novelists abroad, it was not the only one. The number of novelists who have since used English as their medium has grown steadily. Fereyduun Esfandiari (b. 1931), is amongst the first Persian novelists to produce works of fiction in English. His *The Day of Sarifice* (New York, 1960), a politicised novel, centers around a political assassination organized by a religious group in Teheran. He has published two other novels, *Beggar* and *Identity Card*, both in New York.

In the two autobiographical fictions of Shusha Guppy (b. 1935), the London-based Persian singer, actor, and novelist, fact and fiction smoothly blend, and experience and story become antithetical categories. In *The Blindfold Horse* (London, 1988), Guppy, thrown back to the resources of her imagination, interweaves the memories of her childhood to the tale of her city of birth, Tehran, and the socio-cultural situation into which she is born (Yār-e Šāṭer, 1989, pp. 321-24). In *A Girl in Paris* (London, 1991), her second novel and a sequel to the first, Paris replaces Tehran, and French intellectuals in post-World War II era, such as Jean Paul Sartre, Simon de Beauvoire, and Albert Camus appear in the life and mind of a young Persian girl who has traveled to Paris to encounter the decisive moments of choice that will constitute her essential totality as a person in the future. The two novels enjoy a textured and poetical language (Yār-e Šāṭer, 1992). Akhtar Naraghi, is yet another Persian poet and novelist in whose works the line between fantasy and reality, between autobiography and fiction is easily crossed. In *The Big Green House* (Montreal, 1994), a collection of twelve connected short stories, each a vignette from the protagonist's life, Naraghi follows a girl from her childhood in Persia to her adolescence in Germany and finally to her arrival in Canada. Written entirely in the first person singular voice, the book revolves around the protagonist's struggle to adapt to new homes, new countries, and new cultures, touching upon the themes of identity in varying ways. Naraghi has also published a collection of poems, *Legacy: Selected Poems* (Montreal, 1989). In the fiction of Nahid Rachlin (b. 1946), Persia appears as the main character. In *Foreigner* (New York, 1978), she casts an intimate look on the theme of return to one's place of the childhood as an experience of estrangement and



alienation. Minou, the protagonist of *Married to a Stranger* (San Francisco, 1983), Rachlin's second work of fiction, is a dreamy literary girl yearning for an unconventional life. The novel is written from a female point of view and is set in the period just before and during the revolution of 1979. It is enriched by the author's personal experiences and observations in an oppressive society. The story focuses on the joint failure of Minou and her husband to save their marriage, which arises as much from cultural limitations as from individual personalities (Clinton, 328-30). Nahid Rachlin has written another novel *The Heart's Desire* (San Francisco, 1995) and a collection of short stories, *Veils* (San Francisco, 1993).

Donne Raffat's *The Caspian Circle* (Boston, 1978) is set against the backdrop of the post World War II years in Persia. Narrated from the perspective of the Western-educated Firuz Momtaz, the story highlights the rise and fall of an assorted cast of relatives, friends, and business associates, as one generation slowly disintegrates and is replaced by the next. *The Feet of a Snake* (New York, 1984), by Barry Chubin, is one of the first attempts by a Persian novelist to fictionalize the 1979 revolution. A detective story, set against the backdrops of Paris, the Riviera, Persia, London, and Washington, the novel follows the efforts of an American agent to recover a set of stolen tapes containing devastating information.

Manuchehr Parvin lives and teaches in the United States. His *Cry for My Revolution* (Costa Mesa, Calif., 1987), is a historical and political novel, with emphasis on political ideologies and character analysis. *Avicenna & I*, Parvin's other novel recounts the odyssey of two lovers who travel from New York to Hamadān, from present to past, and from earth to sky, searching for truth and wisdom. Persian words are employed in their original forms in the text with no footnotes or translation. Veins of magical realism run through the story line. The protagonist—Piruz—is shared by the two novels (Mahdi).

Bahman Sholevar, a psychiatrist, published *Safar-e šab* in Persia (1967, tr. by the author as *The Night's Journey*, Philadelphia, 1984) and *Dead Reckoning* (Philadelphia, 1992) in English. The latter revolves around the socio-political events in the country and the blows they render to the life of Farhang Shadzad, the novel's protagonist and his family. Sholevar's novels are not primarily concerned with the troubled encounter of different cultures and traditions as is the case with most other Persian expatriate novelists, but rather with depicting twentieth century intellectuals in search of justice, freedom, and identity. (Qānūnparvar).



M. T. Sharif (b. 1964), has authored several successful short stories in English, among them “The Problems with the Food Taster” (*Other Voices*, 1997) and “The Double’s Complaint” (*The Literary Review*, 1996). His “The Letter Writer” (*Agni*, 1987) was included in *The Best American Short Stories of 1989* (New York, 1990) for its fablelike simplicity and structure. The story’s protagonist, Haji, is arrested during the 1979 Revolution and is unjustly accused of espionage and sentenced to work covering up the bare arms, legs, and heads of women pictured in Western magazines, oddly fleshing out a prophecy “reminiscent of both Kafka and the tradition of the ironic Eastern tale” (Atwood). Majid Amini and Masud Farzan are yet two other writers who write in English and in whose works exile appears as a defining and excluding condition. The Persian translation of Farzan’s *Airplane Ticket* (New York, 1969) was published in Persia in 1970. Majid Amini has authored *Dreams of a Native Son* (1987), *The Howling Leopard* (1989), and *The Sunset Drifters* (1995), all published in Canoga Park, California.

Mention might also be made here of *King of the Benighted* by Manuchehr Irani (a pseudonym), which first appeared in the form of an English translation by Abbas Milani of an unpublished Persian novel (Washington, D.C. 1990; Ger. tr. by Y. Nimade as *Der König*, Frankfurt, 1998). It is an exceptional retelling of the Revolution of 1979 and adaptation of the “Black Dome” from Neẓāmī’s poem *Haft Peykar* (q.v.).

In the Netherlands, Kader ‘Abdolah produced *De Adelaars* (The eagles, 1993) and *De Meisjes en de Partizanen* (The girls and the partisans, 1995). Naser Fakhteh’s *Iemand Anders* (Someone else, 1996) and Afshin Ellian’s *Verrijzenis van Woorden*, (Vidya, 1997) are also prime examples of the works of Persian authors in Dutch.

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