



GAIL, MARZIEH

GAIL, MARZIEH (b. near Boston, Mass., 1 April 1908; d. San Francisco, 16 October 1993; [Figure 1](#)), Persian-American [Baha'i](#) author, essayist, and translator. She was the second child of 'Aliqoli (Ali-Kuli) Khan [Nabil-al-Dawla](#), the Iranian consul in Washington, and Florence Breed of Boston; their marriage was the first Persian-American marital union in the Baha'i community. 'Aliqoli Khan was from [Kashan](#); his father met the [Bab](#) in 1845 and became a [Babi](#) and later a Baha'i (Gail, 1987, p. 6). Florence Breed became a Baha'i through her husband. In 1912, at the age of four, Marzieh met '[Abd-al-Bahā](#)', then head of the Baha'i Faith, during his journey to the West. He is said to have remarked that the child had *āteš* (fire) and *namak* (salt; Gail, 1991, p. 87). She grew up "half Eastern and half Western, neither this nor that and yet both" (Gail, 1991, p. 273).

Marzieh's education was conducted by a series of private tutors, since her father's diplomatic work meant that the family had to move frequently, living in Washington, D.C., Paris, Tehran, Istanbul, and Tbilisi. While living in Iran as a child, she observed at close range court life in the waning years of the Qajar era, although she avoided events where she would have to go veiled, which she disliked. Her family were often guests at the opulent royal residences including the *Kāḵ-e Šāheḩbqarāniya*, where, as a child, she once had a comic debate with the young [Aḩmad Shah](#) (r. 1909-24; Gail, 1991, p.136). When she was fifteen, her parents received a marriage proposal for her from the shah himself. Her parents declined, because they were determined to see their daughter educated. She later wrote that they thus saved her from "that



quicksand” (Gail, 1991, p. 246). Her father, who had been appointed minister of the court of Crown Prince Moḥammad-Ḥasan Mirzā (Gail, 1991, pp. 254-55), frequently received death threats; the family was denounced by the clerics from the pulpit of the mosques for being “Babis” and because the daughters were known to appear in public unveiled. The family felt, however, that the attacks were instigated by foreign sources seeking to block his efforts at economic development and fiscal reform (Gail, 1991, p. 254).

In 1924 the family returned to the United States. Marzieh began her studies at Vassar College and graduated from Stanford University in 1929. Shortly afterwards, she married Howard Carpenter, a medical student at the same university. In 1932, she received a master’s degree in English from the University of California at Berkeley.

Marzieh had first met [Shoghi Effendi](#) Rabbani (Šawqi Effendi Rabbāni) in France in 1920, just before he became head of the Baha’i Faith. She was devoted to him, writing that the moments she spent in his presence were “the only really important times of [her] life except for the moments with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (Gail, 1991, p. 301). For his part, Shoghi Effendi greatly valued and constantly encouraged her. In 1933, at Shoghi Effendi’s request, Marzieh and Howard went to live in Iran, and Marzieh was hired as the first female reporter to serve on the staff of a Tehran newspaper (Chen, p. 137); but when Howard contracted poliomyelitis and became paralyzed, they returned to the United States, where he died. In 1939, she married Harold Gail, a manufacturer of springs, and in 1954 the two went to live in Europe as Baha’i pioneers, helping to establish Baha’i religion first in France and later in Austria and the Netherlands.

Marzieh Gail’s literary career began with essays she wrote for the Baha’i magazine *Star of the West* when she was a student at Stanford University. In 1951 she published *Persia and the Victorians*, followed by several works on Baha’i subjects and three books (including one for young readers) about fourteenth-century Europe. She also published newspaper articles under the pen name V. Ives. She was known for her irrepressible sense of humor, which permeated her writing. A reviewer of *The Three Popes* found it “disconcerting” that she treated “the record of human experience as something of a comic opera provided for the delectation of posterity” (*Kirkus Reviews*, p. 543).

While in Iran in the 1930s, she began to translate Baha’i scriptures into

English. Shoghi Effendi commissioned her to translate the “Questions and Answers” appendix to Bahā’-Allāh’s *Ketāb-e aqdas* and then the text of the book itself, which she worked on in collaboration with Baha’i scholar Mirzā Asad-Allāh Fāẓel Māzandarāni. Later she published a translation of Bahā’-Allāh’s *Haft wādi* and *Čahār wādi*, followed by translations of ‘Abd-al-Bahā’'s treatise on modernization and reform, *Resāla-ye madaniya*, and his *Taḍkerat al-wafā’*. She contributed translations to the volume *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* and also translated the memoir *Zendagi-e Ostād Moḥammad-‘Ali Salmāni*.

Marzieh Gail and her husband returned to the United States in 1964 and lived in Keene, New Hampshire. Her later years were devoted to writing a series of biographical and autobiographical works. Her husband did the household chores so she would be free to write (Chen, p. 138). In 1981 they moved to San Francisco, where she died in 1993.

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