



ZEMESTĀN-E 62

ZEMESTĀN-E 62 (Winter of 62), a novel published in 1987 by the well-known and prolific Persian novelist [Esma'īl Fasīh](#)

This title of the novel refers to the winter of 1362 Š. (1984), the third year of the [Iran-Iraq war](#). The story is narrated by one of the familiar protagonists of Fasīh's novels, Jalal Arian (Jalāl Āriān), who is also the narrator of the majority of his novels and many of his short stories (*Badi'*, p. 14; *Mir'ābedini*, p. 928; *Yarshater*, p. 272).

Jalal Arian makes three trips to the war-torn city of [Ahvaz](#) in that winter. On the first trip, he and his incidental companion, Dr. Maṣṣur Farjām, drive from [Tehran](#) to Ahvaz; Arian in search of Edris Āl-e Maṣṣrud, the war-maimed son of his ex-gardener Maṣṣrud Āl-e Maṣṣrud, and Farjām, a thirty-year old engineer who had returned from the United States after an absence of eleven years to develop a computer science center for the National Iranian Oil Company (*Šerkat-e melli-e naft-e Iran*), and to give himself a respite to overcome the memory of the tragic death of his fiancée.

Farjām's computer center project never takes off. Instead, he becomes increasingly intrigued by the ordinary people's willingness to sacrifice their lives for the cause of the "sacred defense" (*defā'-e moqaddas*) of their homeland. Meanwhile he becomes acquainted with Lāleh Jahānšāhi, who reminds Farjām of his lost fiancée, and he finds himself irresistibly drawn to her. She is, however, deeply in love with Faršād Kiānzād. Much to the young lovers' grief, Faršād is drafted for military service. Arian has to return to



Tehran before finding Edris, while provisionally teaching at [Abadan](#) Institute of Technology, a college affiliated to the Oil Company.

On his second trip to Ahvaz to fulfill his teaching consignment, Arian realizes that Frajām's love for Lāleh has intensified, and that, with his project going nowhere, he is spending agonizing nights with his eyes glued to the war footage on the television, having placed a single tulip (*Lāleh*) in a small crystal vase on the set. In his search for Edris, Arian comes into contact with Maryam Jazāyeri, a middle-aged widow whose husband was executed by hanging in the early days of the Islamic Revolution, probably as a counter-revolutionary. She is banned from leaving the country. Later in the story, Arian agrees to assist her in her plan to leave the country and is finally forced to consent to a paper marriage with her so that she can acquire a passport. Arian's attempts to locate Edris eventually pays off, and he finds out that the young man, who has lost an arm and a leg, has voluntarily returned to the battlefield.

After a short trip to Tehran, Arian returns for the third time to Ahvaz. Lāleh's mother dies of cancer. Her mother's death and Faršād's posting to the killing fields of Majnun Island drive Lāleh to the point of suicide. Here, Arian intervenes and sends her along with Maryam to Tehran, so that the two of them can fly to Europe later. Meanwhile, Farjām's mental anguish grows, as does his love for Lāleh, and, in the same proportion, his identification with the ordinary people, who look the war squarely in the face. The story reaches its momentum when Farjām, who bears some resemblance with Faršād, exchanges his passport, his permanent U.S. residency card, and an air ticket for Faršād's uniform and military pass. Faršād joins Lāleh and Maryam in Tehran, and Farjām goes to the front, where he is killed a few days later. As his body, charred beyond recognition, is placed in the tomb as that of Faršād, Arian knowingly looks at his watch as the hour heralds the flight of Maryam Jazāyeri, Lāleh Jahānšāhi, Faršād Kiānzād and, ironically, Maṣur Farjām, to freedom. Shortly afterwards, Jalal Arian takes the road from Ahvaz to Tehran with the maimed Edris in tow.

There is little ambiguity in the symbolic significance of the names in *Zemestān-e 62* (Ferdowsi, p. 25, Badi', 15-16). Jalal Arian (Aryan Splendor; see [ARYA](#) and [FARR\[AH\]](#)) is widely recognized as including a somewhat ironic, yet sympathetic, allusion to the splendor of ancient Iranian culture and civilization (Ferdowsi, p. 30, ff. 12; Mohājerāni, p. 245). Maṣur Farjām's name and death in a military operation with its inherent pun on Majnun (lit. madman, lunatic), is reminiscent of that of his namesake, Maṣur-e Ḥallāj and

his ultimate end at the scaffolds. Other names; e.g. Āl-e Maṭrud (Clan of the Outcasts), and Lāleh, the symbolic flower of martyrdom in contemporary Persian literature, also acquire rich metaphoric implications within the novel's context.

While dismissive comments (Korramšāhi, p. 249) are rare exceptions the reviews of the novel have been mostly favorable. In his multifaceted review on Fasih's literary trajectory, Ehsan Yarshater, noting a number of idiosyncratic aspects of the use of language in Fasih's works, praises the *Winter of 62* as an outstanding post-revolutionary fiction (Yarshater, p. 272: see also [FICTION ii/b. THE NOVEL](#)).

The novel has also drawn wide critical interest as a distinct type of war literature, unprecedented in modern Persian fiction (Yarshater, p. 273). *Zemestān-e 62* does not opt to glorify the military heroism in the battlefields. It recounts, instead, the tale of a panoply of displaced characters of different classes and political convictions, all grappling with the death of loved ones or contemplating the possibility of their own death (Yavari, 1999, p. 588), and mourns the human condition in a world thrown into turbulence by war (Yarshater, p. 271; Haag-Higuchi, pp. 257-61).

The existential, sociological, and autobiographical aspects of the novel have also been studied by several critics (Farmānārā, p. 224). *The Winter of 62*, like most of Fasih's stories is inspired by or linked to the interrelated tales of the members of a single family, most probably his own (Yavari, 1990, p. 62). The existential transformation of the same fictional characters, particularly Jalal Arian, from *Šarāb-e kām* (The raw wine, 1968), with which Fasih begins his literary debut (Fasih, 1994, p. 211), to *Zemestān-e 62* highlights the landmarks of the Fasih's journey from a chronicler of the tragic outcomes of love, drug abuse and murder, to a novelist with deep commitment to his people in their turbulent condition (Yarshater, p. 274). Several of characters mentioned in the novel are based on the tragic lives of his friends, as well as his students at the Abadan Institute of Technology.

Pulling various strands of reading, one may see in Jalal Arian's character a merger of Fasih's usual protagonist with the author himself. "I know what made me write *Zemestān-e 62*. It was the loss of my life in Abadan..., the life of Abadan, and the life of children of Abadan...They are my own children." (Fasih, p. 218) In other words, the literary, the autobiographical, the historical and the existential unify in the identity of Jalal Arian. The unity informs all of



Fasih's creative work and establishes him as a major chronicler of the present predicaments of his nation.

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