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## PART TWO

### ESMĀ'IL FASIH AND HIS OEUVRES



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE AUTHOR'S LIFE AND WORK

#### *Fasih's Life*

Esmā'il Fasih was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1935 in Bāzārche-ye Darkhungāh, which lies in the southern precincts of Tehran.<sup>1</sup> His family and friends called him Nāser (or Nāzi). He was the youngest child of Arbāb Hasan and Turān Khānom.<sup>2</sup> Fasih's father, an illiterate grocery store owner, died when Fasih was only two years old. Arbāb Hasan was very interested in poetry and composed several poems, which were written down by the students of Darkhungāh.<sup>3</sup> Fasih grew up in an overcrowded home along with nine siblings.<sup>4</sup> In 1941, at the age of six, Fasih started his schooling at Onsori Elementary School in Tehran. This period coincided with the outbreak of the Second World War and the Allied invasion of Iran. It was at this age that Fasih discovered fiction through one of his sisters. This sister, who used to borrow books such as Nezāmi of Ganja's (d. 1209) *Leyli and Majnun* (a masterpiece of classical Persian love poetry) and Michel Zevaco's (1860-1912) works, would read them loudly to him at home. When he turned ten, Fasih became a dedicated reader. This hunger for reading fiction led Fasih to choose writing as his career. In this regard, he states that "a compulsive reader might become a compulsive writer in the course of time."<sup>5</sup>

Fasih continued his education at Rahnamā High School in 1947 where he earned his diploma. This period in Fasih's life coincided with the coup d'état of August 19, 1953, which resulted in the fall of Mosaddeq. During Mosaddeq's premiership, the government had announced that whoever wanted to be exempt from conscription would be required to pay 100 Tomans, the Iranian currency of the time. After paying this sum and obtaining his exemption certificate, Fasih hoped to go abroad to continue his education. Between 1954 and 1956, Fasih

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<sup>1</sup> Bāzārche-ye Darkhungāh is one of the old vicinities in Tehran which nowadays lies in southern Tehran near Bāzār-e Bozorg (lit., 'Grand Bazaar'). Today, it is known by its post-revolutionary name, Shahid Akbarnezhād Street.

<sup>2</sup> Badi', *Asl-e Āsār*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Fasih "Goft o Gu," 216.

<sup>4</sup> S. Azimi, "Az Negāh-e Jonubi: Darbāre-ye Esmā'il Fasih va Āsārash ke Hargez Rang-e Parde rā Nadidand," *Māh-nāme-ye Sinemā 'i-ye Film*, no. 398, Shahrivar 1388/August-September 2009, 14.

<sup>5</sup> "Fasih, Esmā'il," *Āftāb*, Ābān 1, 1384/October 23, 2005, [http://aftab.ir/articles/art\\_culture/literature\\_verse/c5c1130073769p1.php](http://aftab.ir/articles/art_culture/literature_verse/c5c1130073769p1.php) (accessed September 23, 2011).

taught in one of Tehran's schools. Because of his meagre income as a teacher, Fasih was forced to apply to one of the cheaper colleges in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

In 1956, 22-year-old Fasih left Iran to go to Montana State College in Bozeman, Montana. He studied Chemistry there for four years. In order to pay his expenses, Fasih worked in the laboratory of the University during his free time. In his third year, he was accepted to the University of Montana in Missoula to study English Literature. Missoula enjoyed a reputation as an important center for American writers, and gave Fasih direct access to American fiction. The overall influence of this experience on his work is evident. Whilst in Missoula, he wrote his first short story, *Khāle Turi* ('Auntie Turi'), which was published by the University press of the time.<sup>7</sup> He placed second in his class, which earned him a 100-dollar award. One of his professors once said of Fasih, "I think we have a writer on our hands," a phrase which left a lasting impression on him.<sup>8</sup>

In 1960, Fasih earned his B.S. in Chemistry and B.A. in English Literature. Immediately after, he moved to San Francisco, California, where he fell in love with and married a Norwegian named Annabel Campbell. They lived in San Francisco for one year, at which point Fasih was offered a good job in Washington. He decided to accept the job, and so he and his then pregnant wife left for San Francisco. Sadly, his wife and child died due to complications during the delivery in 1962. Fasih was devastated. This tragedy made America so unbearable for him that he returned to Iran shortly thereafter.<sup>9</sup>

In the States, Fasih had several memorable experiences. Meeting Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) was one of these. Fasih has stated that from the early days of residing in the United States, he used to read Hemingway's books on a regular basis. His favorite among them was *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Their first meeting occurred in mid-April 1961, when Fasih and his wife made a short trip to Missoula. This was almost three months before Hemingway committed suicide (July 2, 1961). The University of Montana invited Hemingway to deliver a lecture for the students there. When Hemingway saw Fasih's complexion, which was different from that of the American students, he asked Fasih where he was from. Fasih replied "Iran...Good old Persia." Hemingway then asked: "You, Iran?" and Fasih answered: "Yes, from Iran." Hemingway went on to say "Try very hard," to which

<sup>6</sup> Badi', "Negāhi be Zendegi-ye Esmā'il Fasih," *Kelk* 55-56 (1373/1994): 198.

<sup>7</sup> S. Kamāli-Dehqān, "Fasih be Revāyat-e Fasih," *E'temād*, no. 2016, Mordād 12, 1388/August 3, 2009, <http://www.etemaad.ir/Released/88-05-12/253.htm> (accessed September 23, 2011); Ferdowsi, "Fasih, Esma'il."

<sup>8</sup> "Fasih, Esmā'il," *Āftāb*.

<sup>9</sup> Ferdowsi, "Fasih, Esma'il."

Fasih replied “Yes, I will try,” immediately qualifying this with “Writing or something else?” Hemingway responded: “write.”<sup>10</sup>

The influence of Hemingway’s novels on Fasih’s fictional works is omnipresent. For instance, both Hemingway’s and Fasih’s war novels are based on their first-hand experiences of war. In addition, similar to Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, Fasih’s *The Winter of 1983* deals with the subject of romantic relationships occurring during a war. Hemingway’s influence on Fasih has yet to be extensively analyzed, and it would appear that further research on this topic is required.

Upon returning home in 1962, Fasih became a translator at the Franklin Publishing Institute in Tehran, which was under the management of a prominent translator, theatre critic and author named Najaf Daryābandari (b. 1929).<sup>11</sup> Daryābandari played a significant role in the publication of Fasih’s first novel, *Sharāb-e Khām* (‘Raw Wine,’ 1968). Following the completion of the novel, Fasih gave it to Daryābandari for feedback. Despite praising Fasih’s work, Daryābandari suggested that the initial couplet in the novel should be removed, because it did not fit well with the novel form. For this reason, Fasih removed it before publication.<sup>12</sup> Some of Fasih’s fictional works depict the city of Abadan. Since Daryābandari hailed from Abadan, Fasih considered him to be qualified to criticize his novels. As a result, Daryābandari and Fasih had a strong relationship, which was not only confined to the period during which Fasih lived in Tehran, but also persisted during those periods in which Fasih went to Ahvaz and Abadan to teach. The friendship between the two endured until Daryābandari left the Franklin Publishing Institute in 1975.<sup>13</sup>

After returning to Iran, Fasih also became acquainted with other contemporary Iranian writers, such as Sādeq Chubak, Gholām-Hoseyn Sā‘edi, and Ahmad Mahmud. Among them, Fasih developed a close relationship with Chubak in 1962, when Fasih had just landed in

<sup>10</sup> Fasih, “Goft o Gu,” 210.

<sup>11</sup> R. Sayyār, “Bā Jabr Neveshtan,” *Irān*, Bahman 24, 1383/February 12, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> The couplet that Fasih initially chose for his novel, *Raw Wine*, was the following couplet from one of Hāfez’s lyrics:

*Agar in sharāb khām ast agar in harif pokhte*  
*Be hezār bār behtar ze hezār pokhte khāmi*

If that wine were immature, but this comrade mature,  
One immature would be a thousand times better than a thousand mature!

Shams al-Din Mohammad Hāfez, *Divān*, ed. P. Nātel Khānlari, Vol. 1 (Tehran: Khārazmi, 1362/1983), 934, ghazal 459:2. The translation is taken from P. Avery, *The Collected Lyrics of Hāfiz of Shīrāz* (Cambridge: Archetype, 2007), 553.

<sup>13</sup> Kamāli-Dehqān, “Daryābandari Darbāre-ye Fasih: Part o Palā Miguyand ke Mesl-e Hemingway Minevesht,” *Sib-e Gāz-zade*, last updated Shahrivar 1, 1388/August 23, 2009, <http://sibegazzade.com/main/?p=1120> (accessed September 22, 2011).

Tehran and was looking for a job. At that time, Chubak was the director of the *Kāvosh* (lit., ‘investigation’) periodical, which was owned by the National Iranian Oil Company. Since Chubak was looking for someone to assist him with the periodical’s affairs, Daryābandari introduced Fasih. Although, for unknown reasons, Fasih did not work on *Kāvosh* magazine, Chubak, who was also the head of the administrative department of the Oil Company in Tehran, was able to get Fasih a job as a teacher in the Industrial Vocational High School (*honarestān-e san’ati*) in Ahvaz in 1963. As far as their relationship is concerned, Fasih stated in one of his interviews that “Sādeq and I had a good friendship, though we did not meet up very often. Whenever I needed help, I would go to him. Although, in the last days of his life, we seldom got to see each other, Chubak used to send me pictures and postcards via our mutual friend.”<sup>14</sup>

During his stay in Ahvaz, a period full of solitude and gloom for the writer, Fasih started writing.<sup>15</sup> In 1964, a year after moving to Ahvaz, Fasih married Parichehr Edālat. They had two children: a daughter, Sālume (b. 1965) and a son Shahriyār (b. 1970).<sup>16</sup> In 1968, the Oil Company sent Fasih to the University of Michigan as a researcher. After a year, he completed his M.A. degree in English Literature. Subsequent to his homecoming in 1969, his employers transferred him to Abadan to teach at the Institute of Technology, a post he held until 1980, when Abadan was besieged at the initial stages of the Iran-Iraq War. As a result, he was forced to retire as an Assistant Professor. He went back to Tehran and settled in Ekbātān, one of the city’s western precincts.<sup>17</sup> After his compulsory retirement, Fasih devoted the remaining years of his life almost entirely to writing. In addition to writing fiction, he occasionally wrote reports for the National Iranian Oil Company, and gave English courses at the Shahid Tondguyān Petrochemical University in Tehran.<sup>18</sup>

On July 5, 2009, Fasih was admitted to the National Iranian Oil Company Hospital in Tehran due to brain hemorrhaging. He passed away ten days later on July 15. Fasih was buried in the artists’ section of *Behesht-e Zahrā* Cemetery in Tehran.<sup>19</sup> Fasih claimed that his illness was due to the obstacles regarding the publication of his last novel, *Talkh Kām* (‘Bitter Desire’). The publication of the novel had been delayed for a few months pending the approval of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*vezārat-e farhang va ershād-e*

<sup>14</sup> Idem, “Goft o Gu bā Esmā’il Fasih,” *E’temād*, part 2, Farvardin 28, 1386/April 17, 2007, <http://sibegazzade.com/main/?p=92> (accessed September 23, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> H.R. Shokuhī, “Moruri bar Zendegi va Āsar-e Esmā’il Fasih: Asir-e Zamān,” *Mardom-sālāri*, no. 1496, <http://vista.ir/article/371194/> (accessed July 3, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Kamāli-Dehqān, “Goft o Gu.”

<sup>17</sup> “Fasih, Esmā’il,” *Āftāb*; Ferdowsi, “Fasih, Esma’il.”

<sup>18</sup> “Goft o Gu bā Esmā’il Fasih,” *Dowrān-e Emruz*, Dey 5, 1379/December 25, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Ferdowsi, “Fasih, Esma’il.”

*eslāmi*). Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has been the sole authority in Iran regarding the publication of print media (books, newspapers, magazines, and scientific journals).<sup>20</sup> Anyone wishing to publish a novel, for instance, must apply for a license from the Ministry. A license will be given for a book as long as they do not contradict Islamic laws or the constitutions of the Islamic Republic. The Supreme Cultural Revolution Council (*showrā-ye āli-ye enqelāb-e farhangi*) has outlined some of the subjects that can prevent books from being published. For instance, any books that “‘promote profanity and renounce the fundamentals of religion;’ ‘propagate prostitution and moral corruption;’ ‘incite the public to uprising against the IRI;’ [...] ‘advocate the monarchy, dictatorship, and imperialism;’ ‘mock and weaken the national pride and patriotic spirit [...],’” will not get a license to be published.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, after receiving and reading Fasih’s last novel, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance ordered the writer to rephrase, or remove, or rethink certain passages, sentences, and words that contained ambiguous remarks or conflicted with the views of the Islamic Republic. However, when the Ministry learned about Fasih’s health issues, they decided to publish the book immediately (in 2007), and uncensored, which delighted the writer.<sup>22</sup>

### *Urge for Writing: The Birth of Fasih as a Professional Writer*

As a professional writer, Fasih started his career in 1968, when he published his first novel, *Raw Wine*. The publication of this novel, which coincided with Fasih’s research trip to Michigan, led him to see himself as a writer, hoping to write a large number of works. To express his feelings regarding the publication of his first novel, Fasih wrote a letter to his wife from Michigan. He said:

[...] With this first work, the difficult task is now over. I feel I have made my first effort for further accomplishments; it means that I have now thrown myself from the highest mountain. Only flying from this altitude is now left for me. I do not know, falling from this point, what pain and consequences I may cause, but I am sure that I

<sup>20</sup> This matter will be discussed extensively later in this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> A. Hejazi, “‘You Don’t Deserve to be Published’: Book Censorship in Iran,” *Logos: Journal of the World Publishing Community* 22, no. 1 (2011): 55.

<sup>22</sup> Kamāli-Dehqān, “Goft o Gu.”

am not afraid [of falling], and I can also guarantee that the pain from this fall will not be worse than the pain of not falling. I have produced a work that will surprise many people; some will like me, while others will curse me. As there are many authentic and delightful elements in my novel, I am not even afraid of the Galaxy.<sup>23</sup>

In this statement, Fasih claims that *Raw Wine* is just the beginning of what he is willing to pursue in terms of writing novels. Fasih established himself as a writer before the Revolution and continued to be productive after the Revolution. Devoted almost four decades (1968-2007) of his life to writing, Fasih accomplished what he set out to achieve. He published twenty-one novels and five collections of short stories. He has also made eleven translations. Despite this, Fasih is known primarily for his novels, which have struck a chord with the Iranian people. In this regard, Ali Ferdowsi calls Fasih ‘a writers’ writer,’ who “does not simply write but reflects on writings as such, the meaning and price of writing, inside of his writing.”<sup>24</sup> Writing, for Fasih, “is not an act of will, or a need, or a pleasure. It’s a painful instinct, an obsession, a response to visions of a beaten, bruised, and broken angel—an ache, a deep-rooted stimulus.”<sup>25</sup> In addition, Fasih wrote of his loneliness, asserting:

Writing is not a simple and easy task, (I mean writing the best fiction is not a simple and easy task). Genuine authors are lonely people. For them writing is like an umbilical chord [attaching them] to life. Writing is a stage of perspiring, suffering, paining, and restlessness [...]. I promise myself not to discuss my books with anyone ever and not to pay attention to or even read positive or negative criticism, unless it takes place privately and in person.<sup>26</sup>

Fasih was one of the very first writers to write about middle class communities and their social issues in Iran. This was considered an innovative theme in Persian novel writing.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the major themes of his novels are derived directly from the society and peoples’ everyday lives. Fasih portrays ordinary life in different eras in Iran in order to reveal

<sup>23</sup> “Nāme‘i az Fasih be Hamsarash,” *Āftāb*, last updated Tir 26, 1391/July 16, 2012, [http://www.aftabir.com/articles/view/art\\_culture/literature\\_verse/c5\\_1342415197p1.php](http://www.aftabir.com/articles/view/art_culture/literature_verse/c5_1342415197p1.php) (accessed December 24, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Ferdowsi, “National Mysticism: Identity of Author and Nation in Isma‘il Fasih (Writer as the National Patient Stone)” (a paper presented at the Ninth Biennial Iranian Studies Conference, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Fasih, “The Status: A Day in the Life of a Contemporary Iranian Writer,” *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1987): 831-32.

<sup>26</sup> “Nāme‘i az Fasih.”

<sup>27</sup> A. Dehbāshi, “Az Injā va Ānjā va Mājarā-hā-ye...: Yādi az Esmā‘il Fasih,” *Bokhārā* 71 (1388/2009): 445.

changes in Iranian society, lifestyle, and thoughts throughout history. In 2007, a first literary symposium called 'Once Upon a Time' (*ruzi ruzegāri*) was held in Tehran. Fasih's works were praised and acknowledged to have fascinated the general public. For these reasons he received a Certificate of Appreciation for his novels, especially those which focus on the issues affecting Iranian society. Because Fasih was hospitalized, his envoy, Esfandiyār Ābān, a young writer at the time, accepted the certificate on his behalf.<sup>28</sup>

Among his contemporaries, Fasih is regarded as a reclusive writer, who refrained from participating in any intellectual gatherings or literary circles during his lifetime. This avoidance is due to Fasih's intention of not being affiliated with any political or literary party, which he believed would affect his personal life.<sup>29</sup> Notwithstanding this fact, as mentioned previously, he had a relatively close relationship with a small number of Iranian writers and intellectuals such as Daryābandari, Chubak, and Ahmad Mahmud. Fasih had several meetings with them either in his house or in literary cafés. Among them, Ahmad Mahmud and his works highly inspired Fasih and his writing. They are both considered the very first writers in contemporary Iran to produce novels about the Iran-Iraq War. One of the prominent similarities between them is that they both experienced living in the war zone cities of Ahvaz and Abadan. As a result these cities became the main settings of their novels.

Fasih also developed a close relationship with Bahman Farmānārā, a prominent Iranian filmmaker, producer, and screenwriter. Reading Fasih's *The Winter of 1983* led Farmānārā to become acquainted with the writer's works, and inspired him to try to make them into movies. Farmānārā wrote film scripts for three of Fasih's novels, namely *The Winter of 1983*, *Dāstān-e Jāvid* ('The Story of Jāvid,' 1980), and *Bāde-ye Kohan* ('Ancient Wine,' 1994), believing that the stories of these novels were so visual that they could be easily converted to the screen. In writing the scripts, Farmānārā asked Fasih to allow him to change parts of his novels, to better ready his stories for the film medium. Fasih allowed him to do so and eventually was very happy with Farmānārā's scripts. When Farmānārā sent these scripts to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for approval, however, he was refused filmmaking licenses for the films.

In Farmānārā's view, Fasih was an incredible writer, who deserved more appreciation, both during his lifetime and after. When only a very few number of people attended Fasih's funeral, Farmānārā was disappointed, saying "it was painful for me to see that only seventy to

<sup>28</sup> L. Niknām, "Gozāresh-e Marāsem-e Jāyeze-ye Adabi-ye Ruzi Ruzegāri: Ruzi az Ruzegār-e Neveshtan," *Ferdowsi* 52-53 (1386/2007): 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> Kamāli-Dehqān "Goft o Gu."

eighty people came to Fasih's funeral, [which was held] in front of the Artists Forum (*khāne-ye honarmandān*) [in Tehran]. If there were only five readers for each of his novels, it would have been more crowded."<sup>30</sup>

Although the majority of Fasih's works were well-received by both readers and literary scholars, Fasih often avoided interviews with the press and media. In addition, no photographs of Fasih were made public after the publication of his first novel.<sup>31</sup> Regarding shying away from the public gaze, Fasih claimed that as a writer, he had already addressed all of his thoughts and opinions in his works. Thus, on his view, there was no need for further discussions in media, since everything they want to know can be gleaned by reading his works.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, in 1994, Fasih agreed to participate in his very first press conference with the *Kelk* (lit., 'pen,' which was later renamed *Bokhārā*) periodical inside Iran. Ali Dehbāshi, the editor-in-chief of *Kelk*, made a huge effort to arrange an interview with Fasih. After one year of insisting, eventually he managed to convince Fasih. This final interview was carried out at the hospital, a few days prior to Fasih's death. Apart from this interview, Fasih also published one of his short stories in *Kelk*. This was regarded as a remarkable success in the history of the magazine, since it was the first and only magazine in which Fasih agreed to publish a short story.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, in order to commemorate Fasih's valuable contribution to Persian prose literature, a literary ceremony was held in Tehran on July 6, 2013. This ceremony, called 'Esmā'il Fasih's Night' (*shab-e Esmā'il Fasih*), was arranged by the *Bokhārā* periodical. A number of celebrated literary figures in Iran including Farmānārā, Bahā al-Din Khorramshāhi (b. 1945), and Reza Julā'i (b. 1950) delivered speeches about Fasih's personality and works, as well describing their relationships with the writer. They all acknowledged that Fasih's novels, especially *The Winter of 1983*, have had and will continue to have a remarkable number of readers, owing to their brilliance.<sup>34</sup>

Fasih's life witnessed with severe political changes such as the Revolution and the war. Like many Persian writers, he also developed his fictional works along with the country's political and social transformations. In this regard, most of his novels and short stories were inspired by political events in Iran. Although he spent most of his youth outside of Iran, he had a very strong connection with contemporary Iran and what happened inside the

<sup>30</sup> "Shab-e Esmā'il Fasih."

<sup>31</sup> Dehbāshi, "Az Injā va Ānjā," 440.

<sup>32</sup> Azimi, "Az Negāh-e Jonubi."

<sup>33</sup> "Shab-e Esmā'il Fasih."

<sup>34</sup> The detailed account of this ceremony and the speeches delivered by the celebrated Iranian literary scholars can be read in *ibid.*

country. Because studying literature in the United States provided him with easy access to the global literary environment of the time, Fasih's writing style was unique among his Iranian contemporaries. For instance, the plots and style of most of his stories, as we will see later, are more comparable to those of American authors than to other Iranian writers.<sup>35</sup>

### *A Classification of His Works: Novels*

Writing for nearly forty years led Fasih to become one of the most prolific writers among his contemporaries. In addition to novels, short stories, and translations, Fasih also wrote a single article, entitled "The Status: A Day in the Life of a Contemporary Iranian Writer," which was published in the *Third World Quarterly* journal in 1987. In this article, which Fasih considered to be a short story,<sup>36</sup> not only does he describe a typical day of his life during the Iran-Iraq War, and how the war affected the lives of the civilians, but he also discusses issues regarding publication, publishers, and censorship in Iran. Despite this article, Fasih is predominantly known as a fiction writer rather than an essayist.

Fasih's novels occupy a unique place in his body of works, both due to quantity and content. Among Iranians, Fasih's three most acclaimed works are *Raw Wine*, *Sorayyā dar Eghmā* ('Sorayyā in a Coma,' 1984), and *The Winter of 1983*, perhaps due to their original themes and structure.<sup>37</sup> From his first published novel, *Raw Wine*, to his last, *Bitter Desire*, the reader encounters mostly the same narrator, characters, and setting. In other words, many elements in Fasih's works are repeated. Subsequently, through Fasih's novels one can observe a small roster of characters' development over many years. For instance, the narrator of his first novel, Jalāl Āriyān, who is a young man, is seen as an elderly man in his final novel.

Many of Fasih's novels and short stories were inspired by his own life. This is to say that much of the fictional events, characters, and places described in Fasih's novels were drawn from events, characters, and places in Fasih's real life. Additionally, Āriyān, the narrator of his numerous novels and short stories, is presented as Fasih's avatar, through

<sup>35</sup> Kamāli-Dehqān, "Chehre-ye Esmā'il Fasih dar Javāni," *Sib-e Gāz-zade*, last updated Mordād 11, 1388/August 2, 2009, <http://sibegazzade.com/main/?p=916> (accessed September 23, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Fasih, "Goft o Gu," 237.

<sup>37</sup> B. Rowshan-Zamir, "Yādi az Esmā'il Fasih (Romān-nevis-e bi Edde'ā)," *Ketāb-dust*, <http://bookfriend.blogfa.com/post-2677.aspx> (accessed December 20, 2014).

which we perceive the writer's worldview.<sup>38</sup> Fasih's birthplace, Darkhungāh, as well as his friends and family, are frequently the subjects of Fasih's novels. In this regard, Fasih writes:

The Bazaar of Darkhungāh in Tehran has existed since the Qājār period. Perhaps it was initially called 'dar-khān-qāh.' I do not know. However, in my life, Darkhungāh implies the mental effects of my childhood rather than merely a bazaar. [...] People who were living there would make me cry or laugh or even express their love towards me. All this has been carved in my mind. Nonetheless, a man cannot simply copy a life to produce his literary work; instead, he tries to contrive a pattern capable of expressing that pain and complexity [through his work]. He thus identifies characters, setting, background, and origins for all the fictional events. Most importantly, he illustrates the thesis of his story.<sup>39</sup>

Fasih's novels can be classified according to several different standpoints. For instance, they can be classified into pre- and post-revolutionary novels; the novels that are narrated by Jalāl Āriyān, and those that are not; and by the themes of the novels. In the following discussion, Fasih's novels (as well as his short stories) are arranged chronologically, based on their first publication date within Iran, and will be divided into pre- and post-revolutionary works.<sup>40</sup> As most of Fasih's novels are intimately tied up with the history of Iran, studying them using this classification will allow the reader to trace political, cultural, and social changes as they develop over Fasih's four decades as a writer. Although the novels will be divided into pre- and post-revolutionary ones, the themes, the narrator, and the characters will also be studied. It should be noted that although each of Fasih's novels deserves to be studied extensively, my discussion merely aims to introduce these novels to the readers by indicating some of the most significant features of each novel.

### *Pre-Revolutionary Novels*

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<sup>38</sup> Chapter five provides an extensive study regarding Fasih's narrator, Jalāl Āriyān.

<sup>39</sup> Sayyār, "Bā Jabr Neveshtan."

<sup>40</sup> For instance, the very first edition of Fasih's novel named *Nāme'i be Donyā* ('A Letter to the World') appeared in Maryland in 1995. It was not published in Iran until 2000.

Between 1968 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Fasih published two novels, *Raw Wine* and *Del-Kur* ('Blind in Heart,' 1972). Fasih's novels *The Story of Jāvid*, *Dard-e Siyāvash* ('The Pain of Siyāvash,' 1985), and *Shahbāz va Joghḏān* ('the Hawk and the Owls,' 1990) were also written before the Revolution, but were not published until after. Nonetheless, it is important to also categorize them as pre-revolutionary novels, because they express Fasih's thoughts and ideological orientation before the Iranian Revolution, the time that he actually wrote them.

### *Raw Wine*

*Raw Wine* is Fasih's first novel. Here, he introduces Jalāl Āriyān, the narrator of many of his later novels and the protagonist of the vast majority of his stories. This novel expresses Fasih's views on how to construct an ideal world. The story begins when Jalāl Āriyān, who has been studying in America, returns to Iran in order to look after his younger brother, Yusef, who has been admitted to a sanatorium due to heart rheumatism and mental illness. Meanwhile, Āriyān, the employee of an American company in Tehran, desires to travel to Khorramshahr to take care of Mahin Hamidi, an employee of the same company in Khorramshahr about to return to Tehran. Whilst searching for Mahin, Āriyān discovers her dead body on a train on which he was traveling. Apparently, Mahin has committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. This event leads Āriyān to become acquainted with Mahin's sister, Zahra. By reading Mahin's diary, Āriyān discovers that due to a conspiracy by Samad Khazā'er, the company's envoy in Khorramshahr, Mahin was raped and became a drug addict. Zahra has almost the same destiny as her sister. Zahra also commits suicide, but only after having killed Khazā'er with surgical scissors.

In the course of the story, Nāser Tajaddod, Āriyān's best friend, appears. He returns to Iran in order to become a professional writer. He is frustrated about the publishing situation in Iran, because no publishers are ready to publish his novel, *Az Khākestar-hā* ('From the Ashes'). For this reason, he leaves Tehran to go to a remote village called *Sarāb* (lit., 'mirage') to write. Eventually, illiterate villagers bury him alive by accident. The story ends when Yusef goes to America for medical treatment.

So far as the plot goes, *Raw Wine* is evocative of a Western detective story. This, perhaps, is due to the influence of American culture and literature on Fasih and consequently

on his works. The lives of most of the characters in the novel end either with suicide or natural death. Fasih also decides to have his narrator read one of Agatha Christie's detective stories during the course of the novel, called *Ten Little Niggers* (which was later renamed 'And Then There Were None'). All of the characters in Christie's story also die.<sup>41</sup> Jalāl Āriyān appears as an amateur detective hoping to solve the mystery of Mahin's murder and, in the end, he is successful through discovering and reading her diary. Furthermore, undertones of mysticism are also apparent in the novel, generally being invoked by the book's character Yusef. Yusef is in love with the world and nature, and believes that human contentment requires annihilation and a return to Paradise.

The novel relates the events and observations of Āriyān, which happened to him in the closing years of the 60s. This period coincides with the pinnacle of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign. *Raw Wine* is a token of Fasih's criticism of the intellectual's situation in Iran during this era. As was pointed out in chapter two, the establishment of SAVAK in 1957, which limited the freedom of speech of writers and imposed strict censorship on publication, did not put a complete stop to novel writing in Iran. In order to evade the SAVAK's censorship and to facilitate the expression of their ideas, many writers, including Fasih, chose to write symbolic novels. As such a novel, *Raw Wine* exploits symbols and metaphors in order to imply the author's concern regarding the literary discourse in Iran. Correspondingly, the name of the village 'mirage' where Tajaddod was buried alive by well-intentioned villagers is a metaphor for Iran, where a writer cannot fulfill his desires in becoming a writer because of government oppression. The title of Tajaddod's book, *From the Ashes*, also has a symbolic meaning, referring to the writer's endeavor which, due to the failure of the government regarding publication, has become worthless like ash.

*Raw Wine* thus expresses Fasih frustration regarding the government's orientation towards intellectuals, as well as the oppressive situation concerning publication in Iran in the 1960s. In this novel, Tajaddod (meaning literally 'supporter of modernity'), an 'aspiring writer,' is Fasih's avatar through which he projects his thoughts, concerns and ambitions.<sup>42</sup> Tajaddod desires to create a novel that will lead to the glorification of Persian literature. Āriyān and Tajaddod's literary conversations throughout the novel show Fasih's ambition to elevate his work to a superlative literary accomplishment.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Badi', *Asl-e Āsār*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Ferdowsi, "Fasih, Esmā'il."

<sup>43</sup> Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 2 (Tehran: Tondar, 1369/1990), 253; A. Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmalı be Āsār-e Esmā'il Fasih (1)," *Nāme-ye Farhangestān* 14 (1378/1999): 102-9; Yarshater, "Yāddāsht (9)," 472-73.

*Blind in Heart*

*Blind in Heart* is generally perceived as Fasih's most marvelous novel, due to its success in tangibly recreating the atmosphere of Darkhungāh. Fasih was presumably inspired by his childhood memories and recounts real events from that era in the form of a novel. According to many Persian literary critics and scholars, such as Emād Badi', *Blind in Heart* is one of the most inimitable Persian novels for its intimate and accurate depiction of life in Tehran from the 1930s to 1960s.<sup>44</sup>

The story begins when Sādeq Āriyān, the narrator of the story and youngest son of Arbāb Hasan, wakes up to the sound of a phone call informing his family that his eldest brother Mokhtār has died of a heart attack. It ends before the next morning. In just these few hours, Sādeq recounts the events of his family chronologically. He relates the tragic scenes of his family's past, which are framed by Mokhtār's brutality and greed. Mokhtār rapes and impregnates their maid, Gol-Maryam. After hearing this, Arbāb Hasan intends to kill his son. Mokhtār flees and, after a while, is drafted to military service. Meanwhile, Gol-Maryam gives birth to a daughter. Due to the pariah child's sarcasm and bad attitude, Gol-Maryam abandons her for three days, leaving her in front of Majd's house, the richest family in the vicinity. The family take the child and name her Fereshte (lit., 'angel'). After completing his conscription, Mokhtār returns home, where he rapes and impregnates another woman, Jeyrān. Among Arbāb Hasan's sons, Rasul is depicted as the most intelligent and well-mannered. Mokhtār's power and dominance increases day by day, and leads Mokhtār and Rasul to fight. In this fight, Mokhtār punches Rasul so hard that he becomes deranged. Rasul then ends his life by slitting his wrists as a final act of defiance against Mokhtār.

At the end of the novel, we return to the present time. Sādeq is standing outside of the autopsy room. The result of the post-mortem proves that Mokhtār has died of a heart attack. Sādeq realizes that Qadir, the illegitimate son of Mokhtār, is responsible for this incident. On the same night, Sādeq dreams of Rasul, who used to encourage him to be kind and gentle to everyone. In the dream, Rasul is upset and displeased, not only because Mokhtār had such a bitter and immoral heart, but also because Sādeq has forgotten Rasul's message of nevertheless being kind to Mokhtār.

From a historical perspective, the novel takes place during the reigns of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah. However, the invasion of Iran by the Allies in the course of the

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<sup>44</sup> Badi', *Asl-e Āsār*, 63.

Second World War is one of the most significant events that are highlighted in the story. Famine, food ration, and civil commotion were major outcomes of this invasion. The novel also shows that in this period many people, particularly merchants, took advantage of the war to profit from the black market. Because of this, after the war, many who did this became rich.<sup>45</sup> In *Blind in Heart*, Fasih thus unveils the political and social impacts of the invasion on the life of the citizens of Tehran. Through the character of Mokhtār, who becomes rich through hoarding foodstuffs, the author criticizes those who were more concerned with fulfilling their personal desires than with aiding their invaded country.<sup>46</sup>

The novel also depicts Iranian society in the 1940s. In this society, men are powerful and the dominant gender, who do not respect their wives and other women. Some of them consider themselves as even having the right to rape women. On the other hand, women, who also do not play a major role throughout the novel, are consigned to wifehood and motherhood and the duties that these roles entail, such as cooking, getting pregnant, looking after their families, and obeying their husbands. They are not allowed to take part in any social activities. Furthermore, Darkhungāh is portrayed as a place rife with strife: intoxication, murder, poverty, wealth, love, aggression and violence are all dealt with by the novel.<sup>47</sup>

The character depictions are constructed in such a way that each of them represents a particular personality cluster. Concurrently, the moral reflection of each of these different kinds of generic individual are explored. The implications of passion and humaneness constitute the main message of the story and are revealed through Rasul. As the main protagonist, Rasul commends love and humaneness throughout society. His demise at the hands of Mokhtār implies the elimination of intellectuality and chastity in the society.<sup>48</sup> By giving the novel the title *Blind in Heart*, Fasih further indicates humanity's cruelty and malice, as exemplified by the character of Mokhtār.

### *The Story of Jāvid*

*The Story of Jāvid* differs greatly from Fasih's other works, which are set in twentieth century Iran, and in which Jalāl Āriyān narrates stories concerning his family and friends. *The Story of Jāvid* recounts the real life story of a Zoroastrian boy in the first decades of Qājār dominance

<sup>45</sup> S. Erkan, "The Invasion of Iran by the Allies During World War II," *Codrul Cosminului* 16, no. 2 (2010): 113.

<sup>46</sup> Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 2, 256.

<sup>47</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmalı (1)," 111-12.

<sup>48</sup> Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 2, 256-57.

in the region. Fasih states in the introduction of the book that he was inspired to write this book by one of his Zoroastrian friends, who he met during his last few years residing abroad. The main body of the story, Fasih states, is about the autocracy and injustice of the Iranian Qājār prince towards a Zoroastrian boy in Iran.<sup>49</sup> Yarshater notes that this novel is similar to Moshfeq Kāzemi's novel, *Horriḡic Tehran*, since in both of these novels oppressed individuals become toys in the hands of wretched and cruel governors.<sup>50</sup> In 2000, *The Story of Jāvid* was translated into Arabic by Salim Abd al-Amir Ḥamdān as '*Qeṣṣa-ye Jāvid*.'<sup>51</sup>

Jāvid, an Iranian Zoroastrian boy, travels from Yazd to Tehran in order to find his absconded family, who were at the service of the Qājār prince, Malekārā. When Jāvid goes to the prince's mansion, he finds his mother and sister living in a dim and grimy basement, because Malekārā believes that Zoroastrians are unclean infidels and so must be kept away from Muslims. Jāvid also comes to learn about his father's assassination by the prince's agents. Of all people, Malekārā's daughter, Sorayyā, decides to support Jāvid and his family. One night, helped by Sorayyā's maid Leylā, Jāvid's family attempt to flee, but are soon caught by Malekārā's guards. At the prince's request, Jāvid is badly beaten. He is then imprisoned in the basement and his sister, Afsāne, transferred to an unknown location outside Tehran. At the prince's command, Jāvid marries Leylā. In the process of searching for his sister, Jāvid encounters Afsāne's skillet in one of Malekārā's hiding places outside the city. After the decline of Qājār Empire in 1925, Malekārā loses his supremacy. Jāvid learns about Malekārā and Leylā having an affair. In order to take revenge, Jāvid kills both of them and returns to Yazd, where on his arrival he goes directly to the Zoroastrian temple.

This novel is Fasih's first attempt at portraying Zoroastrianism as a noble religion. In a number of his later novels, this theme is explored even more deeply. Jāvid, a Zoroastrian, is the honorable and righteous character in this novel. He tries to live honestly and with integrity in order to overcome the problems and shortcomings he encounters in life. On the other hand, Malekārā, who pretends to be a pious man, drinks, kills, abuses, and insults other religions. Fasih here criticizes the hypocrisy of those who pretend to be Muslim whilst acting in contrast with Islamic principles.

This novel forms Fasih's critique of the Muslims' harsh treatment of Zoroastrians in Iran during the Qājār period, particularly in the nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The Zoroastrians were

<sup>49</sup> Fasih, *Dāstān-e Jāvid*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran: Mo'allef, 1371/1992).

<sup>50</sup> Yarshater, "Yāddāšt (9)," 474.

<sup>51</sup> Ferdowsi, "Fasih, Esma'il."

<sup>52</sup> By 1900 the Zoroastrians were concentrated in two major Iranian cities of Yazd and Kerman as the center of priesthood. By 1970s the majority of them had moved to Tehran.

regarded as pariahs, impure and untouchable, because according to Islamic law the touch of the people of ‘the book’ (Muslims, Christians, and Jews) is pure, whilst that of the pagans (including Hindus, Zoroastrians, and Bahais) is not. There were a number of regulations in Iran which marked the Zoroastrians as a discernible outcast group, easily distinguishable from Muslims. In terms of clothing, it was mandatory for Zoroastrians to wear “distinctive brownish yellow garments, a folded rather than a twisted turban, and tight knickers instead of baggy trousers.”<sup>53</sup> In addition, any occupations that required physical contact with Muslims were forbidden to Zoroastrians. Furthermore, they were often subjected to physical abuse, robbery, kidnapping, and murder.<sup>54</sup> During the Qājār period, the majority of Zoroastrians lived in extreme poverty, and suffered intermittent persecution up to the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup>

Ānāhid Ojākiāns, a literary critic, argues that *The Story of Jāvid* is noteworthy for several reasons. Firstly, not only does Fasih describe the traits and characteristics of the Qājār prince, but he also renders a vivid portrait of the chaos in Iran during the Qājār dynasty, and the reactions of Muslims to the Iranian Zoroastrians. In the second place, the novel is written using colloquial language, and uses many Persian popular phrases, expressions, and idioms to make the language of the novel more colorful and comprehensible. Thirdly, the writer outlines many of Zoroaster’s teachings through Jāvid’s narration. Jāvid as a teenager is wholly familiar with the principles and customs of his religion.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Pain of Siyāvash*

*The Pain of Siyāvash* was written by Fasih before the Revolution, and published for the first time in 1985. This detective novel is based on the tragic coup d’état which took place on August 19, 1953. It describes the ominous destiny of an Iranian idealist during the Pahlavi regime. Siyāvash, the story’s central protagonist, rises up against egotism, hostility, and the animosity of his family. Honesty and justice are two of the key themes of this story and are exemplified by the character of Siyāvash, who has suffered from great injustice.

Jalāl Āriyān travels from Tehran to Abadan in search of Sorayyā’s husband, Khosrow Imān, who absconded on his wedding night. At Khosrow and Sorayyā’s wedding, Shahrūz,

<sup>53</sup> J.K. Amighi, *The Zoroastrians of Iran: Conversion, Assimilation, or Persistence* (New York: AMS Press, 1990), 85.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-89.

<sup>55</sup> P. Saati, “Conversion vii. to the Zoroastrian Faith in the Modern Period,” *EIr*.

<sup>56</sup> Ojākiāns, “Nazari Ejmalı be Āsār-e Esmā‘il Fasih (2),” *Nāme-ye Farhangestān* 15 (1379/2000): 104.

Khosrow's paternal uncle, who has learning difficulties, slaughters a goat and splashes its blood towards the audience. He then threatens Khosrow, vowing that he will revenge his brother's (Khosrow's father's) death. This event leaves Khosrow confused about his father's death. Khosrow has been told that his father, Siyāvash, was drowned in a river when Khosrow was only one-year-old. Āriyān starts his investigation and meets several people who inform him of the truth about Siyāvash's death. As it transpires, Siyāvash was a follower of Zoroaster. Due to religious incompatibility between him and his Muslim family members, Siyāvash leaves his home for a remote area. In order to support his step-niece, Farrokh, who was pregnant, Siyāvash marries her. However, after the birth of the child, Farrokh and his ex-fiancée kill Siyāvash, who in their view is a great threat to the newborn baby. They cut Siyāvash's head off and burn his body. After hearing the truth concerning his father's destiny, Khosrow attempts to commit suicide, but is rescued.

In *The Pain of Siyāvash*, Fasih correlates the life of his protagonist with that of Siyāvash in *Shāh-nāme*. Siyāvash was a legendary Persian prince, who was unjustifiably killed by order of the king of Turān, Afrāsiyāb. His son Key Khosrow later avenged him.<sup>57</sup>

Fasih once again displays his intense admiration for Zoroastrianism in this novel, in which the protagonist converts from Islam to Zoroastrianism. Siyāvash is described as a flawless character who has tremendous faith. He believes that Zoroastrianism is the only way to salvation.<sup>58</sup>

*The Pain of Siyāvash* has the following characteristics. The events of the story are recounted in two different times, with a gap of twenty-three years. Āriyān and Khosrow's attempts to discover the truth about Siyāvash's death occur in the present time, whereas the main body of the novel concerns Siyāvash's life in the past. In addition to this, Khosrow and Siyāvash are comparable characters. They are both secondary characters who do not convey any interesting messages during the course of the story. Khosrow can be thought of as a duplicate of Siyāvash. In this vein, it could be argued that Fasih is addressing the possibility of reincarnation by making Siyāvash and Khosrow, who live in different times, so similar. Khosrow's honesty, generosity, sensitivity, and truth-seeking are the outcome of his love for Siyāvash.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> For the story of Siyāvash in *Shāh-nāme*, see Abolqāsem Ferdowsi, *Shāh-nāme*, trans. D. Davis (New York: Viking, 2006), 215-80.

<sup>58</sup> Aslānpur, *Gozar az Khārzār: Majmu'e-ye Naqd* (Tehran: Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008), 12-13.

<sup>59</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmalı (2)," 112-13.

*The Hawk and the Owls*

The story of *The Hawk and the Owls* describes the events of Jalāl Āriyān's life prior to *The Pain of Siyāvash*. The plot and the central themes are the similar—the focal point of the story is once again the miserable life of an artist. In addition, the contrasts between good and evil and honesty and dishonesty, which often appear as prominent themes in Fasih's works, reach a zenith in *The Hawk and the Owls*. The piece also explores the deterioration of art and mysticism in an aristocratic capital of Iran.<sup>60</sup>

Jalāl Āriyān, an employee of the Oil Company in Abadan, travels to Tehran. On the plane, he meets Parvin Rowshan, daughter of his friend, Sirius. She is travelling to Tehran to look for her father who disappeared nearly eight months previously. Sirius is a renowned painter whose works are popular all over the world. Sirius intends to construct an abstract image based on Hāfez's lyrics. For this reason, he signs a contract with the Ministry of Culture of the time (during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign) for financial support. After three years of working on the project, it is halted due to issues that the Ministry has with the painting. This leads the idealistic and sensitive artist to mental crisis.

Upon his arrival, Āriyān stays in his brother Esmā'il's house. Sirius calls several times, but Āriyān never gets to talk to him. Throughout the novel, several murders take place. Everyone blames the missing Sirius, though he has in fact been killed himself. As the story develops, it becomes evident that Sirius' business partner Malekābādi is in fact responsible for the killings. Furthermore, Āriyān comes to learn that Parvin was not Sirius' actual daughter, since Sirius was impotent. Parvin falls in love with Āriyān and they get married. The story ends when Parvin goes into a coma after learning about her father's death.

The inner conflict of an idealistic man in a society which fails to live up to his ideals constitutes the main thrust of the story. Fasih uses mystical motifs, such as the unity of man and eternity, clairvoyance, and love in order to strengthen his characterization of Sirius. Owing to these mystical tendencies, the mental world of Sirius portrayed in the novel is completely different from that of the other characters. Those things which appear to be important facts and realities for Sirius do not have any value for others. Moreover, in order to reveal the spiritual character of Sirius, Fasih chooses 'Rowshan' (lit., 'bright') as his protagonist's surname, which suggests a close connection with Zoroaster. It implies that converting to Zoroastrianism brought Sirius a bright life, and led him to salvation.

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<sup>60</sup> Badi', *Asl-e Āsār*, 195.

The title *Shahbāz va Joghhdān* and its content is likewise symbolic of this struggle. *Shahbāz* (the hawk) symbolizes Sirius, whose soul has transcended the materialistic world and its afflictions. In contrast, *joghhdān* (owls) stand for the ill-mannered, ignorant, and fraudulent humans in the novel. The similarities between the characters of *The Hawk and the Owls* and Fasih's previous works are significant. For instance, Sirius is comparable to Nāser Tajaddod in *Raw Wine* and Siyāvash in *The Pain of Siyāvash*. Sirius and Siyāvash are both presented as idealists who are inspired by Zoroastrian principles. As maverick characters, they follow the same goal in life: to create a work that will elevate Iranian culture. Furthermore, their deaths are very similar.<sup>61</sup> In this novel, the narrator reads Richard Matheson's *A Shrinking Man*, which revolves around an exiled poet whose body shrinks and eventually turns into an atom. Fasih parallels the character of *A Shrinking Man* with Sirius to bring out similarities between their physical and mental conditions.

Hamid Reza Omid-Sarvar claims that the story of *The Hawk and the Owls* is lifted from one of the Samuel Dashiell Hammett's detective novels, *The Thin Man*. He claims that Fasih's novel is even actually a Persian translation of *The Thin Man*. The critic goes further to suggest that until Ahmad Mir'alā'i's translation of Hammett's novel into Persian, no one realized that *The Hawk and the Owls* was a translation rather than a pure novel. According to Omid-Sarvar, in order to make this work as a Persian novel, Fasih only needed to replace the Western names with Persian names. As a result, the critic believes *The Hawk and the Owls* has blemished the reputation of novel writing in Iran.<sup>62</sup>

### *Post-Revolutionary War Novels*

Following the Iranian Revolution, Esmā'il Fasih continued to write. The number of his post-revolutionary novels is greater than those that appeared in the pre-revolutionary era. These novels cover diverse themes, ranging from the social issues of the time to the political events of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Iran. Among the political events of the twentieth century, the Iran-Iraq War in particular is given an extensive treatment in a remarkable number of Fasih's post-revolutionary novels. This demonstrates the correlation between Fasih's novels and the political and social developments of the country.

<sup>61</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli (2)," 120.

<sup>62</sup> H.R. Omid-Sarvar, "Esmā'il Fasih va Cinemā: Nevisande'i Porkār," *Bāni-Film*, no. 1716, part 1, Khordād 18, 1385/June 8, 2006.

The Iran-Iraq War and related subjects can be seen in six of Fasih's post-revolutionary novels, but the degree to which the war is addressed in these novels differs. The war is a central theme in some novels and marginal in others. This consideration leads to the following question: can all six of Fasih's post-revolutionary novels which describe the war be called 'war novels'? Or is it important to measure the degree to which the war is described in a novel before categorizing that work as a 'war novel'? Among Fasih's novels dealing with the Iran-Iraq War, *Sorayyā in a Coma* and *The Winter of 1983* are thought to be the most controversial novels among Persian and non-Persian literary critics with respect to whether they should or should not be classified as war novels.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the definition of a war novel has changed throughout the years and there is still no clear understanding of the term. In the case of Fasih's novels, critics cannot reach an agreement as to whether they should be properly termed 'war novels,' even though they all address the theme of war at least to some extent. Some Persian critics, such as Hasanbeygi, claim that it does not matter to what level the war is presented in a work, and that a novel with any kind of mention of the war can be called a war novel. In his 2013 book, *Jang va Romānhāyash* ('War and its Novels'), Hasanbeygi selects and analyzes fifty-four Persian novels that, due to their war setting, could be easily turned into movies or presented in the international domain. In Hasanbeygi's classification, all of these fifty-four works, which depict the war to greater and lesser extents, are called 'war novels.' Some of the works mentioned in his book are even treated as war novels for the first time. In the following section, which deals with Fasih's war novels, some of the novels mentioned are hard to fully classify as war novels due to their low levels of war representation. In order to avoid any confusion, the following classification of Fasih's war novels partly follows that used in Hasanbeygi's book.

### *Sorayyā in a Coma*

*Sorayyā in a Coma* is Fasih's first attempt to describe the impacts of the Iran-Iraq War on people's lives. Fasih translated the novel into English in 1985, which was published by Zed Books Ltd. in London in the same year. The English version of this novel was in high demand

in the United States.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the novel was also translated into Arabic as '*Thorayya fi Ghaybuba*' in Cairo.<sup>64</sup>

Jalāl Āriyān travels to Paris to take charge of his comatose niece, Sorayyā, who, after the death of her husband Khosrow in a street demonstration during the Iranian Revolution, goes to Paris to pursue her education. One day, whilst cycling on a soggy road, she slips and goes into a coma. During his stay in Paris, Āriyān meets several Persian writers and intellectuals in a cafe called 'de la sanction,' writers who have migrated to the West from Iran. Many of them emigrated because of the Iranian Revolution and subsequent Iran-Iraq War. In having conversations with them, Āriyān learns about their political and intellectual approaches and thoughts. Meanwhile, the story focuses on another character, Qāsem Yazdāni, Sorayyā's classmate, who often visits her at the hospital. Yazdāni falls in love with the comatose Sorayyā and brings her elaborate bouquets of flowers. Throughout the story, scenes from the war, which portray the devastating effects of the bombing and the killing of innocent people, flash through Āriyān's mind.

As one of the most debated of Fasih's novels, *Sorayyā in a Coma* is the subject of a wide range of literary articles and books both inside and outside of Iran, and there is no consensus about the novel's genre, structure, and theme among literary critics.<sup>65</sup> For instance, in Nāser Irāni's view, *Sorayyā in a Coma* should be viewed as a travelogue rather than a novel, since the narrator travels between Paris and Abadan sketching an accurate picture of the two locations.<sup>66</sup> Behrang Rajabi goes a step further, calling *Sorayyā in a Coma* a 'stray novel' (*romān-e parse*) rather than a war novel, owing to the fact that the characters, the events, and the scenes are incessantly changing their positions and never achieve any solidity within the story.<sup>67</sup>

Through *Sorayyā in a Coma*, Fasih mainly criticizes the westernized intellectuals who blame the West for Iran's chaotic situation as a result of the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, on the basis that they have chosen to leave Iran to live in Europe. On a deeper level, the novel

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<sup>63</sup> Sayyār, "Bā Jabr Neveshtan."

<sup>64</sup> Ferdowsi, "Fasih, Esmā'il."

<sup>65</sup> For a number of significant studies of the novel both in English and Persian, see for instance Ghanoonparvar, "Sorayya in a Coma by Esmail Fassih," *Iranian Studies* 21, nos. 3-4 (1988): 142-45; Idem, *In a Persian Mirror*, 125-28, R. Navvabpour, "Review: Sorayya dar Eghma," *Iranian Studies* 18, nos. 2-4 (1985): 427-32; Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli be Āsār-e Esmā'il Fasih (3)," *Nāme-ye Farhangestān* 16 (1379/2000): 75-87.

<sup>66</sup> N. Irāni, "Sorayyā dar Eghmā," *Nashr-e Dānesh* 21 (1363/1984): 56.

<sup>67</sup> B. Rajabi, "Be Bahāne-ye 'Sorayyā dar Eghmā' dar Towzih-e yek Su'e Tafāhom-e Tārikhi," *E'temād*, no. 2016 (supplement), Mordād 12, 1388/August 3, 2009, <http://persian-language.com/criticism-1690.html> (accessed December 28, 2012).

shows how these intellectuals “have fully succumbed to the West and Western life, which has become an inseparable part of their Self.”<sup>68</sup>

The title and theme of *Sorayyā in a Coma*, in Reza Navvabpour’s words “imply the plight of Iranian intellectuals in the modern world in general and their further confusion and bewilderment, inflicted by the departure of their society from secular modernism to religious traditionalism in particular.”<sup>69</sup> One might say that Fasih uses this ironical title in order to illustrate that the exiled Iranian intellectuals have gone into a coma due to their isolation from their home country. Fasih’s own preference is clearly for those who stayed in or returned to Iran, and, rather poignantly, he describes the exiled Iranian intellectuals as the ‘Lost Generation.’ Using the term ‘Lost Generation’ certainly demonstrates Hemingway’s influence on Fasih, as the term was initially popularized by Hemingway, who used it as one of the epigraphs for his novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. In this novel, Hemingway used the term to designate the post-First-World-war expatriate generation.<sup>70</sup>

Reading *Sorayyā in a Coma* might lead the reader to question whether it should be considered a war novel. The novel does not straightforwardly fit within the definitions of ‘war novel’ given previously, because the central theme of the novel is not war, and the war does not even serve as the setting of the novel. The war is only presented in the form of flashbacks, and these could be removed without greatly damaging the flow of the novel’s central narrative. As a result, there is no agreement on the genre of this novel among Persian critics. Some of them, such as Hanif and Hasanbeygi, consider *Sorayyā in a Coma* to be a war novel, because it depicts the war and its impact on the city of Abadan, though only in the form of flashbacks. For them, the level of presentation of the war is not a criterion for calling this a war novel.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, other critics, including Ābedini claim that since a very small segment of the novel is actually devoted to the war and only in a form of flashback, it cannot be classified as a war novel. Ābedini classifies *Sorayyā in a Coma* as an ‘exile novel’ in which the main story revolves around the life of exiled intellectuals.<sup>72</sup> Possibly, since the novel was written in the midst of the war, the writer wanted to somehow, although in the form of

<sup>68</sup> Ghanoonparvar, *In a Persian Mirror*, 127.

<sup>69</sup> Navvabpour, “Review: Sorayya dar Eghma,” 429. It is interesting to note that the title of this novel was initially *Por Kon Piyāle rā* (‘Fill the Glass’), inspired by one of the Fereydu Moshiri’s (1926-2000) poems. For unknown reasons, before the novel was published, Fasih changed its title into *Sorayyā dar Eghmā*.

<sup>70</sup> For a detailed study of the term ‘Lost Generation’ in Hemingway’s novel, see D. Tomkins, “The ‘Lost Generation’ and the Hemingway’s Materiality of Absence and *The Sun Also Rises*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no. 4 (2008): 744-65.

<sup>71</sup> Hanif, *Jang az Se Didgāh*, 79-84; Hasanbeygi, *Kankāsh dar Romān-e Jang* (Tehran: Mehr-e Tābān, 1384/2005), 445-50.

<sup>72</sup> Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 3, 939-42.

flashbacks, fit scenes of the war into his novel in order to reflect the association of his work with the political situation of the country.

### *The Winter of 1983*

*The Winter of 1983* is an important novel of Fasih's that deals with the Iran-Iraq War. This novel has been well-received by its readers throughout the decades. The multiple reprints and editions of this novel are a testimony to this fact. A number of publishers based both inside and outside Iran have officially reprinted the novel six times since 1985. In the Autumn of 1364/1985, *Nashr-e Nou* published the first edition of the novel. However, two years later, in 1987, the novel was banned (the reasons will be discussed later in this chapter) inside Iran and local publishers were no longer allowed to reprint the novel. From this time, the novel did not appear in bookshops in Iran, but a large number of its copies were sold on the black market across the country.<sup>73</sup> Due to the chaotic situation of publishing inside Iran, in 1989, an Iranian publisher in Cologne brought out the book with Fasih's permission.<sup>74</sup> After eighteen years since its first edition, the local publisher, *Peykān*, again officially reprinted *The Winter of 1983* inside Iran in 2003. The fourth and fifth editions were issued in 2007 and 2010 by *Āsim* and *Zehn-āviz* Publishers in Tehran respectively. The latest edition of the book came out in 2013 out under the imprint of *Zehn-āviz* Publishers.

Publication of this novel led many people to recognize Fasih inside Iran, whilst several translations of *The Winter of 1983* led the novel to be known internationally. In 1998, the novel was translated into German by Mohammad H. Allafi and Sabina Allafi as '*Winter '83: Roman,*' and was first published by the Garé Verlag Publisher in Frankfurt. Two years later, in 2000, *The Winter of 1983* was translated into Arabic by Mohammad Alā al-Din Mansur as '*Shitā 84,*' and was printed in Cairo. The numerous reprints and translations of the novel indicate the book's popularity and high repute amongst its readers in Iran, as well as abroad. Since this novel will be extensively analyzed in the upcoming chapters, this section merely focuses on the issue of the novel's genre.

Although *The Winter of 1983* is largely accepted to be a war novel, there is still some disagreement on this matter among a few critics. As discussed in chapter two, a war novel may embody a large number of themes and subthemes. They can describe warfronts or the

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<sup>73</sup> Fasih, "Goft o Gu," 227.

<sup>74</sup> Kamāli-Dehqān, "Goft o Gu."

actions of a soldier fighting with the enemy directly (such novels are called a ‘novels of command’ or ‘military novels’), or they can reveal the relationship between a war and contemporary life (such novels are called ‘*Bildungsroman*’). As far as *The Winter of 1983* is concerned, it better fits within in the latter category, since it seeks to address the relationship the main protagonist has with the war, and to explore this protagonist’s quest for wisdom and participation at the frontline. Despite this, critics disagree as to whether it should be called a war novel. Many literary critics, including Hanif and Mir‘ābedini consider *The Winter of 1983* to be a war novel, since it articulates the writer’s wartime experiences. They argue that since this novel is derived from Fasih’s direct experiences of living in the war cities of Abadan and Ahvaz during the Iran-Iraq War, which enable him to picture the devastating impact of the war on civilian life, it can be properly called a war novel. Regarding the significance of the novel, Yarshater claims that *The Winter of 1983* is a valuable Persian war novel due to Fasih’s skill in the transmission of his wartime experience to his readership and his depiction of the ways in which civilians’ lives were affected by the war.<sup>75</sup>

Persian literary scholars generally view *The Winter of 1983* as fitting squarely within the war novel genre. Their consensus stems from the novel’s in-depth portrayal of the effects and impact of the war on the personal lives of a diverse cast of characters, and its sensitive depiction of the suffering caused to them by the war. They also note *The Winter of 1983*’s vivid description of the ‘war of the cities,’ which had a profound and immediate impact upon the lives of the Iranian people. As Ābedini observes, “professional writers frequently focus on the description of the ‘war of the cities.’ However, instead of depicting a hero’s bravery at the frontline, they often underline the social upheavals as well as people’s horror during the civil war,”<sup>76</sup> and Fasih’s novel is no exception. Consequently, *The Winter of 1983* has drawn wide critical interest as a distinct type of war literature, and is regarded among many critics as one of the best war novels hitherto written in Iran.<sup>77</sup>

This said, some have questioned the idea that *The Winter of 1983* should be viewed primarily as a war novel. Roxane Haag-Higuchi, for example, argues that war novels typically recount the first-hand experiences of soldiers in the battlefield. Furthermore, she points out that “war novels usually present sections of historical reality, often with a strong autographical touch, and refrain from discussing the historical-political aspects of the

<sup>75</sup> Yarshater, “Yāddāsht (9),” 478.

<sup>76</sup> Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 3, 910.

<sup>77</sup> R. Najafi, “Behtarin Nemune-hā-ye Fārsi-ye Adabiyāt-e Jang,” *Firooze*, last updated Khordād 6, 1387/May 26, 2008, <http://www.firooze.ir/article-fa-460.html> (accessed September 9, 2014).

fighting.”<sup>78</sup> She therefore concludes that although the novel's story is heavily influenced by the war, *The Winter of 1983* should not be straightforwardly classified as a war novel, because it does not contain any personal accounts of soldiers fighting at the frontline.<sup>79</sup> Despite these divergent outlooks on *The Winter of 1983*'s genre, in the present study the work will be treated as a war novel, owing to the fact that the war is essential to the novel's narrative. Not only is the story set during the war, but its central themes of interest concern the manner in which it depicts the impact of war on civilian life.

### *Ancient Wine*

*Ancient Wine* is considered to be a mystical novel, addressing the spiritual evolution of a man who relinquished his religious beliefs and conventions for forty years. Ābedini suggests that Fasih constructed this novel on the themes of ‘journey, love, and transformation’ in order to color his work with Islamic mysticism.<sup>80</sup> To this end, throughout the novel Fasih focuses on the poems of a famous Persian Sufi of the eleventh century named Khāje Abdollāh Ansāri (1006-1089) as cited in *Kashf al-Asrār va Oddat al-Abrār* (‘Exploration of the Secret and Provision of the Righteous’).<sup>81</sup> Although mysticism is the dominate theme of the novel, because the events of the novel occur during the Iran-Iraq War, Hasanbeygi classifies this work as a war novel. He argues that because the mystical story is narrated in the setting of the war, it is a war novel.<sup>82</sup>

Kiyumars Ādamiyyat, a heart specialist from the University of California, Los Angeles, comes to Abadan in order to equip the Oil Company's hospital, which was partly damaged during the early stages of the Iran-Iraq War. Soon after his arrival, Kiyumars meets Pari Kamāl, a laboratory technician, at his office. Kiyumars falls in love with her and hopes to marry her for a fixed term (*ezdevāj-e movaqqat* or ‘fixed-term temporary marriage’ in Islamic law).<sup>83</sup> Pari is ready to accept this proposal, but on the condition that Kiyumars follows

<sup>78</sup> Haag-Higuchi, “The Theme of War,” 255.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ābedini, “Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni dar Sāl-e 1374 (bakhsh-e chāhārom),” *Kelk* 89-93 (1376/1997): 144.

<sup>81</sup> *Kashf al-Asrār va Oddat al-Abrār* is written by Abol Fazl Rashid al-Din Meybodi. This book contains a Persian translation of the Quran, interpretations of the Quranic verses, plenty of mystical doctrines, Sufi anecdotes, and sayings of the prominent saints. N. Pourjavady, “Genres of Religious Literature,” in *A History of Persian Literature*, Vol. 1, 275-76.

<sup>82</sup> Hasanbeygi, *Jang va Romānhāyash*, 271.

<sup>83</sup> For an extensive discussion on temporary marriage in Islam, see S. Hayeri, “Temporary Marriage: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality in Iran,” in *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, eds. M.

Islamic principles and starts saying his prayers on regular basis. He does so and they get married. Kiyumars gives Pari a pendent on which the name ‘Allah’ is carved. After the marriage, they spend every night reading the Quran and *Kashf al-Asrār* and discussing mystical subjects such as love, unity, and spirituality.

One day Pari goes to Ahvaz to visit her ill aunt, but she never returns. In search for her, Kiyumars is confronted with strange and implausible realities: that the laboratory where Pari was working does not exist, that Pari was killed during the war, and many other facts which bewilder him. He also finds Pari’s grave. Not far from it, he encounters another grave, which belongs to an unknown person named Khodādād Jannat-Makān, whose date of birth is the same as Kiyumars’, and whose date of death coincides with the date of Kiyumars’ and Pari’s first meeting. The story ends with Kiyumars’ extreme perplexity the next day when he meets a new technician, Soheylā Kerāmati, wearing the same pendant as the one he gave to Pari.

*Ancient Wine* differs profoundly from Fasih’s previous novels in terms of content and character. From a thematic point of view, *Ancient Wine* is closely tied up with Islamic mysticism and mystical tenets run throughout the novel. Furthermore, it also contains a limited cast of characters, which makes the narrative more comprehensive and approachable. Jalāl Āriyān is not the narrator and hence the story is recounted from the third person perspective. Abdol Ali Dastgheyb argues that although Āriyān does not narrate the story, the novel should be considered Āriyān’s biography, and that Āriyān is the character Kiyumars.<sup>84</sup>

*Ancient Wine* illustrates one of the most prominent mystical concepts: ‘divine love.’ In mystical discourse, divine or mystical love (*eshq-e haqiqi*) refers to man’s love towards his Creator, who is denoted as the ‘Beloved.’<sup>85</sup> Often, in order to reach this stage, a man may go through ‘allegorical love’ (*eshq-e majāzi* or *zamini*), which usually refers to romantic relationships between two people and is typically considered to be a bridge in a man’s journey to ‘divine love.’ In Islamic mysticism, love towards the creator is immortal, whilst love towards another human is mortal. In the novel, though Kiyumars initially falls in love with Pari and her beauty, gradually this love leads him towards God. In other words, as Ābedini explains, this novel is a good example of the theory that “discovery of the self will guide a

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Afkhami and E. Friedl (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1994), 98-114; Idem, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi’i Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

<sup>84</sup> A.A. Dastgheyb, “Naqd va Nazar: Naqdi bar Asir-e Zamān va Bāde-ye Kohan,” *Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni* 41 (1375/1996): 124.

<sup>85</sup> Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Persian Poems* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997), 51.

man to discover God.”<sup>86</sup> Soheylā Abdolhoseyni criticizes *Ancient Wine* for describing a profound ideological change which takes place in less than two weeks, which she feels is unacceptable. The critic asserts that ideological transformation often requires a long time, especially for Kiyumars who has not performed religious rituals for forty years.<sup>87</sup>

The novel also contains metaphorical language. The title of the story *Ancient Wine* refers to the old wine of *Kowsar* in Paradise, as well as human love and mystical intoxication with God. Fasih's decision to name his characters in a manner that corresponds to their fictitious personalities is inevitable. *Pari Kamāl* (lit., 'fairy-perfection'), a symbol of *Kowsar*'s cupbearer, stands for the metaphorical sparkle that exists in every human's nature. *Kiyumars Ādamiyyat* is a symbol of a man who fights against his inner demons, lust, and materialism. The grave of *Khodādād Jannat-Makān* signifies *Kiyumars*' mystical annihilation, while the pendent of Allah emphasizes his perfection and ascension.<sup>88</sup>

### *Captive of Time*

In *Captive of Time* (*Asir-e Zamān*, 1994) Fasih chronologically details the development of the Iranian Revolution from the 1960s up until the end of the Iran-Iraq War. SAVAK's deeds, Iranians' demonstrations, riots against the Pahlavi regime as well as the war and its devastating impacts on people's lives are all portrayed. The novel focuses on the lives of three Iranian families before and after the Revolution in order to portray life during this phase in the country's history. In Emād Badi's view, *Captive of Time* can be regarded as one of the top three or four historical novels in world war literature that includes depictions of a massive Revolution, resistance, and a war.<sup>89</sup>

In 1963, Jalāl Āriyān travels from Tehran to Ahvaz to teach at Oil Company's Vocational high school. Among all of his students, he becomes particularly friendly with Ali Veysi, who recounts childhood incidents and his hidden anti-Pahlavi regime activities to Āriyān. The appearance of a SAVAK officer, Nafisi, is a turning point in Veysi's life. A materialistic and extravagant individual, Nafisi wants to marry Veysi's beloved, Shahnāz Ganjavipur. When Shahnāz declines his proposal, Nafisi imprisons Veysi and Shahnāz's

<sup>86</sup> Ābedini, "Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni," 144-45.

<sup>87</sup> S. Abdolhoseyni, "Naqdi bar Romān: Bāde-ye Kohan," *Honar-e Dini* 1 (1378/1999): 194-203.

<sup>88</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli be Āsār-e Esmā'il Fasih (6)," *Nāme-ye Farhangestān* 19 (1381/2002): 136-37; B.A. Khorramshāhi, "Bāde-ye Kohan," *Kelk* 55-56 (1373/1994): 249-53.

<sup>89</sup> Badi, *Asl-e Āsār*, 270.

father. Both are released later when Shahnāz finally succeeds in marrying Nafisi. Due to Nafisi's ill-treatment and torture, Shahnāz becomes depressed. After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Veysi obtains a high position in one of the government offices. Due to his political and pro-Pahlavi activities before the Revolution, Nafisi is imprisoned and sentenced to death. Meanwhile, Shahnāz gets divorced from Nafisi and is taken to a sanatorium in Abadan for treatment. In the course of the novel, Afsāne, Veysi's mother, realizes that Nafisi is her husband who absconded many years ago after picking up her marriage certificate.

Veysi and Shahnāz, as well as Āriyān and Afsāne, are married. Nevertheless, their happiness is ended by the inception of the Iran-Iraq War. In the first bombardment of the city, Afsāne is killed and the pregnant Shahnāz taken to a hospital. In the meantime, Nafisi flees from the prison and kills Shahnāz. Veysi and Āriyān then find Nafisi. Veysi conveys his hatred of Nafisi by slapping him in the face. That night, Nafisi dies.

In this novel, Fasih explicitly depicts how a person can be completely bound by time, space, and destiny. According to him, time holds us all captive. However, this captivity can be transcended through love and passion. Throughout the course of the story, each of the characters are somehow held captive by their destinies. For instance, Ali Veysi is a captive, because he is deprived of being with his beloved for so many years. His captivity ends with the death of Nafisi, the man responsible for his miserable life. The quintessence of Veysi's desires is social justice. He believes that by instilling justice in society, he will be liberated from captivity.

As far as the narrator of the novel is concerned, Ābedini says that Jalāl Āriyān, who often reads detective novels, appears as a detective with a weapon (i.e., a gun). He alone stands against the novel's antagonist, Nafisi. This private detective, according to Ābedini, is inspired by the protagonists found in Western detective novels. The critic goes further to indicate that with a political outlook, Fasih creates two love stories in the setting of the Revolution and Iran-Iraq War. Despite combining romance and politics in a single work, Ābedini claims that Fasih fails to produce a novel which is acceptable to readers.<sup>90</sup>

### *Killed for Love*

<sup>90</sup> Ābedini, "Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni dar Sāl-e 1373 (bakhsh-e dovvom)," *Kelk* 67 (1374/1995): 181-85.

Fasih's book *Killed for Love* (*Koshte-ye Eshq*, 1997) contains one novelette and one short story entitled *Koshte-ye Eshq* and *Māh* ('Moon') respectively. In 1997, the first edition of the book was published with the Persian text only. The second edition, which was published in September of the same year, appeared in both Persian and English. Fasih was the translator of his own novelette. The events of the novelette, *Killed for Love*, which is the same as the title of the entire book, occur during the first weeks of the 1980 Iraqi assault on Iran. The work is considered a plaintive war novel, crammed with poignant realities. In the preface of the book, Fasih declares that the story of *Killed for Love* is a narration of Ahmad Adnān Munesi's life, an individual whom he met at the hospital in Abadan. In this regard, this novelette can be regarded as Fasih's attempt at a memoir.

The story of *Killed for Love* begins when Jalāl Āriyān is admitted to a hospital in Abadan, where he becomes acquainted with Ahmad Adnān, a twelve-year-old Abadani boy who is in a state of mental shock while waiting for his mother to arrive. As Ahmad has also lost his memory, Āriyān intervenes to help Ahmad learn what has become of his missing mother. It comes to Āriyān's attention that after the outbreak of the war, Iraqi forces wanted to capture Ahmad. His mother, Ra'nā, asks the Iraqis to instead take her as a captive and free Ahmad. Since captivity in the hand of the enemy is a humiliation for Ra'nā, she asks an Iraqi officer to kill her right away. As a result, he kills Ra'nā in front of Ahmad. After realizing this, Āriyān takes Ahmad to Bandar-e Māhshahr, a city in Khuzestan Province, where his uncle, the only living member of Ahmad's family, lives.

The short story *Moon* in the same collection tells the story of a teenage boy, Ali, and his mother who work as servants for one of the richest families in Tehran. One night, after a party in the owner's house, Ali must accompany an old intoxicated man back to his house. The entire story revolves around the conversation of Ali and the old man, who mainly discuss the situation of Iran after the war. This story is considered one of Fasih's more 'common' pieces.

As a novelette, *Killed for Love* highlights the theme of motherly love. There is little ambiguity in the symbolic significance of the title, *Koshte-ye Eshq*. Literally, it refers to one who is killed for a cause of love, and in the novelette, Ra'nā, Ahmad's mother, occupies this position. She sacrifices her life in order to save the life of her beloved son. On the other hand, in Islamic mysticism, *Koshte-ye Eshq* (which it is usually translated as 'killed by love'), as a prominent concept, refers to the mystic who pursues self-annihilation in trying to reach

eternal life with the divine Beloved.<sup>91</sup> However, death can take different forms and connotations in different literary contexts. In Fasih's novels, death has a pervasive presence that often denotes sacrifice. More often than not, Fasih's characters die in order to save the lives of others.<sup>92</sup>

In this piece, Fasih shows the impact of the Iran-Iraq War on the civilians of Abadan, particularly the working class. Ahmad is described as a working class native of Abadan. In the course of the story, it is revealed that Ahmad's father had a little kiosk in the city, which was bombarded on the third day of the war. As a result, Ahmad's father was killed. Ahmad's mother worked in vegetable market. In describing Ahmad and his family, Fasih labels the working classes as the most vulnerable social class during the Iran-Iraq War. He also highlights the extent to which this social class was affected by the war. Not only did they have difficulties in providing for their daily needs (due to the economic recession caused by the war), but they were also among the first groups to join the army.

#### *A Letter to the World*

*A Letter to the World* (*Nāme 'i be Donyā*, 2000) explores the devastating impacts of the Iran-Iraq War on Iranians' lives. The story takes place during the winter of 1987, which coincides with the seventh year of the war.

A young American college professor, Angela Gosinsky comes to Iran at the height of the Iran-Iraq War. She intends to find her son, Mehdi, who was lost when Angela left Iran after the death of her Iranian husband during the post-revolutionary turmoil. In order to find her son, Angela asks Jalāl Āriyān for help. They both travel to Ahvaz where they come to know that in one of the city's bombardments during the war, Mehdi has been killed. After hearing this, Angela attempts suicide, but Āriyān rescues her. Eventually, Angela is killed whilst rescuing a child.

Motherly love, which is one of the perpetual themes in Fasih's previous novel, reaches its zenith in *A Letter to the World*. The ultimate message of this tragic novel is Angela's "life-long search and plea for love and understanding between human beings [...]."<sup>93</sup> By coming to Iran at the peak of the war and observing the upheaval of the country Angela desires peace

<sup>91</sup> Seyed-Gohrab, "Martyrdom as Piety," 251.

<sup>92</sup> Shishegarān, *Mo'arrefi-ye Towsifi*, 132.

<sup>93</sup> Fasih, *Nāme 'i be Donyā* (Maryland: Iran-Books, 1995).

and alliance between the two warring nations. In this regard, she aims to announce the nobility of martyrdom and the innocence of the Iranian masses during this war in the form of a letter to the world. However, akin to Emily Dickinson's (1830-1886) letter, Angela never receives a reply: "This is my letter to the world that never wrote to me."

Structurally, *A Letter to the World* could be studied from several perspectives: firstly, the story begins with the description of Angela's death, which occurs at the end of the narrative. As Fasih claims, the novel starts with death and reaches love.<sup>94</sup> Secondly, throughout the novel, the flashbacks of Jalāl Āriyān's life in America as well as his love story with Angela provide the reader with precious information regarding Iranian history and culture. Moreover, in these flashbacks, which are abundant, pre- and post-revolutionary Iran are depicted. Finally, contrary to many of Fasih's novels in which the narrator entertains himself by reading a Western novel, in *A Letter to the World*, Āriyān reads 'Love: the Report of a Life' (*eshq: kār-nāme-ye yek zendegi*), an autobiography of an invalid young Iranian girl, Soghrā, who deeply respects martyrdom.

It is also interesting to notice that there are a number of similarities between Fasih's two war novels, *A Letter of the World* and *Killed for Love*. Apart from war, which is the common theme in both, the characters of the two novels are comparable. For example, the characters of Angela and Ra'nā both sacrifice their lives to rescue a child, and the characters of Ahmad and Soghrā both belong to the working class and desire to be killed in battle.

#### *Post-Revolutionary Novels with Various Themes*

Apart from Fasih's novels, which mainly deal with the Iran-Iraq War and its devastating nature, many of Fasih's post-revolutionary novels address various other themes ranging from romance to the ancient and mediaeval history of Iran. In these works, Fasih addresses many issues including love, tribal prejudice and kinship, the quest for wisdom, the neglect of officials of art and the artist, and the Iranian Revolution and various outlooks on this event.

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<sup>94</sup> N. Zehni, "Esmā'il Fasih va Jabr-e Neveshtan: Gelāye-ye Hemingway az Ruz-hā-ye Sakht-e Vāpasin be Nevisande-ye Irāni," *E'temād*, Khordād 18, 1384/June 8, 2005.

*Foruhar's Escape*

Fasih's interest in Zoroaster's teachings and principles reaches its climax in *Foruhar's Escape* (*Farār-e Foruhar*, 1993). Similar to Fasih's pre-revolutionary works, such as *The Story of Jāvid* and *The Pain of Siyāvash*, this novel revolves around the disappearance of an idealistic man influenced by Zoroaster's teachings. In this novel, the protagonist, Ja'far Foruhar, recounts his life in a chronological order, from the advent of Zoroaster to contemporary Iran. According to many Persian critics, such as Dastgheyb, since this book contains plenty of historical indications, it is more like a history book or even a biography than a novel. Dastgheyb goes on to refuse to call *Foruhar's Escape* a novel by stating that this book is a form of biography, which Fasih tries to shape into a novel by adding the tale of Āriyān's life.<sup>95</sup> Despite this, on June 5, 1995, Fasih was commended for *Foruhar's Escape*, which was regarded to be the best novel of the year.<sup>96</sup>

Ja'far Foruhar, a retired professor and writer of historical and sociological books, escapes from a sanatorium in Tehran. During the Pahlavi regime, he receives an award for one of his books, which is banned after the Revolution. Due to the discontinuation of his book and the disappearance of his son during the Iran-Iraq War, Foruhar becomes depressed. In searching for Foruhar, Jalāl Āriyān reads Foruhar's notes, which Foruhar calls an 'accurate autobiography.' In his notes, Foruhar describes himself as 'Khartok,' the son of corundum, whose birth coincided with Zoroaster's. He is an observer of the advent and expansion of Iranian culture throughout history as well as an arbiter of Zoroaster's ideal approach and doctrines. Khortak witnesses major European movements, including the Industrial Revolution. He also meets numerous Persian and non-Persian poets and intellectuals such as Ferdowsi, Hāfez, Sa'di of Shiraz (d. 1291), Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare. The life of Khartok proceeds in this way until he reaches the current time, during which he is in a coma in a hospital in London. At the end of Foruhar's notes, Āriyān learns about Foruhar's journey to Yazd, one of the Zoroastrians' major centers in Iran. As a result, Āriyān travels to Yazd, where he receives a letter from Foruhar informing him of his trip to Balkh, an ancient city and the center of Zoroastrianism in northern Afghanistan. Before going back to Tehran, Āriyān visits the Zoroastrian's Tower of Silence in Yazd, where he encounters the warm ashes of

<sup>95</sup> Dastgheyb, "Kālbod-shekāfi-ye Romān-e Fārsi: Nākāmi-hā-ye Esmā'il Fasih dar Farār-e Foruhar," *Gozāresh* 78 (1376/1997): 60-65.

<sup>96</sup> A. Ma'rufi, "Esmā'il Fasih va Yādgar-hā-ye Naft," *Rādio Zamāne*, last updated Tir 29, 1388/July 20, 2009, [http://zamaaneh.com/maroufi/2009/07/post\\_203.html](http://zamaaneh.com/maroufi/2009/07/post_203.html) (accessed August 14, 2014). For an extensive discussion regarding this novel, see Badi', *Asl-e Āsār*, 217-46; Dastgheyb, "Farār-e Foruhar," *Chistā* 120 (1374/1995): 852-67; Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli (6)," 126-34.

Foruhar's corpse as well as his ring, on which the image of 'Far-va-har' was printed. Next to the ashes, there is a note from Foruhar in which he confesses his suicide and requests Āriyān to leave his ashes in the Tower of Silence forever.

*Foruhar's Escape* can, at times, be a difficult read due to the inaccessibility of Foruhar's writings, which are derived from his disheveled mind. As Omidi-Sarvar claims, if Fasih had shortened the novel by removing Foruhar's notes, this would have become one of the most outstanding Persian novels in the contemporary era.<sup>97</sup> Ābedini disagrees with this and asserts that Foruhar's notes, which are read by the narrator, are informative as they tour and guide the reader through the history of Iran from ancient to contemporary times. Ābedini goes on to say that actually it is those parts in the novel, in which Āriyān tries to locate Foruhar through communication with people are boring and tedious.<sup>98</sup> As far as the main protagonist of the novel is concerned, Ali Ferdowsi writes:

He is 55 years of age, born in the same year as Jalal Arian and Esmā'il Fasih, but in his temporal annihilation in the history of his nation, he believes himself to have been born at the time when the 55 years old Zoroaster revealed his divine mission during the reign of king Goštāb. His life parallels the glories and the pains of his nation's destiny in what is aptly described by a critic as the 'explosion of the life of an individual into the totality of his nation's history.'<sup>99</sup>

The external layer of the story outlines the disturbance and self-alienation of the protagonist, whilst Foruhar's paranoia and delirium constitute its internal layer. The layers move parallel to each other until Ayatollah Khomeini's death brings them to intersect.<sup>100</sup>

The hybrid name (Shi'ā/Zoroastrian) of the protagonist, Ja'far Foruhar is significant. His name, Ja'far, refers to the sixth Shi'ā Imam, and indicates his commitment to Islam. Alternatively, Foruhar (pronounced 'Fara-vahar' by Zoroastrians) is one of the primary Zoroastrian symbols and is believed to be the depiction of a *Fravashi* (guardian spirit).

<sup>97</sup> Omidi-Sarvar, "Dariche'i be Su-ye Adabiyāt-e Jeddi: Be Monāsebat-e Dargozasht-e Esmā'il Fasih," *Panjare* 7, Mordād 4, 1388/July 26, 2009, 88.

<sup>98</sup> Ābedini, "Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni dar Sāl-e 1374 (bakhsh-e sevvom)," *Kelk* 85-88 (1376/1997): 181.

<sup>99</sup> Ferdowsi, "Fasih, Esmā'il."

<sup>100</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli (6)," 128.

*Asylum to Hāfez*

The story *Asylum to Hāfez* (*Panāh bar Hāfez*, 1996) takes place during the life of Hāfez, a Persian poet of the fourteenth century. As mentioned in the first page of the novel, *Asylum to Hāfez* is considered to be an autobiography of the protagonist, who recounts the events of his life. In this novel, Fasih focuses on several themes, such as “the death of love, constraint of time and space, shortcomings and suffering from observation of evilness abomination.”<sup>101</sup>

The main protagonist, Khodādād Zarrin-Negār, is a celebrated calligrapher in the court of the Mozaffarids.<sup>102</sup> Due to some rumors spread by some of the courtiers, one of the Mozaffarid princes banishes Zarrin-Negār to Abarkuh, a small town in present Yazd, Iran. During this exile, Zarrin-Negār writes parodies of twenty-three of Hāfez’s lyrics for his mental tranquility. By the assault of Teymur (in power 1370-1405), the founder of the Timurid Dynasty (r. 1369-1450), Zarrin-Negār’s dwelling and properties in Abarkuh get destroyed and plundered. His respect and passion for Hāfez compels him to go to Shiraz and take refuge in the poet’s house, because the city is not yet under the Timurid’s invasion. As a ragamuffin man, Zarrin-Negār enters Shiraz, where he learns about Hāfez’s trip to India. Meanwhile, because Hāfez’s journey is cancelled, he returns to Shiraz. After thirty years of waiting, eventually Zarrin-Negār meets Hāfez and shows him the parodies. Hāfez is impressed by them and gives the calligrapher one of his recent poems to write a parody of. Zarrin-Negār accomplishes the task in a short amount of time and dies while reading one of Hāfez’s lyrics.

This novel recounts the history of medieval Iran, focusing mainly on the Timurid period. In 1387, in the path of marching against Shiraz, Teymur entered Isfahan, where he massacred the people. 70,000 dead were counted and afterwards built up into minarets.<sup>103</sup> Fasih is particularly keen to condemn the brutal deeds of Teymur, who brought huge casualties to Persia.

Moreover, the writer criticizes the negligence of the princes to art and artists in medieval Iran. Although, throughout Iranian history, there was a close relationship between

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>102</sup> After the fall of Ilkhānid Empire in 1335, Iran was under the rule of various rival petty political forces. Among them, Mozaffarids ruled in Kerman and Yazd until 1397. In 1353, Amir Mobārez al-Din, the Mozaffarid prince, conquered the Injud former territory, Shiraz. His eldest son, Shah Shojā‘ ruled in Shiraz twice in 1358-1363 and in 1366-1384, and was prepared to be much more supportive of the arts and poetry than his father. For a comprehensive study of Mozaffarid princes and their ruling periods, see H.R. Roemer, “The Jalayirids, Muzaffarids, and Sarbadārs,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran: The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, ed. P. Jackson, Vol. 6 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), 1-40.

<sup>103</sup> Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 188.

the court and artists (e.g., poet, painter, and calligrapher), the court was often a center of scheming for a multifarious array of artists and courtier groups against one another. When someone gained a good position in the court, others would plot to bring him down until he met his death. *Asylum to Hāfez* shows that in mediaeval Iran, calligraphy was a hallmark of Persian art that was mainly at the service of the court and the prince. This art was used in the Mozaffarid court to record Quran and Persian literary masterpieces such as *Shāh-nāme* and Jalāl al-Din Mohammad Rumi's (d. 1273) *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi* ('Rhyming Couplets of Spiritual Meaning'), as well as many other important documents. Therefore, many artists, including the novel's protagonist, did not have freedom of expression and were forced to produce work in order to satisfy the prince, rather than to express their own feelings and ideas.

The title of the novel, *Asylum to Hāfez*, encompasses the message of the story: Hāfez and his poems are the best shelter for one whose life is full of hardships. During his exile, the novel's protagonist writes parodies of Hāfez's lyrics in order to calm himself mentally. Not only does the protagonist acquire this tranquility through Hāfez's lyrics, but he also considers the poet's dwelling as the safest place in which to live during Teymur's onslaught.

As this novel is distinct from Fasih's other works in terms of theme and setting, *Asylum to Hāfez* embodies a number of special characteristics. Firstly, the language that is used in the dialogues is not comparable to the temporal placement of the novel. For instance, the inclusion of modern Persian phrases and sentences do not succeed in immersing the reader in the medieval era. Fasih could have been more precise about this narrative element in his work. In the second place, each of the characters is addressed by his own epithet, such as *khāje* (esquire), *ostād* (teacher), *mirzā* (clerk), and dervish rather than their names, which is reminiscent of the naming system of intellectuals in medieval Iran. Thirdly, many pages of the novel are devoted to parodies of Hāfez's twenty-four lyrics, which make the novel look a bit like an anthology of Persian poems. Finally, this novel mostly revolves around the male characters, and female characters are not seen throughout the story.

### *Tray of Blood*

*Tray of Blood* (*Tasht-e Khun*, 1997) is a short novel in which the reign of Nāser al-Din Shah is the focus. Neglect towards art and the artist, as one of Fasih's major and continuing

concerns, constitutes the main theme of the novel. In *Tray of Blood*, Fasih criticizes the Qājār rulers for not supporting the artists, who are the originators of Iranian culture.

In *Tray of Blood*, Malek-Tāj describes the day when her artist brother, Kamāl, committed suicide in the basement of his house because one of the Qājār agents destroyed his paintings, on the basis that they contained ‘anti-Islamic’ themes. Kamāl’s father, Bahrām Zarrin-Negār, who is also a well-known painter, cannot accept the demise of his son, and so is not willing to attend his funeral. Instead, he goes to the basement, where he stares at a tray of his son’s blood for hours. None of his friends and family members can convince him to leave the basement. Eventually, he drinks Kamāl’s blood in order to internalize the eternity of his son and his art.

The story takes place within three hours during which the father is in the basement and his family members, relatives, and friends, one by one come to convince him to attend Kamāl’s funeral ceremony. From a narratological perspective, the element of suspense cannot be seen in this novel, because at the beginning of the story, the narrator reveals what will happen at the end. *Tray of Blood* is the only one of Fasih’s novel in which a female, Malek-Tāj, narrates the story.

Fasih, moreover, dramatizes the brutality and wickedness of the reigning Qājārians, particularly Nāser al-Din Shah, who, despite being interested in art, mistreated artists and their endeavors. Indeed, the author criticizes the state in which the ruler is a patron of the arts, and in which an artist has to kill himself due to the neglect of his art by the state. Furthermore, Fasih chooses Kamāl as a name of his protagonist in order to compare him with the well-known painter of Nāser al-Din Shah’s court, Kamāl al-Molk (1848-1940), whose paintings were portraits of important people, landscapes, royal camps, and hunting grounds. Due to close interaction between Iran and the West during Nāser al-Din Shah’s reign, Kamāl al-Molk mainly produced portraits based on the European academic style, which impressed the prince.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, Fasih indicates that during Nāser al-Din Shah’s time, the subjects of paintings were more important than their beauty. By choosing an appropriate subject matter for his paintings, a painter could elevate his position in the court as well as in society. Since the protagonist often pictures his internal feelings and love through the image of a beautiful half-naked Persian girl, whose hair, face, and neck are shown, they are rejected by the rulers of the time, whilst his father’s paintings, which were mostly religious and contain images of

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<sup>104</sup> For a detailed study regarding the art of painting during the reign of Nāser al-Din Shah, see J. Raby, *Qajar Portraits* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 56-130; L.S. Diba and M. Ekhtiar, (eds.), *Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch (1785-1925)* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 238-66.

the Shiite saints, are admired by the prince. In the story, the paintings of the main protagonist are prohibited, because for the Qājār princes, paintings of half-naked women conflict with their religious beliefs. Fasih concludes that the protagonist's paintings, which are derived from his inner feelings and contain an 'anti-Islamic' tenor, could not impress the Qājār court, and therefore, the artist received brutal treatment by the state.

### *Return to Darkhungāh*

Contrary to those of Fasih's novels hitherto mentioned, *Return to Darkhungāh* (*Bāzgasht be Darkhungāh*, 1998) takes the reader to contemporary Iran. Fasih addresses the same topic of returning to his childhood and the memories of Darkhungāh, his birthplace. He compares the vicinities of Darkhungāh before and after the Iranian Revolution in order to show the changes of conviction and customary law. Similar to the vast majority of Fasih's works, Jalāl Āriyān involves himself in one of his friend's lives in order to assist them.

The novel recounts the love story of Khosrow Irānfar, the son of Shāpur (one of the well-known professors in Iran), and Shahnāz, the daughter of Ali Āriyān. Khosrow and Shahnāz intend to get married, but due to Shāpur's animosity towards Ali, Jalāl Āriyān's stepbrother, they cannot marry. Ali Āriyān hopes to send Khosrow and Shahnāz to Canada after their marriage, to start their new life void of tension. Khosrow, who sees himself as the only hope for the protection of his family, refuses to leave Iran. Eventually Khosrow commits suicide in order to pave the way for Shahnāz to go abroad.

The concept 'killed for love' lies at the heart of this tragic novel, a theme also dramatically depicted in some of Fasih's other works. Fasih outlines a mystical framework for this book, using a number of Rumi's poems to this end. In the novel, a major transformation in the realm of divination (*fāl*) can be seen. Fasih focuses on divination from the *divān* ('collection of poems') of Rumi, which was out of the norm. It should be taken into account that for centuries, it has been the Persian tradition to consult Hāfez when confronted with a difficult decision or choice. It is widely believed that Hāfez's poetry will reveal the answer to your destiny.<sup>105</sup> The prospect of taking divination from the *divān* of Rumi rather than Hāfez is an innovative aspect of this novel.

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<sup>105</sup> The question of divination from the *divān* of Hāfez will be extensively discussed in chapter four.

Although the main story does not revolve around Jalāl Āriyān, he appears as the storyteller. Concurrently, Āriyān reads Franz Kafka's novella, *The Metamorphosis*, in which the protagonist morphs into an insect and is eventually killed. Fasih likens Khosrow's life to that of Kafka's protagonist, as they meet identical ends and share a common destiny. According to the narrator, time is the most precious device in the hand of a young man. He believes that the past has gone and the future is not yet come. Therefore, a man should take advantage of his present.

### *The Tragicomedy of Pars*

In *The Tragicomedy of Pars (Terāzhedi-Komedi-ye Pārs, 1998)*, which also takes place in contemporary Iran, Fasih weaves a tale of motherly love, revolving around Leylā Sāle, a woman who has lost her son. The story begins when Leylā travels from Ahvaz to Tehran in order to find her son. Because she has lost her memory, the only word that she repeats is 'Āriyān' or 'Aryan.' Leylā's doctor, who is Jalāl Āriyān's good friend, believes that he is the best person to help her, because his surname is similar to what the young woman repeats. When Āriyān meets Leylā, he instantly recognizes his student from Ahvaz. He is then able to help her in remembering her past. Jalāl comes to know that 'Āriyān' is also the name of Leylā's son, who was kidnaped by his Arab grandfather on the night that he was born. In order to recover the child legally, Jalāl marries Leylā. In the course of finding a way to release Leylā's son from his grandfather, they are informed that Leylā's son has fallen down the stairs and died. This event, which is unbearable for Leylā, leads her to commit suicide.

*The Tragicomedy of Pars* elaborates on the Iranian collective past and the dim, brutal world associated with it, as described in *Foruhar's Escape*. In the novel, Fasih further draws the reader's attention to the major themes of kinship, animosity, and prejudice, as well as friction between Arabs and Persians in Iran. He describes Arabs as an uncivilized and barbarian nation and criticizes the Arabs for returning to their pre-Islamic behaviors and an age of ignorance, during which murdering was the major occupation of Arabs.

Moreover, Fasih pays extensive attention to Persian mythical characters in order to reveal the effects of filicide and chastity on Iranian youths.<sup>106</sup> In order to revere Iranian culture on the one hand and deplore Arabic barbarism and brutality on the other, Fasih uses

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<sup>106</sup> Bozorg-Bigdeli and A. Qāsemzāde, "Omdetarin Jariyān-hā-ye Romān-nevisi-ye Mo'āser dar En'ekās-e Revāyat-hā-ye Osture'i," *Fasl-nāme-ye Takhassosi-ye Peyk-e Nur* 1 (1389/2010), 69.

the names of *Shāh-nāme*'s characters. In this regard, the antagonists are often Arabs, while the protagonists are Iranians and identical to the *Shāh-nāme*'s heroes.<sup>107</sup> In terms of the pace and characterizations of the novel, as well as the allegorical language and usage of the names of *Shāh-nāme*'s heroes, this work is comparable to Fasih's previous novels, such as *The Pain of Siyāvash*.

### *Tulip Glowing*

*Tulip Glowing* is Fasih's first novel written after the Islamic Revolution in which he describes the history of pre-revolutionary Iran from 1971 to 1979. In this novel Fasih opposes the bourgeoisie in favor of the proletariat, particularly the latter's role in the revolutionaries' triumph. As an inevitable theme in Fasih's works, love again appears in the form of a tormented romantic relationship between Nāser and Mitrā, two people from different social classes.

Nāser Nabavi, the youngest son of a poor family in Darkhungāh, meets a bourgeois girl, Mitrā, whose family support the Pahlavi regime. Mitrā falls in love with Nāser. She attempts to help him and his family, who are suffering under the Pahlavi regime due to their anti-Pahlavi activities. Despite a huge ideological and social class difference between Nāser and Mitrā, they get married. Gradually, Mitrā changes her religious and political ideologies and becomes an advocate of the Islamic Revolution. In the last few months before the victory of the Revolution, Nāser and Mitrā take part in almost every protest and street demonstration against the Pahlavi regime. Meanwhile, Mitrā comes to discover that she is the daughter of Nasiri, the head of the SAVAK. She is willing to take revenge on her father. During one of the street riots, Mitrā is wounded and goes into a coma. In order to fulfil Mitrā's wish, Nāser kills Nasiri.

*Tulip Glowing* is remarkably similar to Fasih's *Captive of Time*. Both novels focus on the younger generation's desire for justice and peace. The discontent of this generation, brought on by the country's political and social upheavals in the 1970s, are the main theme in both novels. The characters are also comparable. For instance, the characters of Mitrā, Nāser, and Ali Veysi all stand against the Pahlavi's brutal deeds. They participate in street riots and demonstrations in order to support Ayatollah Khomeini to create an Islamic government. On

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<sup>107</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli (6)," 139.

the other hand, the antagonist Nasiri in *Tulip Glowing* reminds us of the character of Nafisi in *Captive of Time*, as both are described as puppets of the Pahlavi regime and the SAVAK.<sup>108</sup>

After reading *Tulip Glowing*, one might consider the narrative, in which a bourgeoisie girl stands up against her own family and abandons everything in the path of her poor beloved, to be clichéd. A contemporary Persian reader especially might think this since this theme has become commonplace in Persian fictional works. However, it should be noted that Fasih wrote this novel immediately after the Revolution, during which it was an innovative subject matter, about which few others had written. Fasih's novel was published almost two decades later in Iran, which led it to be regarded as a cliché narrative about the Revolution.

Although *Tulip Glowing* mainly highlights the events of pre-revolutionary turmoil, the concept of Zoroastrianism, which is highly tied up with Fasih's novels, is revealed through the name of Mitrā. The common noun Mitrā has several connotations such as 'covenant,' 'agreement,' 'treaty,' 'alliance,' and 'promise,' but it is also the name of the god of worship in Zoroastrianism. Mitrā is also closely associated with the sun.<sup>109</sup> As the character of the novel, Mitrā keeps her promise to Nāser. She is like a sun who brings happiness and hope to Nāser's life.

### *In Waiting*

Fasih discusses love and the anticipation of death in yet another tragic post-revolutionary novel, *In Waiting* (*Dar Entezār*, 2000). From his perspective, love and death are highly connected to each other insofar as death is the next reward in life if one cannot obtain love.

In pre-revolutionary Iran, Mas'ud Eqbāl is the head officer of the navy in Abadan. Following his retirement in the post-revolutionary era, his wife leaves him. Mas'ud, therefore, becomes a lonely and aimless man prone to drinking and smoking. Meanwhile he becomes acquainted with a poet, Simā Farahbakhsh, who often sends her new poems to him. Gradually, they fall in love, but due to some obstacles, it is not possible for them to get married. Simā dies in a car accident and this leads Mas'ud to commit suicide, because he is no longer able to be with his beloved.

<sup>108</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli (3)," 78-80.

<sup>109</sup> H.P. Schmidt, "Mithra i. Mithra in Old Indian and Mithra in Old Iranian," *Elr*, online edition, last updated August 15, 2006, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mithra-i> (accessed March 16, 2014). Also see Boyce, "On Mithra's Part in Zoroastrianism," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 32 (1969): 10-34.

In *In Waiting* readers encounter a limited number of characters. Although Jalāl Āriyān again appears as the narrator of the story, his role in this novel is not substantial. Contrary to Fasih's other novels, in which Āriyān assists the other characters in coping with their troubled lives, in this novel Āriyān keeps his distance from the personal struggles of the protagonist, Mas'ud Eqbāl. For instance, the narrator does not take any steps to convince Mas'ud's wife to return home, or to talk to Simā in order to eliminate the challenges facing their marriage.

Once again, the novel contains numerous poems by Persian poets such as Hāfez, Rumi, and Omar Khayyām (d. 1131), as well as poems by unknown composers. Consequently, the novel includes a collection of poems in which love, death, and waiting constitute the prominent subject matters. In doing so, perhaps Fasih intends to highlight his skill in recalling a wide range of important poems; otherwise referring to such a large number of poems in one novel is questionable.

Particularly in this novel, Fasih highlights the power of fate or 'eqbāl' in human life. As he says, "everyone has a destiny, but as far as good fortune goes, some people have it, whilst others do not; some of those who have it do not want it, whilst yet others suffer from a lack of good fortune and try to recover it by any means."<sup>110</sup> In this regard, by choosing 'Eqbāl' as the protagonist's surname, Fasih highlights the importance of fate in human life. Since Mas'ud was an ill-fated man, the name is a paradox. In order to show the unluckiness of the protagonist, Fasih refers to Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, which also recounts the misfortunes of an old man.

In addition, the sea is one of the significant elements in this novel. Firstly, to address the protagonist Mas'ud Eqbāl, Āriyān uses the term 'daryā sālār' (lit., 'the captain of the sea') because of Eqbāl's position in the navy. In the second place, based on the French idiom "la Mere est Notre Mere" ("the sea is our mother"), Mas'ud believes that all human beings must return to their mother, which is the sea.<sup>111</sup> Consequently, by throwing himself in the Arvand River in Abadan, Mas'ud puts an end to his life and reaches his 'mother.'

### *A Whirlpool so Horrific*

*A Whirlpool so Horrific* (*Gerdābi Chonin Hā'el*, 2002) is a short novel, which also takes place during contemporary Iran. Despite this, it gives an extensive overview of a number of

<sup>110</sup> Fasih, *Dar Entezār*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Tehran: Peykān, 1389/2010), 44.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Iranian modern historical events such as the discovery of oil in 1908 and the establishing of Abadan's Oil Refinery. Like many of Fasih's works, this novel also attacks Arabs and their brutal customs and traditions, highlighting cruelty and malice as Arabs' most prominent attributes.

Jalāl Āriyān meets one of his students, Khodādād Bahrāmi, an Arab-Iranian boy who was poisoned during the Iran-Iraq War when Iraq used chemical weapons against Iranian civilians. After the death of his beloved in a car accident in Ahvaz, Bahrāmi relocates to Tehran with his ill-tempered father who makes Khodādād's life miserable. The father is not ready to go into a home for the elderly. Due to a fight between the two, Khodādād is injured. Āriyān takes him to the hospital where he goes into a short-term coma. Meanwhile, Khodādād requests Āriyān to sell his house as well as to take his father to an old people's home. When Āriyān assures Khodādād that he will fulfill his wishes, Khodādād commits suicide. In his suicide note, he reveals that he has killed himself in order to be in Paradise where his beloved awaits.

*A Whirlpool so Horrific* concerns the unhappy end of a young Iranian boy's love. Khodādād is the representative of the Iranian young generation, who fail to fight their destinies and to have a good life, due to social determinism.

Moreover, the novel takes its title from a renowned couplet found in Hāfez's first lyric, which says:

*Shab-e tārik o bim-e mowj o gerdābi chonin hā'el*  
*Kojā dānand hāl-e mā sabokbārān-e sāhel-hā*<sup>112</sup>

Dark night, the waves' terror, so dreadful a whirlpool,  
 How might the lightly-burdened on the shore know our condition?<sup>113</sup>

The title is a further metaphor for the protagonist's catastrophic life, which eventually leads him towards the whirlpool of death.

### *Love and Death*

<sup>112</sup> Hāfez, *Divān*, Vol. 1, 18, ghazal 1:5.

<sup>113</sup> The translation is taken from Avery, *The Collected Lyrics*, 18.

In contrast with Fasih's other novels, which are set in Iran, *Love and Death (Eshq o Marg, 2004)* presents the story of Jalāl Āriyān's life in America, his marriage to Annabel, and her death. It is said that this novel is based on Fasih's real life, a speculation to which the writer gives credence.<sup>114</sup> In this regard, it is similar to an autobiography, in which the theme of love reaches its zenith and flows through most of the narrative.

Jalāl Āriyān is a young chemistry student at Minnesota University. Thanks to his professor, Almer Fareham, Āriyān gets a part-time job at the laboratory at the university. Fareham and his wife treat Āriyān as their own son, because they never had a child. Āriyān falls in love with Francis, his classmate. However, after a short time, they break up due to Fareham's advice "if you love her, do not marry her." After finding a job in San Francisco, Āriyān moves there and starts working for a chemical company. Meanwhile, he falls in love with a Norwegian girl, Annabel. After getting married, they relocate to Washington, where Annabel dies during childbirth. Eventually, after this tragedy, Āriyān returns to Iran.

Apart from love and death, which are described as two integral elements in human life, what are most deserving of our attention in this novel are the indications of Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam which are present in the story. Fasih presents the principles of each religion and their influence on Āriyān's life. For instance, the novel stresses good thoughts, good words, and good deeds, which are the three pillars of Zoroastrianism. At the same time, Fasih discusses the Christians' custom of going enthusiastically to church every Sunday. Moreover, the major events of the story (i.e., the protagonist's first love) take place during the Christmas of each year (from 1956-1960) to illustrate the writer's reverence of this particular holiday. From an Islamic perspective, Āriyān as a Muslim does not believe in having a sexual relationship with Annabel before marriage (because in Islam pre-marital sex is considered to be a sin), so he suggests that they read a marriage discourse.<sup>115</sup>

### *Bitter Desire*

*Bitter Desire (Talkh Kām, 2007)* is Fasih's last published novel. In it, we encounter Jāvid, the young protagonist of *The Story of Jāvid*, as a ninety-one-year-old man who has been admitted

<sup>114</sup> Kamāli-Dehqān, "Goft o Gu."

<sup>115</sup> M. Maleki, "Negāhi be Ketāb-e Eshq o Marg, Ākharin Asar-e Esmā'il Fasih: Gāf-e Āghā-ye Esmā'il Fasih," *Sedā-ye Edālat*, Mordād 4, 1383/July 25, 2004, 12.

to a sanatorium in London. Fasih perhaps decides to finish his career as a writer with this novel in order to convey his compassion towards the Zoroastrian boy of *The Story of Jāvid*.

Jalāl Āriyān is asked to go to London in the first year after the Iranian Revolution to purchase computer equipment for the college language laboratory in Abadan. In London, he learns about a retired Iranian professor, Jāvid Firuzpur, who has been admitted to a sanatorium. In the sanatorium, the professor is busy continuously reciting long episodes of prayer in the Avestan language, which nobody understands. When Āriyān and Jāvid meet each other, they talk about ancient Iran and the history of Zoroastrianism. Before leaving London, Āriyān goes to *see* Jāvid again, but the professor has gone into a coma.

As Lādan Niknām, the contemporary Iranian literary critic, has said, this novel constitutes an extensive overview of Zoroastrianism and its principles. Jāvid as the symbol of a tortured Zoroastrian boy strongly clings to Zoroaster's teachings. He never abandons his beliefs under any circumstances. Although exposing the mental state of Jāvid and discussing Zoroastrianism are the main goals of the writer in *Bitter Desire*, only a small segment of the story is devoted to this matter. The novel mostly focuses on Āriyān's sightseeing in London and his several meetings with Shokuh Yazdāni. Āriyān only meets Jāvid once, through which he becomes familiar with his approaches to the Zoroastrian faith. In this regard, the critic Niknām has asserted that if Fasih had increased the number of meetings between his narrator and Jāvid, the novel would transmit his message better to the audience.<sup>116</sup>

#### *Pre-Revolutionary Collections of Short Stories*

In addition to novels, Fasih wrote and published five collections of short stories before the Revolution. Many stories in these collections are overlapping and repetitious. Fasih's debut short story was *Auntie Turi*, which he wrote as a student of English Literature in Montana. Although it was in English, the Persian version of this story was published later in his first collection of short stories, *Khāk-e Āshenā* ('Familiar Soil,' 1970). As Fasih's second literary work (after *Raw Wine*), *Familiar Soil* recounts the tale of Arbāb Hasan's family in four interrelated sections. It begins with the story of *Ādam-hā-ye Pir* ('Old People'), introducing Arbāb Hasan, who comes to Tehran in the final year of Nāser al-Din Shah's reign in 1891 and

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<sup>116</sup> Niknām, "Dāyere-ye Baste-ye Zamān: Naqdi bar Romān-e Talkh Kām," *Sharq*, Mordād 14, 1386/August 5, 2007, 16, <http://www.javanemrooz.com/articles/print.aspx?id=24878> (accessed January 18, 2013).

marries Kowkab. The succeeding stories mainly revolve around Arbāb Hasan's children, particularly those from his second wife, Puri. Not only do these stories describe the life of each child (Esmā'il, Jalāl, Farangis, and Yusef) throughout the years, but they also provide a comprehensive picture of Darkhungāh. The stories in *Familiar Soil* are somewhat elaborated in Fasih's subsequent novels. For instance, *Blind in Heart*, which was published two years after this collection, narrates the story of Arbāb Hasan's family in detail. Regarding the stories in the collection *Familiar Soil*, Omid-Sarvar claims that they are akin to the unformed and scattered pieces of a novel, which, due to their identical characters and themes, should not be straightforwardly regarded as separate short stories. He goes on to say that this collection indicates Fasih's lack of experience and skill in writing short stories.<sup>117</sup> By contrast, after reading the collection, Chubak acclaims Fasih for the stories, most of which contain vivid pictures of Darkhungāh.<sup>118</sup>

The second collection of Fasih's short stories to be published in pre-revolutionary Iran was *Tavallod, Eshq, Aqd, Marg* ('Birth, Love, Wedding, Death,' 1972).<sup>119</sup> The first edition of the book contains four short stories, while in the second edition of 1978 (published by Amir-Kabir) Fasih added four other stories entitled *Shahrak* ('Town'), *Khāb* ('Dream'), *Harekat* ('Movement'), and *Kharābāt* ('Tavern'). For this reason, the title of the second edition was changed into *Aqd va Dāstān-hā-ye Digar* ('Wedding and other Stories'), and contained eight stories in total. The collection begins with birth and ends with death, and emphasizes the brevity of human life. Furthermore, the stories in this collection do not revolve around Jalāl Āriyān and his family. The order of the stories in this collection is presented in the following manner:

*Birth*, the opening story in the collection, relates the tale of a woman who gives birth to a baby. After several miscarriages, and also losing her seven-month-old son, the woman hopes that this baby will stay alive and bring happiness to her life. However, she never gets a chance to see her baby to discover whether it lives or not. In the next story, *Love*, Leylā, a six-year-old girl talks about angels' love. When she turns eleven, she is forced to marry a man who is much older than her. Due to her petite body, Leylā dies whilst having sex on her wedding night. The following story, *Town*, focuses on a Persian literature teacher who is asked to go to an industrial town to teach in a school. Upon arrival, he encounters problems finding a place to stay. People and workers in the town make fun of the teacher and his task.

<sup>117</sup> Omid-Sarvar, "Dariche'i be Su-ye Adabiyāt," 89.

<sup>118</sup> Fasih, "Goft o Gu," 212.

<sup>119</sup> "Shab-e Esmā'il Fasih."

They believe that literature is not useful nowadays and that people should worry about other, more important things. In this story, the writer expresses his concern and anxiety regarding the neglect of people to literature. In another story in the same collection, titled *Wedding*, a couple is invited to a wedding ceremony. On entering the ceremony, the man realizes he does not know anyone there—he does not even know whose wedding it is. As a result, he stands in a corner, where many people come and talk to him. Eventually, he meets one of his ex-lovers, Parvāne. After having a conversation with her, the man remembers that Parvāne had actually died few years ago. Parvāne tells him that she appears wherever a wedding ceremony is held. For this reason, the same night, Parvāne attends another wedding, taking the man with her.

The rest of the stories in this collection mainly focus on the life of the same protagonist. Since the protagonist suffers from a mental disorder and has a disturbed mind, many of his thoughts and statements are incomprehensible. For instance, in the story *Dream*, the protagonist dreams several times that he is sentenced to death for killing someone. When he wakes up, he realizes that there is no punishment and death, and that he can still live. In the next story, *Movement*, the protagonist plans to take a year's leave from his work in order to travel across Iran and visit Iranian heritage sites. The story of *Movement* is indeed a travelogue, which familiarizes the reader with Iranian heritage and culture. The protagonist, who is identical to the character of Foruhar in *Foruhar's Escape*, is a follower of Zoroaster. As viewed by Ali Ferdowsi, *Movement* and *Foruhar's Escape* are identical, because both display the “‘mystical’ annihilation of the protagonist into the totality of his nation, its land and history [...]”<sup>120</sup> Similarly, in the story *Tavern*, the protagonist decides to leave his family and travel somewhere far from everyone. Meanwhile, he is admitted to hospital. In a nightmare, he sees a woman who advises him to go to a fire-temple in Shiraz, where an old man will guide him to a place with no inhabitants. She also tells him to say the word ‘tavern’ as a code word. The protagonist does so, but he never reaches the place because he was not supposed to doubt about anything, but did. It is in the hospital that the protagonist finally dies. In the last story of this collection, entitled *Death*, the protagonist knows that he is about to die. Since he suffers from Alzheimer's, he has to undergo neurosurgery. Before being admitted to a hospital in Tehran, he goes to his elementary school, where he studied thirty-five years ago. He meets his music teacher there. The teacher confesses her love for him, which she has been harboring for her entire life. While making love, the protagonist faints, and when he opens his eyes, he is in hospital. Although the title of the story is *Death*, the concept is elusive in the

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<sup>120</sup> Ferdowsi, “Fasih, Esma'il.”

story, while the concept of love is concrete. Perhaps, this implies Fasih's belief in the intimacy of love and death. Fasih's mystical approach reaches its climax in this collection of short stories. Despair and disappointment, which are highlighted in most of Fasih's works, are the main themes of this collection. In it, the writer is very keen to make his protagonist face absurdity and apprehension and denies love and peace to him. These aspects of the collection are reminiscent of the works of Poe, Kafka, and Hedāyat.<sup>121</sup>

*Didār dar Hend* ('Meeting in India,' 1974) is Fasih's last collection of short stories published before the Revolution. In this collection, Fasih relates two types of stories: those about Jalāl Āriyān and his family and those not about this family. In this regard, *Meeting in India* can be regarded as a combination of *Familiar Soil*, in which the stories mainly revolve around Āriyān and his family, and *Wedding and Other Stories*, which contains stories beyond this family. For instance, the stories in this collection, such as *Yek Film-nāme-ye Kheyli Irāni* ('A Very Persian Screenplay'), *Gol-Maryam*, and *Qaziyye-ye Halim va Siyā Divune* ('The Story of Halim and Siyā, the Madman') recount the tale of Āriyān. Āriyān's siblings are introduced: his elder brother, Esmā'il, who has settled down in America after traveling to China and India; Yusef, his younger brother, who dies from an unknown disease; and Farangis, his sister, who lives in Abadan with her husband.

In terms of Fasih's skill in writing short stories, *Meeting in India* stands between the two previous collections. That is, though *Familiar Soil* has been said to reveal Fasih's lack of writing skill in writing short stories, and *Wedding and other Stories* is thought to be an improvement in this realm, *Meeting in India* is a step backwards in terms of the writer's proficiency in writing this type of fictional work. In this regard, Ābedini asserts that the stories in *Meeting in India* are a hasty attempt by Fasih to elaborate some of the scenes from his novel, *Blind in Heart*. This critic also states that due to Fasih's obsession with criminal and detective elements, the stories of this collection have suffered from lack of structure.<sup>122</sup>

#### *Post-Revolutionary Collections of Short Stories*

In contrast to the large number of post-revolutionary novels written by Fasih, Fasih wrote and published only two collections of short stories following the Revolution, namely *Gozide-ye*

<sup>121</sup> Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 2, 258.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

*Dāstān-hā* ('Selected Stories,' 1987) and *Nemād-hā-ye Dasht-e Moshavvash* ('The Symbols of the Turbulent Desert,' 1990). Thus, as a short story writer, Fasih was more productive in pre-revolutionary Iran.

His very first post-revolutionary collection, *Selected Stories*, contains a number of the stories from the writer's previous collections. As far as the writer's intention of selecting these stories are concerned, Fasih states in the preface to the book that:

The stories of this collection are chosen from the three books *Familiar Soil*, *Meeting in India*, and *Wedding and other Stories*, from the distant past. Now, when I look at them as a whole, they are not more than a single story. They look like moments of a dream, as if a mad painter has created them in a far-off place, in the middle of the clouds above Darkhungāh/California/Khuzestan. Perhaps, among the stories that were not selected, there are some, which in terms of technique or the writer's personal interest, are missing in this collection. However, it is a small gift.<sup>123</sup>

In this collection, the writer includes stories revolving around Jalāl Āriyān and his family at the beginning, which are taken from the collection *Familiar Soil* and *Meeting in India*. Those stories not about Āriyān and his family are placed at the end, and are taken from the collection *Wedding and other Stories*.

One might ask what made Fasih publish this book, as it only contains stories which had already been published in other collections. One thing that should be noted is the huge gap between the publication of the last collection prior to the Revolution, and the current one. Thirteen years of absence (1974-1987) as a short story writer might have concerned Fasih, in terms of being forgotten as such by his readers. Although, during this period, Fasih published a number of novels, he desired to solidify his position as a short story writer as well. Thus, this collection might have been published in order to preserve his reputation as a short story writer.

Fasih's second collection of the post-revolutionary era is devoted to the theme of the Iran-Iraq War and consists of nine short stories. The title of the collection, *The Symbols of the Turbulent Desert*, which was initially mentioned in Fasih's *The Winter of 1983*, signifies wartime Iran.<sup>124</sup> Each of the stories in this collection, except for *E'āne* ('Help') and *Sonnat-e Darkhungāh* ('The Tradition of Darkhungāh'), mainly deal with the war and its various

<sup>123</sup> Fasih, *Gozide-ye Dāstān-hā* (Tehran, Nashr-e Nou, 1366/1987).

<sup>124</sup> Idem, *Zemestān-e 62*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran: Zehn-āviz, 1389/2010), 182, 219, 373, 450.

aspects. Fasih dedicates this work to the students of Abadan Oil College who were killed either during the Iranian Revolution or in the course of the Iran-Iraq War. In the preface of the book, he names some of these victims.

In the first story of the collection, *Noqte-ye Kur* ('A Blind Spot'), Fereydu Rowshankār, who left Iran at the outbreak of the war, returns after the ceasefire in order to investigate his property. He travels to Abadan, where he learns that the city and his house have been transformed to ruins. From the time that he enters until he leaves Abadan; Rowshankār sees the spirits' of war martyrs all wearing long white bloody robes. Each of them resembles one of his fallen friends. At the end of the story, these spirits appear in Rowshankār's path and do not allow him to leave the city. In this story, the writer indicates the presence of the war martyrs' spirits in Iranians' everyday lives, who have witness their deeds and actions. Apart from this, throughout the story the devastating impact of war on the landscape of the city of Abadan is made manifest.

Less concerned with the war, *Sekte-ye Nāqes* ('Incomplete Stroke') tells the story of a man who joins the army after the outbreak of the war. Subsequent to his injury, he is sent back to his hometown, Isfahan, where he works as a driver for the Oil Refinery. One day, due to a heavy bombardment in the city, he gets a heart attack, and apparently dies. His body is taken to a hospital and later to a graveyard. The same night, the custodian of the cemetery informs the family of the deceased that the man is alive. The family rush to the graveyard. On their return home, they have an accident in which all of the family members, except the son (who was in another car), die. In the next story of the collection, *Duri az Azizān* ('Away from Loved Ones'), the narrator meets one of his old friends, Abbas Jahānpur, who is separated from his family, since they live in the United States. The narrator and his friend visit one of the martyrs' cemeteries in Isfahan. Perceiving the graves of the young fallen, who are mostly between thirteen and twenty, touches Jahānpur. He also sees an old woman who is sitting and crying next to four graves, all belonging to her young sons who were killed during the war. This scene leads Jahānpur to think that being away from one's loved ones is now an epidemic in Iran. These two stories illuminate how the war split families and did not allow people to be with their loved ones.

The stories *Mosāhebe* ('Interview') and *Morgh-hā-ye Eshq dar Bombārān* ('Lovebirds in the Bombardment') both revolve around the bombardment of Iranian cities by Iraqi planes and missiles. In the former story, because of Iraq's heavy bombardment of one of the villages in southern Iran, all of the inhabitants there die except for an old man, a young boy, and a goat. An Iranian broadcasting channel interviews these survivors. The reporter asks a series of

questions to the illiterate old man. Since he does not understand the questions, he gives irrelevant answers and instead explains how each of the inhabitants was killed during the bombardment. Regarding the structure of the story, Sarshār argues that the irrelevant answers make the story humorous, and that consequently it should be considered a comedy. He goes further to indicate that due to lack of a cohesive plot, this work is hard to call a story.<sup>125</sup> In the next story of the collection, *Lovebirds in the Bombardment*, due to a heavy bombardment in Tehran three lovebirds get shell-shock and die. This, Sarshār claims, is one of the weakest stories in the collection, which shows Fasih's lack of knowledge regarding the elements of plot and structure in a short story. He asserts that high-school students could have written this story.<sup>126</sup>

*Zan-e Āl-e Butāve* ('The Woman from Butāve Tribe') is another story in which Fasih describes the impact of the war on Iranian women. In Ahvaz, the narrator Jalāl Āriyān goes to a place where he encounters many Arab peddlers. Among them, he starts flirting with a woman who lost her husband and children during the bombardment of Abadan and had to migrate to Ahvaz. This story evidently shows how the war affected the life of women in Iran, in that the female protagonist is forced to migrate to another city and work to make ends meet.

The last story in this collection, which is closely related to the war, is *Gozāresh* ('Report'). The story begins with the Iraqi invasion of Abadan in 1980. The young technician of the Abadan Oil Refinery has to take his family to a safe place in Ahvaz. One day, whilst traveling from Ahvaz to Abadan, he and many of his colleagues are taken captive by Iraqi forces. They are first transferred to a camp in Basra, where conditions are awful. Later they are moved to another camp in Shalamche, near the Iran-Iraq border. During their captivity, the technician can only think about his family, who are supposed to go to Behbahān, a city in Khuzestan Province, in order to be far from the warzone. Meanwhile, he attempts to escape from the camp and eventually is successful in so doing. After reaching Ahvaz, he immediately takes the road to Behbahān, where he learns about the death of his family members in a bombardment. In this story, captivity in the hands of the enemy is the major theme. As discussed in the previous chapter, captivity is one of the frequent themes in Persian war fiction. None of Fasih's war fictions depict the theme of captivity as much as *Report*.

Apart from these stories, there are two stories in *The Symbols of the Turbulent Desert* that are not written about the war. In *Help*, we encounter a woman whose husband has died.

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<sup>125</sup> Sarshār, *Vorud-e Nevisande be Sāhat-e Dāstān va Khoruj-e Shakhsīyat-hā az ān* (Tehran: Beh-Nashr, 1387/2008), 229.

<sup>126</sup> Idem, "Negāhi be Nemād-hā-ye Dasht-e Moshavvash," *Sure-ye Andishe* 21 (1369/1990), 13.

Before he died, he had donated his property to the people at the Iranian frontline. Since the woman has two children to look after, she asks the clergy who are in charge of sending humanitarian aid to the warfront to return the amount that her husband donated. After investigating, the clergy returns the amount to the woman. Later, the clergy meet the deceased's brother, who intends to reveal the fact that his brother had never had a wife, but does not do so. In another story, *The Tradition of Darkhungāh*, the protagonist, Mehdi, returns Iran after an absence of eleven years. After obtaining a PhD degree, Mehdi becomes a hero among his family and relatives. Upon his arrival, there is a family tradition that must be accomplished. The youngest son of the family should hit Mehdi on the head with a dagger. In doing so, the family believe that bad incidents and omens will leave the successful son alone.

Among the nine stories in *The Symbols of the Turbulent Desert*, the familiar narrator of Fasih's works, Jalāl Āriyān, narrates only four stories (*Away from the Loved Ones*, *Interview*, *Lovebirds in the Bombardment*, and *The Woman from Butāve Tribe*). Apart from this, as is remarked upon by Ānāhid Ojākiāns, *A Blind Spot*, due to its lively description of the ruined city of Abadan during the war, and *Report*, due to its description of Iraqi war camp, are the most significant stories in the collection.<sup>127</sup> The main characters in this collection are chiefly divided into two groups: the intellectuals, such as Fereydun Rowshankār and Abbas Jahānpur, who are often educated abroad and wealthy; and non-intellectuals, such as the old man in *Interview*, who often belong to the working class and are described as poor and illiterate. During the war, these groups had different reactions to the war. The number of non-intellectuals who participated in the war was higher than that of the intellectuals, who refrained from the war effort and mainly left the county. Despite this, many of those who left the country during the war were upset in doing so. For instance, in the story of *A Blind Spot*, Rowshankār reprimands himself for not being in Iran during the war where the narrator says: "wherever he sees a ruined building or a burnt garden [...], he feels ashamed of himself."<sup>128</sup>

### *The Impact of Censorship on Fasih's Fictional Works*

As discussed earlier in this chapter, since the Revolution of 1979, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has been the sole authority in Iran in presiding over cultural productions

<sup>127</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmāli be Āsār-e Esmā'il Fasih (5)," *Nāme-ye Farhangestān* 18 (1380/2001): 148.

<sup>128</sup> Fasih, *Nemād-hā-ye Dasht-e Moshavvash* (Tehran: Safi Ali Shah, 1369/1990), 38.

such as books, movies, television programs, songs and so on. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has several objectives, such as “promoting the moral values based on faith and piety; cultural independence and protecting the society from the influence of alien cultures; promoting public awareness in various areas [...] and acquainting the people of the world with the principles and objectives of the Islamic Revolution; and preparing the ground for unity among Muslims.”<sup>129</sup> In order to achieve its wide range of objectives, the Ministry has taken many steps, among which domestic censorship, issuing and revoking the permission of literary and cultural productions, and supervising the activities of publication centers and bookstores are significant.<sup>130</sup> The publication of cultural productions that would be detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public can be prevented or be subjected to changes or modifications by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

As one of the main issues in Iran following the Islamic Revolution, censorship must be addressed in any discussion of Fasih’s work. Like all books published within Iran, Fasih’s works had to receive approval of the Ministry in order to get a publication license. Among Fasih’s oeuvre, the three novels *Raw Wine*, *The Winter of 1983*, and *Bitter Desire* were the subjects of censorship.

As a pre-revolutionary novel, *Raw Wine* underwent severe changes in order to be eligible for reprint in post-revolutionary Iran. In order to obtain a reprinting license from the Ministry, Fasih removed some pages which conflicted with Islamic doctrines and the Ministry’s objectives. Fasih declared, he had to remove roughly twenty pages from the novel, which led local Alborz Publishers to republish the novel for the first time after the Revolution in Iran in 1991.<sup>131</sup> The publication of *Bitter Desire*, Fasih’s last published novel, also had to await approval by the Ministry. However, because of the writer’s health issues, the novel came out in print without censorship.

Between 1987 and 2003, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance banned *The Winter of 1983*. The novel was considered to be harmful to both Islamic principles and the values of the Revolution. According to the Ministry, the novel does not conform to Islamic doctrine regarding martyrdom. Based on Islamic teachings, if an individual is killed while on a path in keeping with God and Islam, then s/he should be considered a martyr. In addition, the novel was also forbidden to be reprinted due to its anti-government tenor. It addresses and criticizes some of the rules that were followed in Iranian society during the war, such as

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<sup>129</sup> “Responsibilities and Policies,” *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, <http://www.farhang.gov.ir/en/profileofministry/responsibilities> (accessed October 23, 2014).

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Omidi-Sarvar, “Esmā‘il Fasih.”

obligatory military service for boys above eighteen, the prohibition of female employment, and the requirement that an 'ideology test' had to be undertaken by those wishing to be employed in government offices.

During the last year of the war with Iraq, when Iran had an unstable political and social situation, *The Winter of 1983*, which was in conflict with the values of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, was considered a major threat to the minds of Iranians. Therefore, to prevent the dissemination of any anti-Islamic and thoughts among the Iranian people, the Ministry of banned Fasih's book. After banning *The Winter of 1983* in Iran, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance subsequently ordered Fasih to rephrase, remove, or rethink certain passages, sentences, and words that can be interpreted as in conflict with Islamic principle and the Revolution. Fasih, however, did not do as the Ministry asked, and the book was suddenly and surprisingly reprinted in 2003 without any censorship.<sup>132</sup>

### *Translations*

In addition to his large body of fictional works, Fasih has also made eleven translations, all of which have been from English into eloquent Persian. His translations, as Ali Ferdowsi claims, are significant "for their respectable commercial success, and their subject matter."<sup>133</sup> Fasih's translations can be divided into three major thematic groups: psychology, literature, and politics. Most of his translations fall under psychology, and are as follows: *Vaz'iyat-e Ākhar* (1972), which is *I'm OK, You're OK* by Thomas Harris (1969); *Bāzi-hā: Ravān-shenāsi-ye Ravābet-e Ensāni* (1987), which is *Games People Play: the Psychology of Human Relations* by Eric Berne (1964); *Māndan dar Vaz'iyat-e Ākhar* (1988), which is *Staying Ok* by Amy Harris and Thomas Harris (1985); *Khod-shenāshi be Ravesh-e Jung: Teknik-e Ramz-vāzhe* (1993), which is *Self-Discovery: the Jungian Way* by Michael Daniels (1991); and *Tahlil-e Raftār-e Motaqābel dar Ravān-darmāni* (1994), which is *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy: A Systematic Individual and Social Psychiatry* by Eric Berne (1971). These psychological works translated by Fasih belong to an integrative approach in psychology

<sup>132</sup> "Zende-yād Fasih Chandi pish az Momayyezi-ye Āsārash Enteqād Karde Bud," *E'temād*, Tir 27, 1388/July 18, 2009, [http://www.aftabir.com/news/view/2009/jul/18/c5c1247895287\\_art\\_culture\\_literature\\_verse\\_smail\\_fasih](http://www.aftabir.com/news/view/2009/jul/18/c5c1247895287_art_culture_literature_verse_smail_fasih) (accessed October 21, 2015).

<sup>133</sup> Ferdowsi, "Fasih, Esma'il."

known as ‘Transactional Analysis’ (TA). Among all of Fasih’s translations, *Vaz’iyyat-e Ākhar* is one of the best-selling, and reached its 28<sup>th</sup> edition in 2008.<sup>134</sup>

Fasih’s other translations are of well-known literary texts: *Ostādān-e Dāstān: Majmu’e’i az Dāstān-hā-ye Jahān* (1991), which is a translation of *Great Short Stories: Fiction from the Masters of World Literature* (1989); *Rostam-nāme* (1994), which is *The Book of Rustem Retold from the Shāh Name of Firdausi* by Ethel Mary Wilmot-Buxton (1907); *Shakespeare: Zendegi, Kholāse-ye Asār: Hamlet* (1997), which is *Outlines of Shakespeare’s Plays* by Homer Andrew Watt (1934); and *Khāhar Kuchike* (1997), which is a translation of Raymond Chandler’s ‘The Little Sister’ in *Later Novels and Other Writings* (Francis MacShane, ed., 1995).

Fasih’s translations of political works are limited to two: *Tārikh-e Kubā va Ravābet-e ān bā Āmricā* (1982) which is *A History of Cuba and Its Relations with the United States* by Philip Sheldon Foner (2 Vols. 1962-1963) and *Jang-e Espāniyā-Kubā-Āmricā va Peydāyesh-e Emperyālism-e Āmricā* (1983), which is *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, also by Philip Sheldon Foner (1972). These translations imply Fasih’s intense interest in politics, which parallels the fact that most of his novels are deeply political.

The works that Fasih chose to translate are closely related to his fields of interest: the psychology of human relations, transactional analysis of human behavior, history, short stories, and Iranian ancient literary works which dealt with Zoroastrianism. Fasih does not consider his translations as his ‘intellectual and mundane capital,’ but rather declares that his main purpose was to introduce the mentioned books to Iranians.<sup>135</sup> Despite this, Fasih is proud of what he has done in translation and claims:

I am proud of my translations, as I was able to introduce the world’s new literary and scientific works to the Iranian people, particularly, the English translation of *Rostam-nāme*, by a British writer, who made the *Shāh-nāme* into prose and short stories in order to introduce [the Persian Epic] to the Western world [...].<sup>136</sup>

### *The Unpublished Work*

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.; Sayyār, “Bā Jabr Neveshtan,” 10.

<sup>135</sup> Badi’, *Asl-e Āsār*, 9.

<sup>136</sup> Ma’rufi, “Esmā’il Fasih.”

Apart from his huge range of published books, Fasih also has a body of unpublished work. This includes Fasih's autobiography, in which he attempted to give an extensive account of his personal and professional life, as well as his writings. The work also contains some articles by well-known Persian critics about Fasih's work. Although the writer tried hard to complete this work as soon as possible, death did not allow him to do so. After Fasih's death in 2009, his family sent this unfinished piece to *Peykān* Publishers, asking them to publish it as a book under the title '*Zendegi-ye Man*' (My Life), but later Fasih's wife decided to prevent its publication. Regarding this decision she said: "Since Fasih could not finish writing this autobiography before his death, it was not possible to publish it posthumously. I believed publishing this uncompleted work, which still needs some facts to be added, was not right."<sup>137</sup>

### Conclusion

Fasih is one of the most prolific Persian writers of the late twentieth century, and wrote novels, short stories, and translations. However, it is generally agreed that he was more skilled as a novelist and translator than as a short story writer. As Ābedini observes, Fasih's short stories are deprived of brevity, which is the key element in this kind of work of literature.<sup>138</sup> When considering the varied themes of his works, it cannot be denied that Fasih is a writer of great range. The themes in his novels are paralleled to the era and society that he is living in.<sup>139</sup> The same can be said about his translations—and, as is mentioned above—his novels, which comprise war novels, Zoroastrian novels, and romantic novels.

There are several points that should be taken into account when trying to understand Fasih's oeuvre. First of all, the ways in which he weaves a singular style in modern Persian fiction—as is conveyed through his characters, narrative strands, plots and themes—must be appreciated. Love, death, mysticism, and the invariable clash between good and evil are the most significant themes in Fasih's novels and short stories. In his works written after the Revolution we also encounter other themes, such as war and martyrdom.<sup>140</sup> Secondly, Fasih was a pioneer in specifically focusing on civilians of the middle class, as this brought a new subject to the Persian fiction genre. Third of all, Fasih's diction is another characteristic that

<sup>137</sup> "Enteshār-e Zendegi-nāme-ye Khod-nevesht-e Esmā'il Fasih Montafi Shod," *Isnā*, last updated Dey 23, 1391/January 12, 2013, <http://isna.ir/fa/news/91102313115/> (accessed August 26, 2014).

<sup>138</sup> Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 2, 250.

<sup>139</sup> Badi', *Asl-e Āsār*, 11.

<sup>140</sup> Ojākiāns, "Nazari Ejmalı (6)," 141-42.

made him unique from other writers. His Persian is accessible and very fluent.<sup>141</sup> This smoothness of language is due perhaps to his commitment to using accessible language in order to write works which can be understood and appreciated by a large demographic.

Fasih's interest in the Zoroastrian faith and its doctrines further differentiates his work. He explicitly refers to Zoroaster's teachings in almost all of his novels, especially those written before the Revolution. According to Fasih, because of the acceptance Islam in the seventh century, Iranians have lost sight of their origins and are more prone to be drawn into betrayal and disloyalty. He suggests that by returning to the previous creed of Zoroastrianism, Iranians can reach salvation, the ultimate goal in life.<sup>142</sup>

More than any other Persian writer, Fasih leans toward pursuing similar patterns and characters in his works.<sup>143</sup> Fasih's ability to interweave the history of a city and a nation within the history and development of a single family, whose members are the shared characters of most of his novels, is significant. Fasih chooses the characters of most of his novels and short stories from real life, but he does not simply copy them in his works. In this regard, he asserts:

In my view, either in a novel or in a short story, the writer does not take his characters from the air, but s/he chooses them from his/her own life, especially those who had inspired the writer. However, it is possible that in the course of the story, the author adds some characteristics to those characters, or increases the number of them or even transforms them. I do not think that in any of my works there are characters that are outside my destiny and personal life.<sup>144</sup>

Apart from this, Fasih often chooses symbolic names for his characters which parallel their roles in the novels in which they occur. In many cases he reveals his opinions through such names. For instance, in order to display his hatred toward Arabs, Fasih chooses Arabic names for his antagonists, whilst his protagonists often have Persian names or surnames. This fact clearly demonstrates the writer's patriotic nature.

Furthermore, most of Fasih's novels can be classified under detective literature. His interest in writing detective novels perhaps derived from his reading of the world's best detective fiction, particularly Samuel Dashiell Hammett's novels. As many Persian critics,

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<sup>141</sup> Dehbāshi, "Az Injā va Ānjā," 445.

<sup>142</sup> Aslānpur, "Negāhi Ejmalī be Āsār-e Esmā'il Fasih," *Sure-ye Andishe* 28 (1370/1991): 33-35.

<sup>143</sup> Idem, *Gozar az Khārzār*, 11.

<sup>144</sup> Sayyār, "Bā Jabr Neveshtan," 9.

such as Omid-Sarvar have noticed, despite Fasih's best attempts to write detective novels at the same level as the world's best detective novelists, they often remain superficial and void of the complexity that a detective novel requires.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Omid-Sarvar, "Esmā'il Fasih."

