

Let Me Tell You Where I've Been:

New Writing by Women of the Iranian Diaspora

Edited by Persis M. Karim

Foreword by Al Young

**A powerful collection that speaks to history, immigration, and
the emergence of a new international literary voice**

*between two parallel mirrors
as if between two pasts*

*she stands unadorned
but for the strokes of history upon her flesh
blood sacrifice of dubious origins
tempestuous kisses
in tempestuous climates
and gouged chasms
upon her core*

...from "Perfectly Parallel Mirrors" by Laleh Khalili

*In my mother- tongue we say
that a desired woman's body
is like peeled peaches,
that she walks like a drunk peacock
and sees with her deer eyes.
We say that a child's body is as pure
as her mother's milk.*

. . . from "Words to Die For" by Esther Kamkar

From *Publisher's Weekly* (May 1, 2006)

"The diversity of voices represented in this stunning collection of poetry, fiction and nonfiction by women of Iranian descent shatters their narrow image in the U.S. Though none are well known, most of the 53 authors live in the U.S. and 15 have been published in journals if not books. One writes about a woman's relationship with her chador. Another remembers her desire, as a young girl, to distance herself from the "old-world values" espoused by her parents. A woman who sought refuge in Germany conveys the longing she felt to return to her birthplace by detailing a market scene and how the taste of raw walnuts made her feel at home again. Like other immigrants, the women who fled Iran after the 1979 revolution have continued to feel strong ties with their homeland. Many of those now living in the U.S., Canada or the U.K. have grappled with such feelings in an era when cars in the U.S. were emblazoned with bumper stickers reading "Iranians Go Home" and "We Play Cowboys and Iranians." Though many contributions avoid politics, several writers illustrate

heartbreaking incidents of stereotyping that reveal the struggle of facing pervasive social suspicion. Touching on universal themes of love and loss, exile and longing, politics and war, this collection derives its cumulative power from its authors' subtle, uniquely female perceptions."

"Might we present this stunning collection of voices to the U.S. government?

Might this be the perfect moment for bridges of language and sensibility--

delicious humanity -- to define and connect us? Cast aside the grim proclamations of power and threat! Gratitude to Persis Karim for this healing tonic of pomegranate wisdom and pleasure." -- Naomi Shihab Nye, Poet and Author of *You & Yours* and *19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East*

"In these tender and not-so-tender pages you'll find the barely tellable story of what really happened to dreams deferred. Through the vivid, sometimes spellbinding accounts they provide, these gifted writers speak powerfully to the subject of displacement." --Al Young, Poet Laureate of California, from the Foreword

"This is a surprising collection. . . . Persis Karim has located a community of sensitive and articulate cultural observers and mapped that explosion of creativity for us."--Michael Beard, coeditor of *Middle Eastern Literatures* and author of *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*

"[These writings] command our attention, not only for the range of their subject matter and literary artistry, but for representing a multiplicity of voices, the newest patch in this quilt of American culture. They are allegories of our enriched nation. . . . the real thing." --Zohreh T. Sullivan, author of *Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora*

"We have to thank Persis Karim for this wonderful book and for these powerful selections; they offer an alternative to the currently politicized and one-sided view of Iran and Iranian culture." -- Azar Nafisi, author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*

"Iran is a land of paradoxes. It is also undergoing a momentous and profound transformation. The delightfully diverse group of women assembled in this important and timely collection offers a panoramic view of these complex and dynamic changes. Persis Karim ought to be congratulated." -- Farzaneh Milani, author of *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*

Until recently, Iranian literature has overwhelmingly been the domain of men. But in the twenty seven years since the Iranian revolution, women both in Iran and in the diaspora have written

and published in unprecedented numbers. The new hybrid cultures of Iranian diaspora writers has given way to a uniquely feminine literary voice. *Let Me Tell You Where I've Been*, the first anthology of writing by women of the Iranian diaspora, is an extensive collection of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction that explores through literature the influences of history, revolution, war, exile, and immigration. The work in this collection uncovers an emerging multicultural generation of female sensibility and eloquence. Unlike the tired, familiar images of Iran in the media, these women write about the complicated spaces between cultures, and capture a unique and still emerging literature. They challenge both the patriarchal literary tradition of Iran and the singular portrayals in the West of Iranian women as veiled, silent, and lacking in agency.

Book Description

Featuring over one hundred selections (two-thirds of which have never been published before) from over fifty contributors—including such well-known writers as Susan Atefat-Peckham, Tara Bahrapour, Firoozeh Dumas, Azadeh Moaveni, and Farnoosh Moshiri—the collection represents a substantial cross section of this unique multicultural community. Organized around six general themes, including home and away, family and tradition, gender, politics, love, and silence, *Let Me Tell You Where I've Been* creates a rich conversation about Iran, Iranian culture, the Persian and English languages, and the dual identities of its authors. In a time when Iran is cited daily in the news and political rhetoric is at an all time high, this collection offers a complex and humanizing literary representation. These writers bring their individual and collective vision and offer a powerful new voice to the international literary scene.

PERSIS KARIM was born in the United States to an Iranian father and a French mother. She is an associate professor of English and Comparative Literature at San Jose State University in California and coeditor of *A World Between: Poems, Short Stories, and Essays by Iranian-Americans*. She is currently working on a collection of essays, "In the Belly of the Great Satan: Literature, Art and the Emergence of Iranian-American Identity."

AL YOUNG is the poet laureate of California. Young has a long list of publications ranging from novels and poetry collections to musical memoirs and screenplays. Currently, he is working on a new novel called *A Piece of Cake*, a sequel to his *Sitting Pretty*.

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