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Home

The Story of Doctor Dolittle

The Plague Dogs

The Art of Racing in the Rain

The Complete Tales

The Hobbit

Mossflower

The Neverending Story

Fell

The Master and Margarita

Prince Caspian

The Horse and His Boy

The Animals of Farthing Wood

Felidae

The Complete Fairy Tales

The Amber Spyglass

Silverwing

Posted on 02 October 2017 By Azar Nafisi

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The title itself is a rather catchy one, however, I must add that it is an important book There are so many aspects of this memoir that I value a lot. For me it is less about totalitarian

Regimes and Iran, it is about courage and integrity in times of crisis particularly when one is not allowed to do something as harmless as reading, and therefore one stands up against the bullies. When I read this book, I felt like I were in a literature class with Ms Nafisi her students. Reading forbidden books, discussing writers and then using imaginations to combat the world around or shall I say, one reads to remain sane inside and not let any regressive forces break the human will and intelligence, and that's what these Iranians do. Very often such narratives are often understood or read in regard to one set of people, one country, one people, the moment we fall in such a trap the very purpose of the book is defeated. The critique in the book is the critique of power, how freedoms are curtailed if one does not pay attention when we ignore and look away. While it is most definitely a book about Iran, but it should not only be read as a portrayal of regressive Iran and the superior west. I guess writers like Nabokov, Fitzgerald, Lawrence are read and claimed in Iran or in other countries for the same reasons they are read in the west. When these writers are banned and their books are burnt in Iran, it is exactly for the same reasons these same writers were once banned in the west. Of course, one feels quite suffocated when one reads the kind of restrictions that are imposed, particularly, on women in Iran. As a reader, I was aghast to read that women have to be in hijab even in a classroom. But the book also tells that it is the new regime that has imposed these laws, Iran before the revolution has been radically different. Looking at the contemporary world, it seems absurd now that Muslim women are now policed and shamed in the same way, but for different reasons, not only in Iran but also in the most advanced nations of the world. Personally, I think that the whole politics of Hijab whether of the Mullahs or the Trumpists mirror each other. I am sure someone like Ms Nafisi who wrote such an exemplary book concerning the situation in Iran in the days of revolution must have now, being a US resident, a lot to do in the US.

Free E-pub ? Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books ? Every Thursday Morning For Two Years In The Islamic Republic Of Iran, A Bold And Inspired Teacher Named Azar Nafisi Secretly Gathered Seven Of Her Most Committed Female Students To Read Forbidden Western Classics As Islamic Morality Squads Staged Arbitrary Raids In Tehran, Fundamentalists Seized Hold Of The Universities, And A Blind Censor Stifled Artistic Expression, The Girls In Azar Nafisi S Living Room Risked Removing Their Veils And Immersed Themselves In The Worlds Of Jane Austen, F Scott Fitzgerald, Henry James, And Vladimir Nabokov In This Extraordinary Memoir, Their Stories Become Intertwined With The Ones They Are Reading. Reading Lolita In Tehran Is A Remarkable Exploration Of Resilience In The Face Of Tyranny And A Celebration Of The Liberating Power Of Literature. Reading Lolita in Tehran A Memoir in Books, Azar Nafisi. Reading Lolita in Tehran A Memoir in Books is a book by Iranian author and professor Azar Nafisi. Published in 2003, it was on the New York Times bestseller list for over one hundred weeks and has been translated into 32 languages. The book consists of a memoir of the author's experiences about returning to Iran during the revolution 1978-1981 and living under the Islamic

Republic of Iran government until her departure in 1997. It narrates her teaching at the University of Tehran after 1979, her refusal to submit to the rule to wear the veil and her subsequent expulsion from the University, life during the Iran Iraq War, her return to teaching at the University of Allameh Tabatabaee 1981, her resignation 1987, the formation of her book club 1995-97, and her decision to emigrate. Events are interlaced with the stories of book club members consisting of seven of her female students who met weekly at Nafisi's house to discuss works of Western literature, including the controversial *Lolita*, and the texts are interpreted through the books they read. The book is divided into four sections: *Lolita*, *Gatsby*, *James*, and *Austen*. ISBN 978-0007178484. 1979-1997..

In case you don't know about this book yet though, honestly, how could you not know about this book yet? It is an absolutely amazing memoir by an Iranian woman who was a professor of English/Persian literature at the University of Tehran before, during, and after the revolution and war with Iraq. Once wearing the veil became mandatory and she refused to wear one, she was forced to quit teaching, and one way she came up with to fill her time was to gather several of her most dedicated students for a once weekly literature class. In it, they discussed books like *The Great Gatsby*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Lolita* duh, etc. This book is triple-layered. The first layer is Nafisi's memoir of the tumultuous times she lived in in Tehran, which she watched go from one of the most progressive, intellectual cities in the world to one of the most restrictive and repressive. You can see many of her friends and relatives here, and learn about the different ways people dealt with everything from withdrawing completely from society to picking sides and becoming vocal and fervent about religion, politics, nationalism, etc. The second layer is Nafisi's memoirs of being a professor of literature in such times, including one astonishing episode where her class actually puts *The Great Gatsby* on trial to determine whether it is decadent, Western poison or a work of high art. Not to mention the memories of the women in her literature class, how they coped with the readings, one another, and their lives in Iran. The third layer, which for me catapults this book into a work of absolute genius, is Nafisi's theories on and explications of the books themselves, including how they relate to the struggles and culture of both of the above layers. Nafisi's brilliant theories about literature, her clear, inviting voice, and the much-needed internal perspective she gives us Americans on a country and culture that we are essentially taught to loathe all combine to make this one of the most incredible books I've ever read. Three times. What we search for in fiction is not so much reality but the epiphany of truth. This book isn't a fast read. I've started reading this memoir 24 October, and I only finished part 1 so far (77 pages of 347) and that already took me a while. Maybe I'm in a reading slump, but I doubt that, because I'm eager enough to read. Some other reviewers complained that the book is tedious, disjointed and all over the place, and that the author's tone is smug and self-important. Except from the fact that when the author refers to the girls who come to her private reading class, she always talks about "My girls", which for some reason I find irritating, I'm not sure yet if I share these criticisms. For me, it's just such

a book that is interesting enough, but not really absorbing, so I just plough on through it, in search of those epiphanies of truth in Western literature for Iranian veiled women I haven't read any of the novels that are being discussed in this book, but I don't consider this to be an obstacle for being able to understand the references to these well-known works. Even so, someone who reads those classics, will probably benefit from it while reading this book.

5 November 2018 Part I Lolita

Yet I suppose that if I were to go against my own recommendation and choose a work of fiction that would most resonate with our lives in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it would not be *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* or even *1984* but perhaps Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading* or better yet, *Lolita*. What Nabokov creates for us in *Invitation to a Beheading* is not the actual pain and torture of a totalitarian regime but the nightmarish quality of living in an atmosphere of perpetual dread. Unlike in other utopian novels, the forces of evil here are not omnipotent. Nabokov shows us their frailty as well. They are ridiculous and they can be defeated, and this does not lessen the tragedy: the waste. *Invitation to a Beheading* is written from the point of view of the victim, one who ultimately sees the absurd sham of his persecutors and who must retreat into himself in order to survive. Those of us living in the Islamic Republic of Iran grasped both the tragedy and absurdity of the cruelty to which we were subjected. We had to poke fun at our own misery in order to survive. We also instinctively recognized *poshlust* not just in others, but in ourselves. This was one reason that art and literature became so essential to our lives: they were not a luxury but a necessity. What Nabokov captured was the texture of life in a totalitarian society, where you are completely alone in an illusory world full of false promises, where you can no longer differentiate between your savior and your executioner. In most of Nabokov's novels *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Bend Sinister*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *Invitation to a Beheading* there was always the shadow of another world, one that was only attainable through fiction. It is this world that prevents his heroes and heroines from utter despair, that becomes their refuge in a life that is constantly brutal. Take *Lolita*. This was the story of a twelve-year-old girl who had nowhere to go. Humbert had tried to turn her into his fantasy, into his dead love, and he had destroyed her. The desperate truth of *Lolita*'s story is not the rape of a twelve-year-old by a dirty old man but the confiscation of one individual's life by another. We don't know what *Lolita* would have become if Humbert had not engulfed her. Yet the novel, the finished work, is hopeful, beautiful even, a defense not just of beauty but of life, ordinary everyday life, all the normal pleasures that *Lolita*, like *Yassi*, was deprived of. In fact Nabokov had taken revenge against our own solipsists: he had taken revenge on the Ayatollah Khomeini, on *Yassi*'s last suitor, on the dough-faced teacher for that matter. They had tried to shape others according to their own dreams and desires, but Nabokov, through his portrayal of Humbert, had exposed all solipsists who take over other people's lives. At some point, the truth of Iran's past became as immaterial to those who appropriated it as the truth of *Lolita*'s is to Humbert. It became immaterial in the same way that *Lolita*'s truth, her desires and life, must lose color before Humbert's one obsession, his desire to turn a twelve

year old unruly child into his mistress When I think of Lolita, I think of that half alive butterfly pinned to the wall The butterfly is not an obvious symbol, but it does suggest that Humbert fixes Lolita in the same manner that the butterfly is fixed he wants her, a living breathing human being, to become stationary, to give up her life for the still life he offers her in return Lolita s image is forever associated in the minds of her readers with that of her jailer Lolita on her own has no meaning she can only come to life through her prison bars This is how I read Lolita Again and again as we discussed Lolita in that class, our discussions were colored by my students hidden personal sorrows and joys Like tearstains on a letter, these forays into the hidden and the personal shaded all our discussions of Nabokov And and I thought of that butterfly what linked us so closely was this perverse intimacy of victim and jailer Like the best defense attorneys, who dazzle with their rhetoric and appeal to our higher sense of morality, Humbert exonerates himself by implicating his victim a method we were quite familiar with in the Islamic Republic of Iran We are not against cinema, Ayatollah Khomeini had declared as his henchmen set fire to the movie houses, we are against prostitution Again we skipped back and forth between our lives and novels was it surprising that we so appreciated Invitation to a Beheading We were all victims of the arbitrary nature of a totalitarian regime that constantly intruded into the most private corners of our lives and imposed its relentless fictions on us Was this the rule of Islam What memories were we creating for our children This constant assault, this persistent lack of kindness, was what frightened me most I had asked my students if they remember the dance scene in Invitation to a Beheading the jailer invites Cincinnatus to a dance They begin a waltz and move out into the hall In a corner they run into a guard They described a circle near him and glided back into the cell, and now Cincinnatus regretted that the swoon s friendly embrace had been so brief This movement in circles is the main movement of the novel As long as he accepts the sham world the jailers impose upon him, Cincinnatus will remain their prisoner and will move within the circles of their creation The worst crime committed by totalitarian mind sets is that they force their citizens, including their victims, to become complicit in their crimes Dancing with your jailer, participating in your own execution, that is an act of utmost brutality My students witnessed it in show trials on television and enacted it every time they went out into the streets dressed as they were told to dress They had not become part of the crowd who watched the executions, but they did not have the power to protest them, either The only way to leave the circle, to stop dancing with the jailer, is to find a way to preserve one s individuality, that unique quality which evades description but differentiates one human being from the other That is why, in their world, rituals empty rituals become so central There was not much difference between our jailers and Cincinnatus s executioners They invaded all private spaces and tried to shape every gesture, to force us to become one of them, and that in itself was another form of execution. . I m not sure I can finish this book It s just so boring and self important And poorly written My eyes keep crossing It makes me angry because I think this COULD really be a good book It has a good premise,

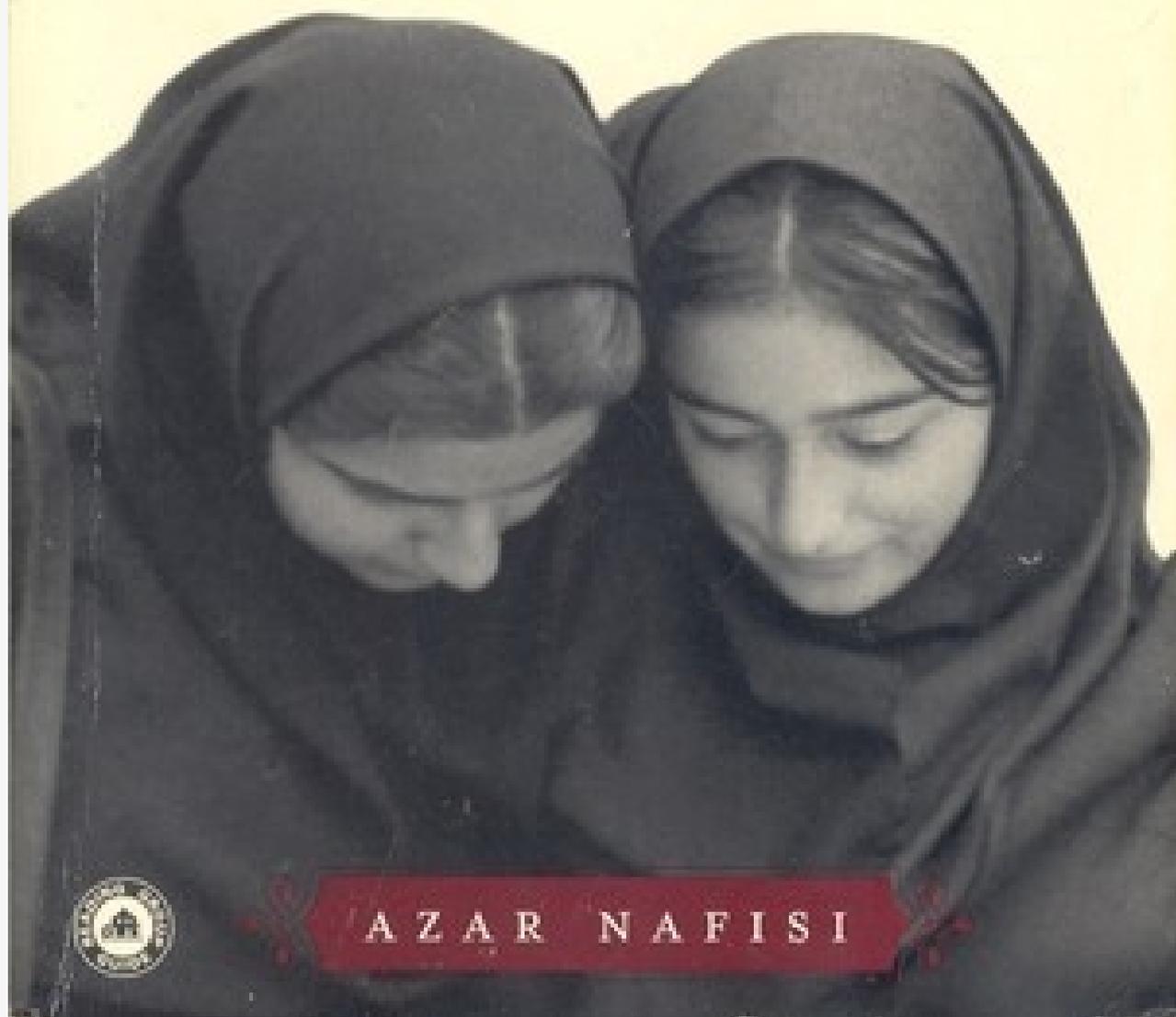
a lot of potential, and it's about a topic I'm actually very interested in and would like to know about. But instead it's dry as hell and doesn't follow any cohesive pattern; it just feels like a lot of random moments in the life of Azar Nafisi strung together by some run-of-the-mill literary criticism. And maybe worst of all, it doesn't make me feel any empathetic to the Iranian people than I already did, and it doesn't give me any additional insight into Islamic culture that I haven't already gotten from Western media sources. Why did this get such good reviews? Do people never read books and judge them for themselves? Or do they just say what they think they're supposed to say because they were told this is a terribly important book about a terribly important topic by a terribly important person? Sigh. I feel like I showed up for class without reading the required assignment. This book should come with a prerequisite reading list: *Lolita*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Daisy Miller*, and *Pride and Prejudice* or at least a warning for spoilers: *Lolita* is raped by an older man, *Gatsby* dies, *Daisy Miller* doesn't get a happy ending, and *Elizabeth Bennett* does. Hide spoiler.

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READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN

A Memoir in Books



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