

Distant View of a Minaret and Other Stories

By Alifa Rifaat, Denys Johnson-Davies (Trans.)

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"More convincingly than any other woman writing in Arabic today, Alifa Rifaat lifts the veil on what it means to be a woman living within a traditional Muslim society." So states the translator's foreword to this collection of the Egyptian author's best short stories. Rifaat (1930-1996) did not go to university, spoke only Arabic, and seldom traveled abroad. This virtual immunity from Western influence lends a special authenticity to her direct yet sincere accounts of death, sexual fulfillment, the lives of women in purdah, and the frustrations of everyday life in a male-dominated Islamic environment.

Translated from the Arabic by Denys Johnson-Davies, the collection admits the reader into a hidden private world, regulated by the call of the mosque, but often full of profound anguish and personal isolation. Badriyya's despairing anger at her deceitful husband, for example, or the haunting melancholy of "At the Time of the Jasmine," are treated with a sensitivity to the discipline and order of Islam.

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"Horrible, beautiful, comforting, divine and devilish at the same time." Jan Morris

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Editorial Review

Review

"Her startling, melancholy stories have a resonance which is as far-reaching as the call of the *muezzin* which rings across so many of their pages." --*The Literary Review*

"Her stories have a frankness and a power that makes them of immediate relevance to the West." --*The Guardian*

"What a beautiful edition of this very important book. To see Rifaat in print again is a joy. Her work should always be available." --John McDonald, University of Portland

Language Notes

Text: English, Arabic (translation)

About the Author

Alifa Rifaat has spent all her life in the Arab world, immersed in the traditions and culture of Islam. She was brought up in Egypt, a devout Muslim, strictly adhering to the Islamic way of life and well versed in the Qu'ran and religious teachings. Her education and a possible future career in art were curtailed when she married - her parents' alternative to university. A widow, she now lives in Cairo with her three children. Largely divorced from Western influences, speaking and writing only Arabic, Alifa Rifaat allows the reader a rare and enlightening glimpse at woman's condition in a male-dominated environment. Her originality lies not in any overt and conventional feminist approach, but rather through her implicit criticisms of the male neglect of his Islamic obligations to women, particularly in family life and marital relationships. She challenges behaviour from within the accepted framework of her society's religion and laws. *Distant View of a Minaret* was first published in English in 1983, by Quartet Books. Two of the stories have been broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Users Review

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