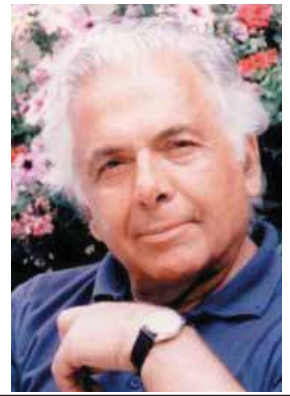
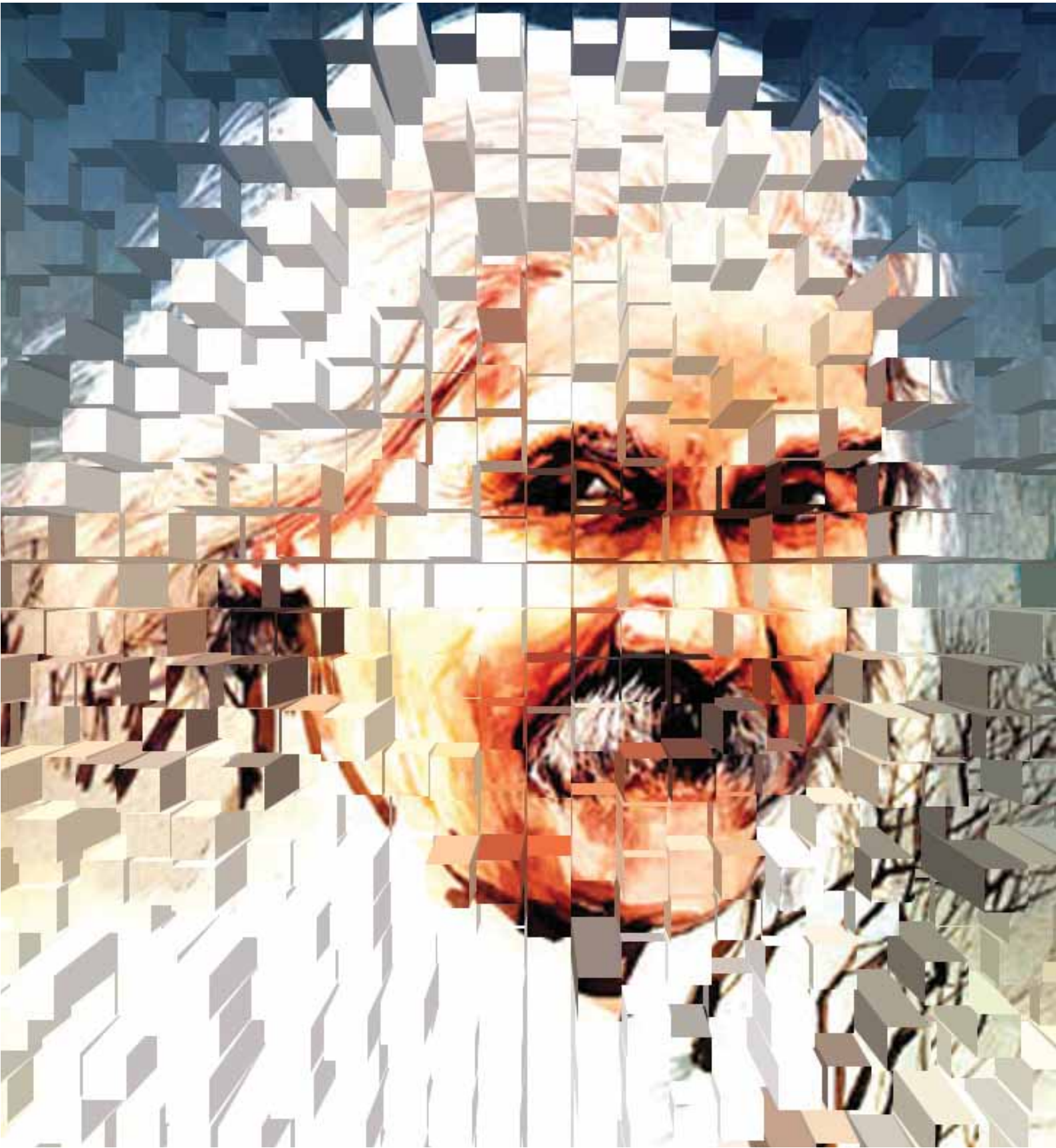


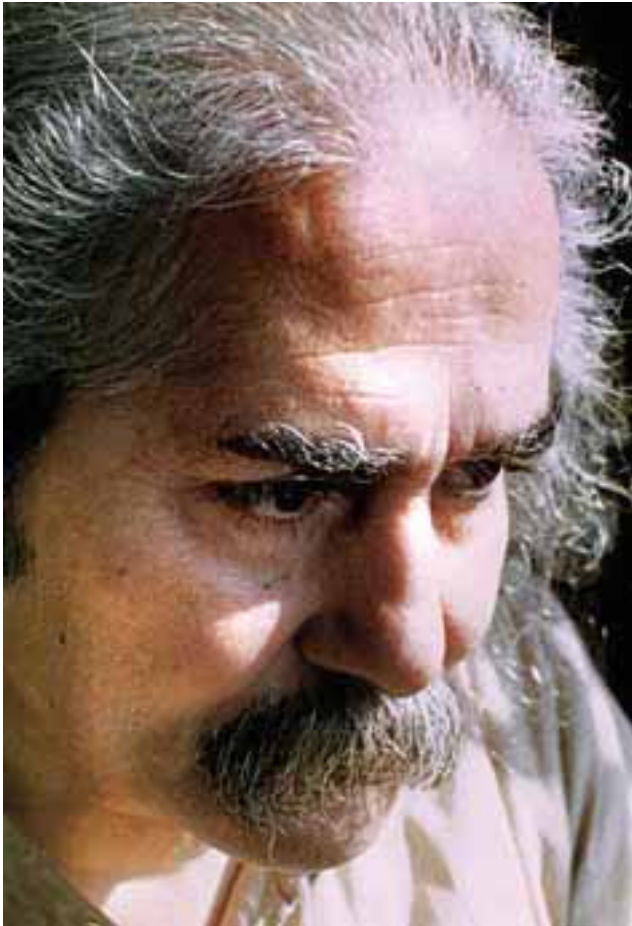
# PENDAAR



IRANIAN BRITISH MAGAZINE

ISSUE 8 NOVEMBER 2011





**M**ehdi Akhavan Sales (M. Omid) was born in 1928, in Mashhad, Khorasan Province, he finished secondary school there. He resided in Tehran in 1949.

In early 1950s, he became involved in anti-governmental riots, something common in Iran of those days, and was briefly imprisoned after the fall of the government of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq in 1953. His first book of poems "Organ" was published in 1951.

Between 1959 and 1965, he joined the governmental work force and served as a high-school teacher and a grade-school principal. He also contributed to dubbing and/or narrating educational films, in

addition to writing articles for newspapers and popular magazines.

In 1959, Sales published his "End of the Shahname," wherein he examined some of the contemporary socio-political problems of Iran in the context of the country's own ancient myths and legends as reported by Ferdowsi. And, a year later, he created a complementary view of the same in his

"From This Avesta," again indirectly criticizing the government. Retaliating, the government persecuted him and his followers as anarchists. Similar activities in 1967 landed the poet in Qasr prison for a short period.

After his release, Akhavan joined the Ministry of Education as well the National Iranian Radio and Television Organization.

He died in 1990 in Tehran. His tomb is in Tous near Mashhad, near Ferdowsi's grave.

The critics consider Mehdi Akhavan Sales as one of the best contemporary Persian poets. He is one of the pioneers of Free Verse (New

Style Poetry) in Persian literature, particularly of modern style epics. It was his ambition, for a long time, to introduce a fresh style in the Persian poetry.

The moment of visiting

The moment of visiting is near  
Again, I am crazy and drunk  
My hands are shaking and so is  
my heart  
Again, it seems I am in another  
world.

Razor, don't carelessly scratch  
my face  
Wind, don't mess up my hair

My heart! don't embarrass me  
The moment of visiting is near.

Translated by:  
Mahvash Shahegh

Two Windows

Like two windows across from  
each other  
We were aware of every quibbles  
of another  
Everyday greetings, questions  
and laughters  
Everyday an appointment for the  
next day.

It was not the act of the sun,  
Or the magic of the moon  
Curse the voyage which has  
done this:

Now I am heart-broken and silent  
'Cause one of the windows is  
closed

Translated by:  
Mahvash Shahegh





The House of Bernarda Alba  
By Federico García Lorca  
Yas-e-Tamam Theater Group/  
SUSPENSE London Puppetry Festival  
Review by Sandra Giorgetti

**T**his production of *The House of Bernarda Alba* moved me profoundly. It is imaginatively economical in its delivery, creating evocative atmospheres with carefully chosen sound effects and precise movements and poses, but at the same time it is rich with imagery and meaning. Even the parallels between the life of these women - Bernarda twice widowed, her five daughters, mother and servant trapped in mourning and by the necessity of conforming with strict traditions and religious observance - and the lives of women living under fundamentalist regimes such as that of Iran cannot go un-noted. This Tehran based company, under director Zahra Sabri, uses three actors who both take roles and manipulate handheld puppets of the characters. The actors have covered faces, the white muslin embroidered with

black crosses and coloured stitches that suggest scars, and their heads are covered in white-rimmed black cloth reminiscent of wimples. They are dressed in black loose jackets with layered lace cuffs and long black skirts; it is a combination which, whilst suggesting a Qu-ranic jilaabah, equally points to traditional Spanish styles and at symbols inextricably linked with Christianity and mourning. It helps to have some knowledge of the story beforehand or to have read the programme's synopsis since the play is presented without surtitles but the strong Catholic undercurrent, the domineering nature of Bernarda and the suppressed energy of her daughters is inescapable. The rows of stationery puppets that sit round the back of the set bear silent and threatening witness to the action like gossipy neighbours waiting for a transgression to destroy the reputation of Bernarda's household, which she holds so dear. Pepe el Romano, suitor of eldest daughter Angustias and secret lover of the youngest Adela, is represented by a hand puppet in the form of a red horse. This stallion imagery is very strong

and is carried through the play and, as the horse/hands run over the young girls' prone bodies, the sensuality is intense. Other images are similarly powerfully created.

The handling of the puppets is deft and the symbiosis between actor and puppet as a character is striking, each taking the role by need or for effect: when Alba, in a fiery rage, leans over the puppet the disparity of her size over that of her daughter is frightening and when she hits the cowering actor holding the puppet the impact is huge.

Not understanding the language - the text here is acted and narrated on a recording - is both restricting and liberating. Clearly some of the story, the subtler messages and commentary were lost but it focussed my attention on the detail of the design and inspiringly eloquent action. Whatever I may have missed was more than made up for by the hauntingly expressive images.

«The House of Bernarda Alba» was presented as part of SUSPENSE, a biannual London-based puppetry festival for adults produced by The Little Angel Theatre.

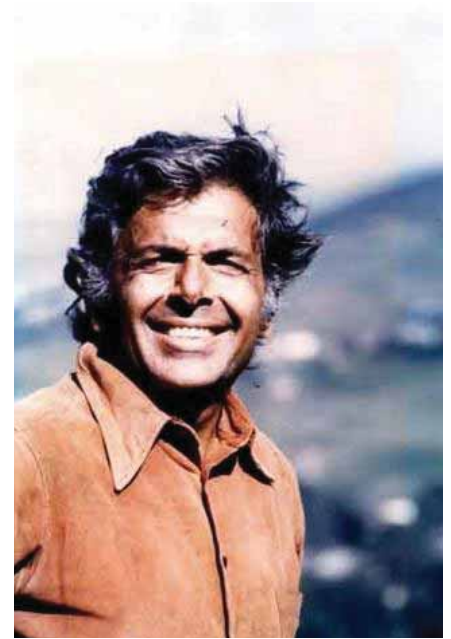


## Ebrahim Golestan

Any fair description of Ebrahim Golestan courts the danger of hyperbole. Of Andre Malraux it has been said that he was the quintessential intellectual of his country. Golestan is truly the quintessential artist of his generation. The contours of his luminous career, spanning over half a century, cover everything from cinema and fiction to Shakespeare and Shaw; it includes nearly every major intellectual, and artistic movement in twentieth century Iran, and nearly in every field he either reached the apex, or was one of the first to offer a radical critique of the movement. He was a little over twenty years old when he was named the editor of the Tudeh party's chief organ; and long before criticizing Stalin became an intellectual fad, Golestan was amongst the first Iranians to criticize the intellectual sclerosis, and the naked nationalism that defined Soviet Marxism. His short-stories, brilliant in their pith and parsimony, heart-wrenching in the depth of their perception of the human condition, and of the follies and failures, no less than the virtues and valor of the human kind, his internationally acclaimed documentaries no less than his two trail-blazing feature-films, and finally his essays on the aesthetics of modern painting and poetry will, I am convinced, go down in the annals of twentieth century Iranian history as an oeuvre unmatched in its variety and richness, its innovation and experimentalism. Decades before Iranian cinema became a darling of film critics, Golestan was winning prizes and praise

in some of the most prestigious festivals around the world. He was responsible for introducing Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway to Iranian readers. In His pioneering work in fiction and cinema was accompanied by a remarkably prescient sense of history. Much has been rightly made of the failure of intellectuals and scholars, as well as governments and intelligent agencies in predicting the Islamic revolution in Iran. Yet, at the height of the shah's power, Golestan made easily not just the most daring political film of his generation, but predicted with eerie accuracy the advent of the Islamic revolution. Long before scholars began to talk about the oil curse and its power to deform politics and power in countries like Iran, Golestan's film, *Mysteries of the Ghost Valley* points out the perils of sudden subaltern wealth.

About the time he made the *Ghost Valley*, a good decade before the largest mass exodus of Iranian from their country, Golestan decided to opt for a life of exile. The conjunction of the personal and the political, of the grief of losing Forough Farokhzad, his beloved in easily the most poetically celebrated love affair in the last several centuries of Iranian canon, led to his decision to leave home for Diaspora. Golestan has an unwavering ethos of speaking truth to power, of standing up to injustice or ignorance with fearless abandon. In a country given to "tagiyeh and ta'araf" the first a Shiite concept similar to Jesuitical dissimulation and the second the Persian social habit of verbal and invariably



exaggerated difference- where circumlocution in discourse and demeanor is synonymous with circumspection, Golestan's habit of frank talk, bereft of frills, as well as his aversion to dogma and to intellectual fads, have provided his foes some opportunity for a campaign of whispers. Surely in the long run of history, it is the mettle and measure of the work that determines an artist's place and easily overshadows the petty politics of personal innuendo. And though predicting the contours of History is a folly of ideologues, let me nevertheless venture a guess: When the history of our age will be written in future, the works of Golestan will stand out as singularly creative and daring, erudite and innovative. And talking of his work, many of his fans have been worried that exile has meant silence. Let me break the good news that for some time now he has been working on two books that combine personal touch and taste of a memoir and the flair for prose and narrative that define his fiction.

Eight-thirty in the Morning  
Marjan Riahi

I was seventeen. I stood in the middle of the courtyard, on the edge of the small pool. My cousin came in. I had no time to reach for my chador. The sleeves of my flower-patterned dress were short. I blushed. He turned his face away. It was the first time he was returning from the war.<sup>1</sup> Everybody was whispering behind our backs. My cousin had said, Engagement means *mahramiat*. He had said that he wanted to be able to sit somewhere with me and talk. We sat in the park. It was early evening. He spoke to me: «Farzaneh!» I said: «Hmm!» He said: «Don't say, "Hmm"; say something beautiful.» I said: «Hello.» He laughed. He recited a poem. He liked poetry. I didn't know any poems. He said, «What do you like?» I said: «Eight-thirty in the morning.» He said: «Why?» I said, «At this hour everything is alive.» I said, «Every day, I ask the teacher for permission to go to the bathroom, but then I go to the courtyard, among the flowers. When the Vice Principal sees me, I say I've lost my keys.» He said: «How long will you tell lies?» I said: «Forever.» He said: «Then what about the Vice Principal?» I said: «Some days we look for the keys together.» I looked at him. The sun went down. Then he went back to war. Every day I went to school. I kept telling myself, «One of these days, school will end!» I said to myself, «To hell with school!» He was at war, his footprints in

the park and the trace of his eyes on the Si-o Seh Pol.<sup>3</sup> I remembered every word he had said. Every day I repeated them so I wouldn't forget. Once he called. I said, «Hello», but we were cut off. Once he sent a letter. There was a red stain on the letter. Mother said: «It is blood; go clean your hand.» I kissed the letter. I looked in the mirror; I was seventeen. The white dress was becoming to my skin. Mother was buying me my trousseau. Everything was ready, to be with him. He came back from the war. Unannounced. Suddenly. I came back from school. There was a pair of boots behind the hall door. He had left with two of his friends. He had come back alone. He looked out of it. At eight-thirty in the morning, near the Zayandeh Rood he seemed sharp. Coffins were passing over the bridge, and he was crying. His crying saddened me. He told me: «I am sorry.» I said: «Why?» He said: «I am making you sad.» I said: «No.» I was lying. His eyes were puffy. His beard was untrimmed and the collar of his shirt was perfectly clean. He said: «How do I look?» I said: «You look like eight-thirty in the morning.» He laughed. Then he went back to war. The radio was talking about the war. Whatever he said I accepted. But I wanted to tell him not to go to war. I was talking along the Zayandeh Rud and he was walking, perhaps, along the Karkkeh.<sup>5</sup> In the evening on television they showed footage of the war. I was looking for him. Everybody had a gun but nobody was him. Aunt said that last time she had boiled his clothes. Insects were everywhere inside them. I said, «Certainly he has stayed among the bullets for a

long time.» Then everything collapses. I didn't go to school either. People were not in the city. We were in the basement at Aunt's. The ground was shaking. The windows were jingling. His letter was not coming. He didn't call either. Every time a missile hit, Mother fainted. Cousins screamed. I was afraid. But I was happy. Now I had something to tell him. In the mornings, at eight-thirty, Mother said, «Don't leave the basement.» Aunt said, «Don't look at the garden from behind the glass.» Cousin said, «If it breaks, it will fall in your eyes.» I sighed. We stayed in the basement for a few weeks. We were gradually forgetting there was a Zayandeh Rud outside. Then someone rang the doorbell. He said something. Mother sat down. Aunt sat down. Whoever was standing sat down. I stumbled. We waited for him. Many people were waiting. And they came, being carried on the shoulders. Nobody's shoulders were empty. In the morning, at eight-thirty, they buried him.



1. The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88).
2. Mahramiat (or, being mahram) is a religious term. According to a traditional interpretation of Islamic law, individuals of the opposite sex may see and interact with each other only when they are mahram. Other than members of one's immediate family, they may become mahram to each other only through marriage or after conducting specific religious ceremonies.
3. A historic bridge in Isfahan.
4. The river that runs through Isfahan.



## Writing on walls

step gently  
a nation  
is dreaming...

**T**he construction of the Israeli barrier that isolates the West Bank from the outside world began almost a decade ago. It is now 450 miles long -- the distance from San Diego to San Francisco, and stands 26 feet tall, more than twice as high as the Berlin Wall. It has been called both the anti-terrorist fence and the racial separation wall. No words come to mind, however, as you walk on the streets of Bethlehem, Palestine. You do not need to delve deep; the wall's impact is visible in people's faces, faces that still smile at you as they pass by and go on with their lives. Contemplating the soul-numbing injustices with which these people live, an urge to commit your life to the cause of Palestinian independence dominates you. But most likely you will move on too. It is only the Wall that stays -- it has uprooted olive trees, thwarted access to health care, cut through farmlands and villages, separated brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren. It has been built to stay, to rise and stand tall, to cast its shadow on our humanity. Ironically, it is also on the streets of Bethlehem where a more just world is most imaginable. It is in Palestine that your heart dares to dream of peace, not in the long corridors of the United Nations headquarters where "peace" is a resolution yet to



be passed. The streets of Palestine are where free-spirited activists and artists have come to change the face of apartheid, to add the bright colors of their vision to the monochrome gray of the Wall. Through graffiti art and poetry, Palestine now owns the longest "living canvas of resistance and solidarity." The Persian-language verse of Ahmad Shamlu is found alongside Mahmoud Darwish's poignant poems in Arabic. "Nations United" written in English is right next to "This wall will fall, and I will return to claim my piece," in Spanish. Story after story of suffering is present, displaying the profound universality of the human condition. From a tombstone of the world imagined by the politics of "separate but equal," the Wall has been turned into a monument that summons, in every one of us, a sense of affinity and shared vulnerability, a monument that insists on the presence of lost lives. Paul Ricoeur, the French

philosopher, writes, "From the suffering Other, there comes a giving that is no longer drawn from the power of acting and existing, but precisely from weakness itself. What the suffering Other gives to he or she who shares this suffering is precisely the knowledge of shared vulnerability and the experience of the spontaneous benevolence required to bear that knowledge." The following selection includes work by Darwish, Palestine's most celebrated poet, as well as graffiti art and writing captured on the Wall. What do these latter expressions add to the discourse of Palestinian rights and suffering? They beautify a despised structure that some locals would prefer be left in its naked, repressive form. Where formal texts often distance us from the Palestinians' predicament and Israel's policies, graffiti art speaks to us with the same warmth and intensity one encounters in conversation with people on the streets of Hebron, Bethlehem, and Ramallah.

# Writing on walls

Art may not change the reality on the ground in Palestine, but it is potent enough to turn an inhuman barrier into a living narrative that mirrors the best of a nation that still dares to dream.

Selections from Mahmoud Darwish  
Translated by Fady Joudah

The soldiers measure the distance between being and nonbeing with a tank's scope...  
\*\*

Siege is the waiting the waiting on a ladder leaning amid the storm  
\*\*

(to poetry:) besiege your siege  
\*\*

Do we harm anyone? Do we harm any country, if we were stuck, even if from a distance, just once, with the drizzle of joy?



Selections from the Wall  
[written for the oppressor]  
The Wall is in your head who has made the two one and



has destroyed the barrier the dividing Wall of hostility -- Ephesians 2:14  
\*\*  
to exist is to resist -- Zapatista Army, Mexico

our revenge will be the laughter of our children  
Bobby Sands, Northern Ireland

an eye for an eye leaves the whole world BLIND



a country is not what it does but also what it tolerates  
\*\*\*

you look at me and I look at you

what is this teaching our children?



dream as if you will for ever



If I sit silently I have sinned -- Mohammad Mosaddegh, Iran



I have come to your land and I have recognized shades of my own my land was once one where some people imagined that they could build their security on the insecurity of others -- Faris Esack, South Africa  
\*\*

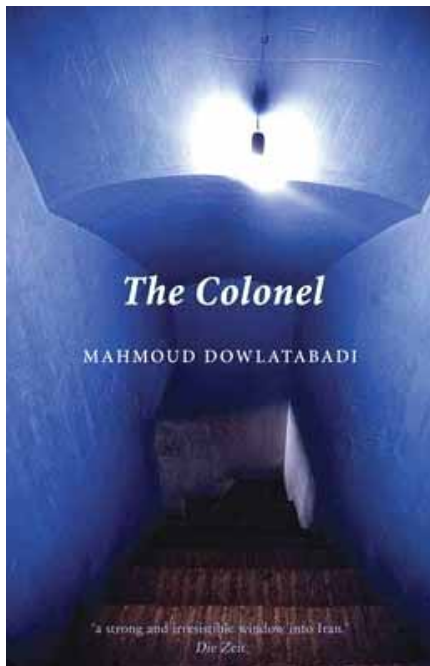
let never-smiling - people rise  
let them rise

-- Ahmad Shamlu





## Book Review



A pitch black, rainy night in a small Iranian town. Inside his house the Colonel is immersed in thought. Memories are storming in. Memories of his wife. Memories of the great patriots of the past, all of them assassinated or executed. Memories of his children, who had joined the different factions of the 1979 revolution. There is a knock on the door. Two young policemen have come to summon the Colonel to collect the tortured body of his youngest daughter and bury her before sunrise. The Islamic Revolution, like every other revolution in history, is devouring its own children. And whose fault is that? This shocking diatribe against the failures of the Iranian left over the last fifty years does not leave one taboo unbroken.

Born in 1940 in the Khurasan village of Dowlatabad, Mahmoud Dowlatabadi is the most prominent Iranian novelist since the 1980s. Self-educated

and forced to work from childhood as a farm hand, Dowlatabadi went to Tehran later on to become an actor. He started writing in the 1960s and has published numerous novels, novellas, plays and essays. He is considered an important representative of modern Persian prose and has also written dozens of critical literary and political essays. Dowlatabadi combines the poetic tradition of his culture with the direct and unembellished everyday speech of the villages. With this highly topical new novel Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, Iran's most important novelist, sheds light on the upheavals, which haunt his country until today. The Colonel is set on a pitch black, rainy night in a small Iranian town. Inside his house the Colonel is immersed in thought. Memories are storming in. Memories of his wife. Memories of the great patriots of the past, all of them assassinated or executed. Memories of his children, who had joined the different factions of the 1979 revolution. There is a knock on the door. Two young policemen have come to summon the Colonel to collect the tortured body of his youngest daughter and bury her before sunrise. The Islamic Revolution, like every other revolution in history, is devouring its own children. And whose fault is that? This shocking diatribe against the failures of the Iranian left over the last fifty years does not leave one taboo unbroken.

Mahmoud Dowlatabadi is best known in Iran for his 10-volume epic *Kelidar*, which at more than 3000 pages is perhaps for

the moment unlikely to feature in any publisher's catalogue. We are, in the meantime, fortunate to have this passionate and informative fable of the Islamic revolution in our hands. The idealistic and relatively modernised "Colonel", a career officer in the Shah's army, has murdered his adulterous wife. Stripped of his rank, he finds himself in the same prison as his eldest son, Amir, a student who belongs to the Iranian Communist Party.

Father and son are soon released in the weeks of mayhem following the Shah's departure into exile and Ayatollah Khomeini's return. Everyone's hopes are soon quashed, however, when the new regime outstrips its predecessor's brutality. Public executions follow, the universities are shut down and the new generations are "left struggling like newly-hatched chicks in this fist, which had turned into a vulture's talons".

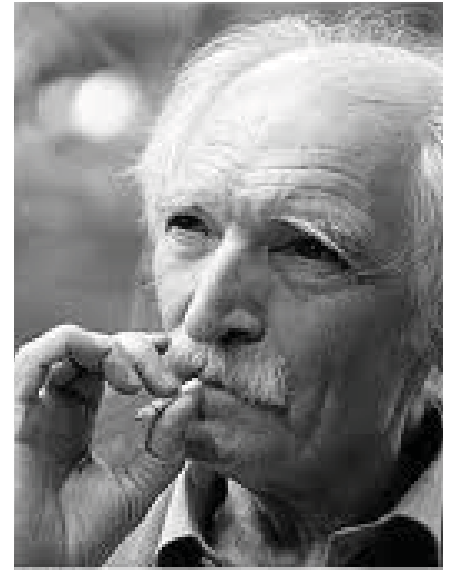
The Colonel is the tale, in the words of its translator, Tom Patterdale, of how "the revolution ate its own children". Four of the colonel's five children are executed or killed in action: three for belonging to various leftist factions, while another is "martyred" in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). No scenes are more telling of this senseless bloodshed than those involving Amir and his former interrogator Khezr Javid, whom Amir hides in his cellar when violent mobs take to the streets looking to lynch their jailers. It is an uncomfortable pairing that Dowlatabadi exploits to portray a society ravaged by a warped morality.



# Book Review

For a fable, there is very little allegory about the novel: it is very historically accurate. The character of the Colonel draws on a historical figure, Mohammad Taqi Khan Pesyan (1892-1921), a hero even to current Iranian nationalists. This scrupulous reformer was probably the closest Iran ever got to its own Atatürk. In this novel he is a metaphor for the Iran that might have been. Patterdale is to be commended for his immaculate glossary,

which does not omit a single reference in the text to Persian mythology, place-names or historical and political figures. His equally precious afterword informs us that The Colonel has “never appeared in its original language” in Iran. It was first published in Germany, after Dowlatabadi had deemed that decades of tinkering with the manuscript had come to an end. It’s about time everyone even remotely interested in Iran read this novel.



**18 - 26 Nov 2011**  
**2nd London Iranian Film Festival**

**Festival Programme:**

Friday 18th November - 19.30  
 Networking event  
 Friday 18th November - 20.30  
 Opening Night - Saadat Abad

---

Saturday 19th November - 17.00  
 Bitter Milk + 3 Shorts  
 19.00: Bonjour Monsieur Ghafari + short

---

Saturday 19th November - 21.00  
 Mourning  
 Family special - Animations

---

Sunday 20th November - 17.00  
 Tehran Taxi + Original certified copy  
 Sunday 20th November - 21.00

A Tribute to Ebrahim Golestan + Q&A  
 Monday 21th November -  
 18.30: Minor & Major + Animation  
 20.30: 3 Women

---

Tuesday 22th November -  
 18.30: Gold and Cooper  
 20.30: A very close encounter + Q&A  
 A Tribute to Mojtaba Mirtahmasb

---

Wednesday 23th November - 20.30  
 Cine Lumiere  
 Back Vocal + Off Beat + Spring Movement

---

Thursday 24th November - Cine Lumiere  
 18.30: A Separation

20.30: Networking Event  
 21.15: The Other + Shorts

---

Friday 25th November - 18.00  
 Apollo Cinema  
 Green, White, Red + Shorts + Q&A  
 21.30 : This is not a film + Short + Q&A  
 Cine Lumiere

---

Sat 26th November - 19.00  
 Apollo Cinema  
 There are things you don't know

---

Sat 26th November - Apollo Cinema  
 19.00: Music + Award Ceremony +  
 Please do not disturb  
 21.45: Please do not disturb



A family at war  
... A Separation.

An unhappily married couple break up in this complex, painful, fascinating Iranian drama by writer-director Asghar Farhadi, with explosive results that expose a network of personal and social faultlines. A Separation is a portrait of a fractured relationship and an examination of theocracy, domestic rule and the politics of sex and class – and it reveals a terrible, pervasive sadness that seems to well up through the asphalt and the brickwork. In its depiction of national alienation in Iran, it's comparable to the work of Jafar Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof. But there is a distinct western strand. The film shows a middle-class household under siege from an angry outsider; there are semi-unsolved mys-

teries, angry confrontations and family burdens: an ageing parent and two children from warring camps appearing to make friends. All these things surely show the influence of Michael Haneke's 2005 film Hidden. Farhadi, like Haneke, takes a scalpel to his bourgeois homeland.

These are modern people with modern problems. After 14 years of marriage, Simin (Leila Hatami) and Nader (Peyman Moaadi) want to split. They live in a flat with their intelligent, sensitive 11-year-old daughter Termeh (Sarina Farhadi), and with Nader's elderly father (Ali-Asghar Shahbazi), who suffers from Alzheimer's and is in need of constant care. Both of them work, and, ambitious for their daughter's

education, they have hired a teacher from her school to come to this crowded flat to give her extra coaching for her imminent and crucial exams. But now Simin wants to leave Iran for a country where there are more opportunities for women generally and for her daughter in particular; Nader says it is out of the question. They must stay in Iran to look after his father.

This debate has escalated into a demand for divorce. The very first scene shows the pair petitioning the equivalent of a magistrate for permission to proceed. This figure is not shown; the couple look directly into the camera and make their case, as it were, to us, the audience. In courtroom terms, this is something like an opening address to the jury, and the audience is invited not to



## Film A Separation

decide who is right and who is wrong, but to see afresh that in such cases there is no right and wrong. Both have some justice on their side.

As the movie progresses, terrible things happen in a succession of unintended consequences. Flawed people behave badly and they will make ferocious appeals to justice and to law in preliminary hearings very similar to the divorce court, heard by harassed, careworn officials oppressed by the knowledge that there is no black and white, but numberless shades of grey. Despite the angry denunciations flying back and forth and the fizzing sense of grievance being nursed on both sides, the messy, difficult truth is that both parties can be justified, that all-or-nothing judicial war will bring destruction, and that some sort of face-saving compromise will somehow have to be patched up. The women see this, but not the men.

When Simin and Nader part, and Simin leaves to live with her mother, an instant question presents itself – with no wife in the picture, who is to do the woman's work? Which is to say, who is to do the drab, menial work of cleaning the flat, and looking after Nader's poor, incapable father? Nader already has a modern wife who has a professional career and wants to go her own way. Now he needs a traditional wife, in all but name – a drudge. So through Simin's connections, they engage Razieh (Sareh Bayat), a woman with one small daughter, whom she will have to bring to work every

day, and who also has a secret she is keeping from her prospective employer. Despite the tough work involved – a 90-minute

commute and the necessity of looking after a confused and incontinent old man with no special training – Nader quibbles with her about pay and this humiliating exchange is to involve Nader in the lives of both Razieh and her own prickly husband Hodjat (Shahab Hosseini). The stage is set for a terrible confrontation. Class matters, as much as gender. One scene shows a group of people at the flat, relaxing and having fun, playing table football. Friends can join in, as well as family. But not Razieh. She is shown rather miserably getting on with something in the kitchen. When Termeh's teacher Miss Ghahraii (Merila Zare'i) comes round, she is treated as an honoured guest. She is, after all, teaching their daughter. But how about Razieh? She has an important family responsibility, too, looking after Nader's father. But she gets no respect. And she is further oppressed by her own religious sense. When she realises that she will have to handle the old man's naked body in the bathroom, Razieh has to telephone her imam to get confirmation that



this would not be a sin. She knows that in this world, the man's word is law, but which man? Her well-off employer or her impecunious husband? Everywhere in this unhappy household, there is conflict. Farhadi shows how this situation is like a pool of petrol into which any event lands like a lighted match. Everyone is aware of their rights and how angry they feel at injustices and slights, and the women are grimly aware of the double responsibility of finding a working solution and persuading their menfolk to accept it. Yet one thing cannot be bargained away: the children. In the end, Termeh is the central figure. She sees everything, she forces her father to make a key admission, and then, excruciatingly, is put into a false position on his behalf. Her pain and anger are all mostly hidden. But she is the person on whom a terrible, unspeakable burden is to fall – a burden both judicial and moral. The adults' pettiness and selfishness have forced this on her: it is an insidious kind of abuse. With great power and subtlety, Farhadi transforms this ugly quarrel into a contemporary tragedy.