



The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree

Shokoofeh Azar, Adrien Kijek (Translator)

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The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree is an extraordinarily powerful and evocative literary novel set in Iran in the period immediately after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Using the lyrical magic realism style of classical Persian storytelling, Azar draws the reader deep into the heart of a family caught in the maelstrom of post-revolutionary chaos and brutality that sweeps across an ancient land and its people.

The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree is really an embodiment of Iranian life in constant oscillation, struggle and play between four opposing poles: life and death; politics and religion. The sorrow residing in the depths of our joy is the product of a life between these four poles.

The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree Details

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Author : Shokoofeh Azar , Adrien Kijek (Translator)

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From Reader Review The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree for online ebook

Michael Livingston says

I struggled with this - lots of digressive magical realism in the style of Marquez, which isn't something I really have a lot of patience with. It's fascinating to read something so deeply Iranian - lots of mythology and history bleeds into the story - but I like my narratives built on more solid ground.

Rashida Murphy says

Shokoofeh Azar's extraordinary first novel recalls many of the elements of consummate story-telling associated with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie, along with Azar's own countrywomen, Porochista Khakhpour and Banafsheh Serov. The story is fresh, original and incandescent in its handling of the Islamic Revolution on the lives of the ordinary citizens of Iran and in its weaving together of Persian folklore and magic realism. The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree chronicles the lives of five people in a single family as they come to terms with the loss of a son and a daughter, while the country they know and love becomes increasingly hostile and unbearable. This novel can be read equally as an anti-war story as well as a conservation story, evident in descriptions of the destruction of forests, gardens, homes and lives, and the way people transform into 'other' living beings because the natural world can sustain them when the political world won't. I loved this novel and its fearless, lyrical voice.

Louise says

A wonderful read, so different to anything I've read before. Beautiful lyrical writing.

Tundra says

This book is not an easy read. Religious persecution is not a nice topic and this novel ventures into territory that is traumatic and at times the allegorical writing is difficult to follow. However, it made me think and wonder about what happens to individuals, family and community when all hope is lost. How people can either choose to live and accept evil, lose connections with their past or just live in the moment in order to survive.

There are a number of references to the Zoroastrians who were a religious society that inhabited parts of Iran prior to the arrival of Islam. Their beliefs include the use of fire and water as agents of ritual purity. This helped me to understand some of the flood/fire/water events in this book. There are also numerous references to Persian folk stories and characters that help create the surreal world presented in this novel.

Lisa says

It's a stunning novel. It's written in a lyrical magical realism style, which seems bizarre at first – until the author's purpose becomes clear. This style is both a tribute to classical Persian storytelling and an appropriate response to the madness of the world she is describing. The novel tells the story of a family living through the turbulent period of Iranian history when the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war brought them overwhelming grief. While there is no solace to be had in the real world, the mystical world conjures it instead. When the eldest son Sobrah is arbitrarily arrested and executed along with thousands of others, the child narrator who was immolated when the Revolutionary Guards came to burn her father's library, is there as a witness. She is there to tell the strange story of her mother Roza's disappearance, the attacks on her sister Beeta, and the destruction of everything her father Hushang holds dear. The presence of ghosts everywhere seems almost realistic when the entire country is plunged into mourning by the Islamic regime. It is the regime which seems unrealistic because it was responsible for the execution of thousands and thousands of its own people: dissidents and conscripts in the senseless eight-year war...

The regime orders book burnings, the destruction of ancient Persian cultural artefacts, and arbitrary arrests and executions without trial. Roza will not set foot outside the house because she refuses to cover herself in accordance with the new rules, rigidly enforced by the Morality Police. Music is banned; any manifestations of pro-Western attitudes brings brutal punishment. The family leaves Tehran for the small village of Razan, hoping that its isolation will allow them some freedom. But sorrow follows them there too, along with all kinds of strange fantastical beings: fireflies that live in Roza's hair; Jinns who avenge themselves on Beeta's lover; and dragonflies which portend the future. The more I read, the more strange it seemed, and yet it made sense when the all powerful Ayatollah Khomeini goes mad in a mansion of mirrors and dies alone, haunted by the spirits of the dead. This is the magical world delivering the justice that this evil man evaded in the real world.

To read the rest of my review please visit <https://anzlitlovers.com/2017/08/01/t...>

Kate says

The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree by Shokoofeh Azar is set in Iran in the period immediately after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Using magic realism and classical Persian tales, Azar tells the story of a family deeply affected by the post-revolutionary chaos and brutality.

Things I understand and appreciate about The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree:

01. That it is a stunning example of using folklore to tell a modern story.
02. That Persian folklore is rich and I knew very little of it before reading this book.
03. That books such as this introduce readers to a slice of history and to a culture that isn't readily accessible (or rather, under-represented) in Australia.
04. That Azar's writing is very fine and powerful –

For Mum, Sohrab wasn't a son awaiting an uncertain fate, imprisoned in an uncertain prison. For Mum, he

was the culmination of heartbeats, desires, loves and hopes that she had endured her entire life; of which she dreamed, for which she searched in novels and in the layers of poetry; and which in the end, she lost.

I realised that we dead are the sorrowful side of life, while the living are the joyful side of death.

05. That a scene featuring a mermaid will stay with me for a very long time. It made me feel physically ill (again, testament to Azar's strong writing).

06. That some of my favourite bloggers (Lisa and Brona) loved this book to pieces.

Things that I know about myself as a reader:

01. That I don't really like magic realism.

02. That if, while reading, my mind drifts after a page or two and that it takes a monumental effort to refocus, it's not the book for me.

Unfortunately list two outweighed list one.

I found this book hard reading, predominantly because of the structure. The Persian tales interwoven with the narrative about the family resulted in a story that was intricate and meandering. Tales of jinns, ghosts, incessant snow storms and the building of a palace of mirrors were vivid but also so numerous that I felt the family's story lacked cohesion.

The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree has been shortlisted for the 2018 Stella Prize. Will it win? If the judges like magic realism, then perhaps. If it was up to me, no.

2/5 But don't let me put you off...

Brona's Books says

May even be a 4 & half star rating!

I feel that I will definitely reread this book one day.

Magical realism can be a problem for many readers I know. I'm happy to embrace some forms of magic realism more than others. I especially like those that draw fairy tales, fables and myths into our modern real-world setting. (FYI: I'm not so keen on the type of magic realism that brings in a lot of deliberately disorientating layers and details. I like my magical realism to still make sense somehow!)

Azar's use of magic realism did that and more. It's quite a skill to weave a story that allows your somewhat sceptical reader to accept the existence of ghosts, jinns and mermaids. But Azar did it for me - I was with her from the start, on that level at least.

However, it did take me a while to get going. It may have been a translation thing or it may have been a slightly different approach to sentence structure. Many of the books I gravitate towards lately are ones with

concise, short sentences. So maybe it was simply my lack of practice in reading longer, flowing, complex sentences. Whatever it was, I found the start of The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree choppy and erratic.

It wasn't until the special circumstances of our narrator were revealed at the beginning of chapter 5 that I was hooked. Suddenly the 'playful, poetic and deeply melancholy' Alice Pung quote on the back cover came to life.

I dropped into a dreamy, almost trance-like state every time I picked up the book. Jinns and groves of trees haunted my own dreams as fleeting childhood memories of news items about the 1979 Revolution were triggered by events in the story. It was angry, it was heart-rending, it was glorious, mesmerising and confronting.

Full review here - <http://bronasbooks.blogspot.com.au/20...>

Lia says

Simultaneously a modern yet mythical retelling of the Iranian Revolution.

The narrative style is unusual and I understand it draws stylistically from Persian storytelling traditions.

An amazing first novel, an interesting choice for the Stella Prize shortlist. Beyond a doubt a wonderfully told story, yet the unusual structure and subject perhaps may alienate all but the most adventurous of readers.

I enjoyed the book immensely and it is well worth the effort and energy to read.

I would be very interested in Ms Azar's next project

Sahar Fazli says

If imagination was a tree, Shokoofeh's Azar's land of imagination is a mysterious forest, dense with oak tree trunks and branches. As an oak-tree-enthusiast, it is no surprise how much I enjoyed reading through the pages of this book even though it portrayed one of the darkest moments of Iran's history, the aftermath of the 1979's revolution. As an Iranian reader, specifically born in northern part of Iran, where most of the story is narrated, there have been many cultural elements that beautifully resonated with me in this book; the authentic feeling of the local lyrics, foods, stories of jinn, etc. All, along with the author's poetic storytelling narrative proves the uniqueness of the voice of the author.

The surreal presence of the ghosts and the mythical creatures might seem unusual at first. But as the layers of the story unravels, it becomes more and more crystal clear why the ghosts are the most dominant presence of the story. Those who lived the transitional life before/after 1979's revolution in Iran know how everything was flipped over from day to night: From music, dance, happy family gatherings and laughter to sorrow, mourning over the loss of the beloved ones, and terror. A terror of a kind that took over the heart of our beautiful culture, dictated the most horrific silence, to the point that one of our greatest contemporary poets, Shamlou, phrases "They smell your breath

Lest you have said: I love you,

They smell your heart:

These are strange times, my dear."

As a kid, I grew up witnessing the life of a neighbor, a mother who lived across from our house, and had lost 8 of her family to the execution orders of Ayatollah Khomeini for political prisoners; her sons, daughters, son-in-law's and daughter-in-law's, and spent the rest of her life in the agony of waiting for them to come

back home. Some days, she woke up excited, started cooking for her lost children, cleaned the house, watered the plants, with the hope that they will be back because she had sensed it; the enlightenment... When Roza, the mother in the enlightenment of the greengage tree goes to the depth of the forests of Mazandaran, you can feel the heaviness of all the sorrows, hopes, and the suppressed passions that she carries with her...

In my own family, my mom lost her job, and her beloved brother and uncle whom I never met, but I grew up hearing the stories of their great, outspoken, helping and caring characters. So the unique way the author chose to tell us this story, is the most poetic way of portraying the terror and darkness that inundated our beautiful land after the revolution and during the eight years of Iran-Iraq war onwards...I definitely recommend this book to all who enjoy exploring the world of realism through imagination...

ns510 says

Such a powerful read! Rich with magical realism, this was right up my street. It also reminded me somewhat of Salman Rushdie's writing style.

This is a story of an Iranian family, and how the Iranian Revolution impacted on their lives collectively, and individually. Torn apart and traumatised, the effects are far-reaching. Widening the scope, there is also a bigger story in there, of the effects war and religious extremism has on the country as a whole.

Sometimes you need a touch of the fantastical to make sense of horrifying events. Why not jinns, whose mythology are a central part of the culture? Or ghosts and mermaids? Despite this, the story still felt bleak and angry and melancholy, and made for a sobering read.

I admired this book a lot. What a talent. I also felt quite upset and cynical thinking about endless, senseless fighting, for all sorts of unnecessary reasons that essentially boil down to basic greed and desire for control and power. Will we never learn? What is the point of history. Safe to say, it makes for endless fodder for writers, and indeed, the urgent need to document events in history was another important point made in this book.

Bron says

Beautiful and weird (like only magical realism can be) this was so sad and terrible but also kind of hopeful. I gave it 3.5 stars

Mohammed Morsi says

This is a fantastic journey. A recommended read.

It's not your usual writing style but once you let yourself flow along and be carried (by the excellent translation), there is a story that will teach you, make you happy and sad, enlightened and grateful. Definitely recommended.

Calzean says

For me this was a very unusual novel with elements that I'll never understand. But what a book! Narrated by a 13 year old Iranian girl whose family flees the Islamic Revolution of the 70s to a remote village where they hope for peace. Each member of the family is featured at various lengths as to what has happened and is happening to them.

Sounds simple but the story is layered with ghosts, jinns, spells, Iranian folklore, debates on death versus life, the beauty of nature, wise men, sad men, love, religions and politics.

I was captivated throughout even when her sister gives birth to sea creatures and turns into a merperson. Also, the harshness and brutality of the regime is contemplated against the apparent madness of the ageing Ayatollah who has a fixation of mirrors. Unusual imagery told in an unique style.

Sonia Nair says

A reimagining of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and its aftermath, Shokoofeh Azar's *The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree* expertly traces the travails of a family of five during one of the most turbulent times in Iran's political history.

Read the rest of my review on Books+Publishing here: <https://www.booksandpublishing.com.au...>

Sandra says

Short listed for the Stella Prize 2018

'And love, only love
carried me to the expanse of life's sorrow
delivered me to the places to become a bird.'

This book transported me to a time, place and culture I had little knowledge of and filled me with wonder, respect and despair. It shows the effect of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 on an Iranian family of 5; Father Hushang, Mother Roza, Sister Beeta, Brother Shorab and our narrator Bahar, the youngest daughter. Bahar's narrative has an omniscient voice, knowing intricate details to events unseen. The reason for this is revealed a quarter way into the story and changes the perspective of the novel.

This book merges reality with the fables of Persian culture creating a story full of magical realism. It shows the divided existence of a extreme dictatorship on the individual who still holds their poetry and mystical beliefs essential to their identity. It shows the senselessness of war and the way it eliminates hopes, dreams and lives but not the human spirit.

I must admit when I began reading this book I was unsure if I would completely connect with it. The magical elements both fascinated and disturbed me. After the second chapter I decided to let go and go with it. I am so glad I did because this book was a gift of knowledge, light and love.

This book was written and translated from the Farsi. The writer Shookoofeh Azar is an Iranian refugee to Australia in 2011. I am so excited that books like this are being translated in this country. This is not a flawless book but captured my heart and will stay in my consciousness, so 5 shiny ?????, but you can see more if you climb to the top of the greengage tree.
