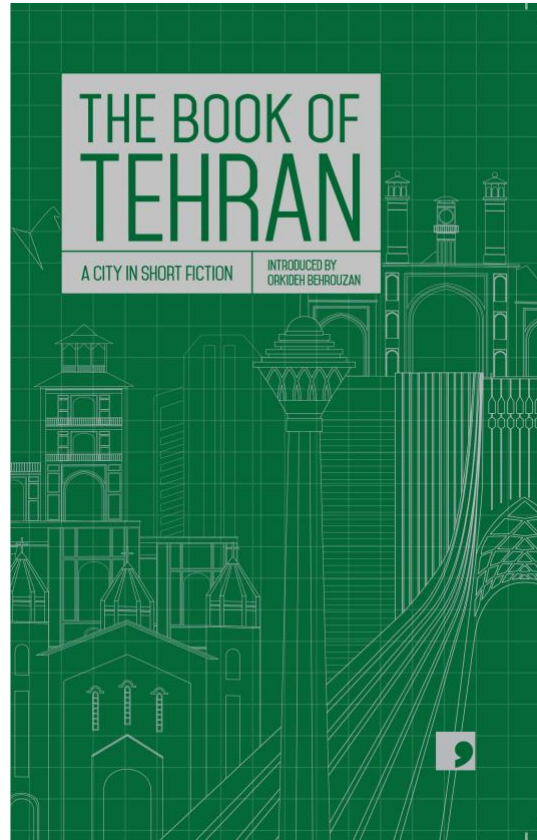


Spotlight on Women in Iranian Literature

***The Book of Tehran* (excerpt)
Betrayal by Azardokht Bahrami
Translated from the Persian by Poupeh Missaghi**



Today, we continue National Translation Month's tradition of featuring Iranian women writers and translators. We're delighted to share an excerpt from the new collection of short stories [*The Book of Tehran*](#) published in March 2019 by Comma Press. We selected *Betrayal* by Azardokht Bahrami, translated by Poupeh Mizrahi, a short story that won the 2004 Sadeq Hedayat Award. *Betrayal* is a humorous take on the act of surveillance, highlighting the way people's behavior changes when their relationships are examined under a microscope. Azardokht Bahrami often uses humor in her writing which include screenplays and novels. Her collection of short stories *Wednesday Nights* received the 2007 Rouzi-Rouzegari Award as well as the Press Writers and Critics Award.

Poupeh Missaghi is an accomplished translator, writer, educator, and also Iran's Editor-at-Large for *Asymptote*. We fell in love with her translation and you will, too.

We'd love to hear from you! Let us know how you like our posts, or attend, share, and spread the word about our readings. Open your heart to new experiences and the beauty of the world, and celebrate its cultures and new voices with us using #NTM2019. Happy National Translation Month and happy reading!

—Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman



[The Book of Tehran](#)

Comma Press, 2019

A city of stories – short, fragmented, amorphous, and at times contradictory – Tehran is an impossible tale to tell. For the capital city of one of the most powerful nations in the Middle East, its literary output is rarely acknowledged in the West. This unique celebration of its writing brings together ten stories exploring the tensions and pressures that make the city what it is: tensions between the public and the private, pressures from *without* – judgmental neighbors, the expectations of religion and society – and from *within* – family feuds, thwarted ambitions, destructive relationships. The psychological impact of these pressures manifests in different ways: a man wakes up to find a stranger relaxing in his living room and starts to wonder if this is his house at all; a struggling writer decides only when his girlfriend breaks his heart will his work have depth... In all cases, coping with these pressures leads us, the readers, into an unexpected trove of cultural treasures – like the burglar, in one story, descending into the basement of a mysterious antique collector’s house – treasures of which we, in the West, are almost wholly ignorant.

Betrayal

Azardokht Bahrami

Translated by Poupeh Missaghi

THE WOMAN WALKS TO the door, opens it, and, putting her index finger to her lips, signals to the man to say nothing, then opens the door further for him to enter.

The man stares at the woman in silence then walks in hesitantly.

The woman rushes to the kitchen counter, grabs a whiteboard and a marker, walks back to the man, and hurriedly jots down something on the board: *Don't say a word.*

The man looks at her with surprise.

The woman gives the man a piece of paper and writes on the board: *Read from the script.*

The man starts to read in a dry, unsure tone: 'How are you?' looking at the woman with a smirk on his lips and questions in his eyes.

The woman writes on the board: *Use more emotions. Imagine we're on stage.*

Flirtatiously and in a loud voice, she says, 'I'm fine. How about you?' and immediately writes on the board: *Go ahead! Say the next line. Pleeceaaase, be emotional.*

The man reads from the piece of paper reluctantly: 'I missed you.'

The woman says enthusiastically, 'I missed you more.'

AZARDOKHT BAHRAMI

She then walks to the kitchen and from the distance asks him in a loud voice, 'Want something to drink?'

The man, as if starting to get interested, reads: 'Do you have the usual?'

From the kitchen, the woman, with a peculiar laughter in her tone, says, 'Sure. Of course I do. I always buy it just for you!'

She then takes a bottle of water from the fridge, pours some in a glass, and brings it to the man.

She offers the man the glass, showing neither elegance nor care.

The man looks at the paper and takes the glass. He looks at the water inside with surprise and holds the glass up to the woman with a questioning look.

He reads from the paper: 'Wow, what a colour!'

Reluctantly, he takes a swig of water, smacks his lips, breathes deeply, and puts the glass on the table.

He grabs the marker from the woman and writes on the board: *What are you doing? Why did you ask me to come over? Aren't we going to the rehearsal?*

In a loud voice the woman asks, 'Want more ice?'

The man reads from the script: 'No, darling, I'm good.'

The woman gets up and goes to the kitchen; she comes back in no time and laughs: 'Don't be shy! I know you love ice!'

The man laughs and looks at the paper. He opens his mouth to say something, but decides against it.

The woman writes on the board: *Go ahead. Say it!*

The man shakes his head to say *No*, grabs the marker from her, and writes on the board: *Is this a hidden camera thing? Or are you making a documentary?*

The woman shakes her head to say *No* and cheerfully adds, 'I sure know how the fire within you can only be cooled with these ice cubes!'

BETRAYAL

The man looks at the paper and throws it to the side furiously.

Disheartened, the woman looks at the man. She interlocks her fingers to beg him to read from the script.

The man shakes his head to say *No* and whispers, 'What are you doing?'

The woman laughs flirtatiously and says, 'What am I doing?' while simultaneously writing on the board: *What's wrong with what I am doing?*

The man whispers, 'What the hell is all this?'

The woman draws a question mark on the board.

The man grabs the marker from the woman and writes on the board: *Can you tell me what's going on here?*

The woman grabs the marker from the man and writes on the board: *Didn't you always want to piss Keyvan off?*

Startled, the man points to himself and silently mouths the word, 'Me?'

The woman nods her head with exaggeration and writes on the board: *After Keyvan dodged investing in your film, you promised to get back at him when the time was right. Have you forgotten about this already?*

The man nods his head, hesitantly gives in, and looks at the paper on the table. He says emotionally, 'Do you know what you've done to my heart?'

And he writes on the board: *At least tell me how far we're going to go with this.*

The woman smiles, shakes her head, and gestures that she doesn't know either.

The man writes on the board: *Do consider the fact that I'm married. And I love my wife.*

The woman nods.

Without glancing at the script, the man says out loud, 'How long more are we going to keep this up? I can't take this any longer.'

AZARDOKHT BAHRAMI

Then he writes on the board: *Can't you just tell me the reason for all this?*

The woman laughs loudly and flirtatiously again. 'Be patient. It's all going to be over soon,' she says, then writes on the board: *I don't even know how to be flirtatious!*

The man writes: *You're being listened to, right?*

The woman reads and nods silently.

The man writes: *Keyvan? Or is it someone else?*

The woman reads and points to the word Keyvan.

The man writes: *I can't believe it! Here? In the megalopolis of Tehran? In the twenty-first century?*

The woman nods.

The man says passionately, 'Don't you believe me? You've become my night and day, my air and bread. I've become a moving corpse!'

The woman laughs out loud, grabs the piece of paper from the table, hands it to the man, and gestures to him to continue to read from the script.

The man takes the paper and throws it back on the table.

The woman writes on the board: *I can't continue like this! I can't do it impromptu!* laughing quietly and flirtatiously as she does so.

The man writes on the board: *I can't continue like this either! I can't be dictated to!* He then kisses his own hand, making noises.

The woman is startled. She gives the man a surprised, annoyed look.

The man writes on the board: *You call yourself an actress? You should be able to do this!* while kissing his hand again and making noises.

The woman shakes her head with disappointment.

The man writes: *These acts might be helpful to you, but what about me? What will Keyvan think of me? After all the years of friendship, of breaking bread with one another?* Then he

BETRAYAL

immediately adds: *Actually, to hell with Keyvan! Don't you care how my wife will feel when she hears these noises?*

In an exaggerated manner, the woman gestures to him to leave. Then she begins to chuckle quietly but seductively.

The man writes: *You've forced me into this husband-wife thing without even checking with me! Now you tell me to just get up and leave?*

The woman sighs and writes: *Can you believe it? After fourteen years of marriage, he is keeping a watch on me?*

The man writes: *What's your intention here? To make things worse? To get revenge? To piss him off? Or you simply want to give me a bad name?*

The woman writes: *Nothing will get worse, and you won't get a bad name. We are just going to piss him off a little bit.*

The man writes: *Are we going to the rehearsal? If we're late, Bayati will hang us both from our feet!*

The woman gestures that she is aware of the time and signals for him to go on with his role.

The man grumbles under his breath, kisses his hand, and writes: *So what's my role in all this?*

The woman shakes her head, and the man realises that he has no role whatsoever.

The man writes: *How are you going to prove this?* Then adds: *Right now, the audio and all the other evidence are against us!*

The woman smiles, points to the laptop on the table that's on, and pantomimes to let the man know that it has a camera.

The man writes: *Is it recording?* The woman nods.

The man shakes his head and, with a smile on his face, writes: *Do you, by any chance, want any noises other than kissing?* and gives the woman a sly look.

The woman laughs charmingly and sighs.

The man kisses his hand again, making even more noise than before.

AZARDOKHT BAHRAMI

The woman makes a face, gets up, and walks quietly to the kitchen.

The man begins to pant loudly.

By the kitchen counter, the woman covers her ears.

The noises coming from the man tell of the beginning of a passionate lovemaking.

The woman takes an apple, a tangerine, and an orange from the fridge, puts them on a plate along with a knife and fork, and brings them back to the man.

The man's noises have reached their peak.

The woman writes on the board: *That's enough. You're making me sick!* She holds the whiteboard in front of the laptop and then turns it towards the man.

The man reads the text on the board and writes: *Are you sure? I can keep going!*

The woman shakes her head with a smile and holds the whiteboard in front of the laptop.

The man once again kisses his hand, making noises. This time his sound effects are filled with mischievousness. The woman laughs quietly.

The man moves two fingers through the air to gesture walking towards the door. With the movement of his head, he asks the woman: *Shall we get going?*

The woman writes on the board: *I'll get ready.*

The man mumbles passionate whispers.

The woman covers her ears, gets up, tiptoes to the room, and gently closes the door behind her.

The man keeps panting, making lots of noises, voraciously kissing his hand and cunningly smiling towards the laptop. His noises tell of a passionate lovemaking.

About the author

Azardokht Bahrami was born in 1966 in Tehran and graduated in Dramatic Literature from the Nivaran Cultural Centre. She has published four books, including *Wednesday Nights* (2006), which received the 2007 Rouzi-Rouzegari Award, as well as the 8th Press Writers and Critics Award. The title story also won the 2004 Sadeq Hedayat Short Story Award. Her novels include *Blunders Blog* and *Water, Sky* (2014), and she has also written scripts for numerous TV series (such as *Family Restaurant*) and the Radio Culture Network. She is soon to release a new short story collection published by Cheshmeh.

About the translator



Poupeh Missaghi is a writer, educator, translator, and Iran's Editor-at-large for *Asymptote*. She holds a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Denver and an MA in Translation Studies from Azad University of Tehran, Iran. Her published translations include, from English into Persian: Roberto Bolaño's *Last Evenings on Earth*, Cheshmeh Publication, Tehran, and from Persian into English, works in *Copper Nickel*, *National Translation Month*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *World Literature Today*, *The Puritan*, *Asymptote*, and elsewhere. She was also part of the Persian language team for the University of Iowa's Whitman Web yearlong translation project of "Song of Myself." Her prose writings have appeared in *Catapult*, *Entropy*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Feminist Wire*, *World Literature Today*, *Guernica*, *The Quarterly Conversation*, *Asymptote*, and other publications.