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The Corpse Washer (The Margellos World Republic Of Letters)



Synopsis

Through the struggles of a single desperate family, Sinan Antoon's novel shows us the heart of Iraq's complex and violent recent history. Descending into the underworld where the borders between life and death are blurred and where there is no refuge from unending nightmares, Antoon limns a world of great sorrows, a world where the winds wail.

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Customer Reviews

The Corpse washer, this novel of Sinan Antoon that it is translated from its Arabic version titled "The Pomegranate Alone" by him too to English, and as I read it couple of times and now having it in English, the same feelings that struck my high walls of isolation and demolished them to appear naked as the reality is naked, bitter and painful! Reading and absorbing the main character in this novel "Jawad or Jodi" let me think, and to believing this story is not fiction, I felt him, lived his questions, transformed myself to this character, and after I finished the reading, I was naked again, felt of huge emptiness, indeed I just want to go back between the words to find myself, yes it is sorrow, fear, and pain but whenever I read any chapter, I feel I am standing next to Jodi, as his close friend that he will never die and will never leave him alone! This novel, the corpse washer is a must to read, if you want to see Iraq and get the picture from another corner, this novel will help you, and it is highly recommended!

Although I am no longer a novel reader as I used to be when I was younger but this book was an

exception! I bought it when I heard the author in an interview on NPR and I was impressed by the dialogue and felt compelled to order the book and read it. I am an Iraqi teacher who left Iraq right after the first Gulf war just like the author and I lived and witnessed most of the events in the story!! However, you don't need to be Iraqi to appreciate the novel because it is a master piece beyond description. I was quite taken by the book for days and weeks!! highly recommend it.

A story of life in Iraq from the 80s until the present is sadly portrayed in this novel that took the author 2 years to write in Arabic & another two to translate into English. I learned about it on NPR & glad I did.

Beautiful, poignant tale of the life of corpse washer from the Iran- Iraq war to the aftermath of the disastrous American invasion. You don't have to be Iraqi to appreciate Jawad's struggle to survive each day.

An astonishingly beautifully written novel about life during post-Saddam Iraq at the height of sectarian violence. Eloquently captures the devolution of civil society into "us" and "them."

This beautiful and poetic story is one of the best novels I've read in a long time. Since the book was originally written in Arabic it doesn't read as an Iraqi author writing for foreigners, and this makes the story seem more intimate and real. Sinan Antoon eloquently portrays the immense tragedies that Iraqis have faced over the years through an individual story about a failed artist, and while the story conveys a deep sadness, it is also multidimensional and will leave you thinking about many different ideas/images/stories. Readers who have some understanding of Iraq's history might appreciate the book more, but I think it should seem accessible for anyone. I read it right after Fiasco: the American Military Adventure in Iraq, which is a powerful combination/sequence if your aim is to read more about Iraq generally. I do wish that the publisher had allowed Sinan Antoon to keep the original Arabic title, "The Pomegranate Alone," but other than that, this book is near perfect.

Kafka-esque. A wonderful book, self-translated over four years from Arabic by the author. This short novel through its fierce and powerful prose brings us the experiences of Jawad, the younger son of a Shiite corpse washer, whose Baghdadi environment changes from one that began for him as moderate, fairly secular into a backward free-fall into sectarian violence, civil war and terrorism. The story offers a counterpoint to the American experience of the Iraq invasion, through Jawad, a corpse

washer's son, whose dream of studying sculpture in Europe was thwarted by the occupation and subsequent civil unrest. Jawad is compelled through his internal and external struggle to take over his father's business, one he feels he has neither the stamina nor the spiritual depth to execute properly. Yet, his commitment to his family after the untimely death of his father as well as the collapsed Iraqi economy propels him into four years of corpse washing service, rife with self-doubt, disappointment of delayed personal goals, and concern for safety. He experiences war through the dead he prepares for eternal reward. Each story effects him profoundly, and the horror of each death assaults him through his dreams. The pomegranate tree behind the shop provides the sole outlet for his grief and frustration, and he sits and speaks to it often. Art and duty keep him tenacious; the dead pick away at his soul. The story's title in Arabic is "The Pomegranate Tree."

Understandably, it was changed for the English translation so as not to be mistaken for chick-lit, but I wish the author had kept the original title. The pomegranate tree symbolizes Jawad in that death provides the necessities for life (the tree, water to live and grow; Jawad, the livelihood that provides the income towards his family's survival), and those left behind can continue to thrive and be beautiful simply because we are alive. Read this. It will stay with you long after you turn the final page.

I recently read this book wondering if it would be appropriate for my ninth grade students, and while I would not choose it for them, I loved the book myself. I found it engaging throughout the entire read. It grabbed my attention right from the beginning and didn't let go. It provides a realistic portrayal of life in Iraq during this time period. One thing about *The Corpse Washer* I came to enjoy was how the main narrative is interrupted with brief memories or vignettes from the past. To me it gave the book a true sense of realism. I can only imagine that Iraqis trying to survive this time period spent quite a lot of time reflecting on the past. The vignettes gave the book a disorienting feeling, which again must have been the way that many Iraqis felt. I highly recommend this book, in fact I've already purchased another book by Sinan Antoon, *I'jaam: an Iraqi Rhapsody*, and I can't wait to start it

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