

## **A Review of “The Silence of Scheherazade”**

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Attention to detail makes Defne Suman’s novel, “The Silence of Scheherazade” a joy to read. Scenes come alive with meticulous descriptions of the foods, aromas, sounds and sights that are aptly described. Intricate particulars of life during WWI make this book a great read. Descriptions are breathtakingly vivid, and the novel carries you from the onset to an exotic world during a tumultuous time. “The stars, seen to their best advantage now that the moon had set, were scattered across the entire sky, from the mountain slopes to the dark sea.”

Like “David Copperfield,” the story begins from the moment of the narrator’s birth but soon takes on a modular structure. It gives glimpses of the life of Scheherazade’s affluent grandmother Juliette, who is cold-hearted and indifferent toward her daughter Edith. The reason is that Edith is the result of Juliette’s extramarital affairs. Edith finds out in her teenage years that her true father is a man by the name of Nikolas Dimos. He is a stranger who bequeaths an inheritance that includes a house in Smyrna to Edith before his death. Edith decides to reside in Smyrna with her lover, an Indian spy working for the British by the name of Avinash Pillai. His mission is to infiltrate a Sufi Muslim sect in Smyrna.

In a part of the world where the cultures of the East and the West intermingle, the author mesmerizes her readers with the complexity of these interactions. The foreign instigated tensions among the otherwise peacefully coexisting religious communities, pit one group of citizens against another.

At a time when Edith, Scheherazade's mother, has turned thirty-years-old, the entry of victorious Greek soldiers to Smyrna, who are supported by the British, is an occasion celebrated by the Christian residents while the Muslim Turks hid in their homes in fear. Like pawns in the hands of forces they do not understand, the population sways from one allegiance to another. Simple people once living in harmony are now divided, with enmity taking root among them.

Panagiota, who is of Turkish descent, sees the Greek soldiers' ambitions to conquer more territory as a threat to the wonderful life she and her ancestors have lived for generations. Her beloved Stavros, however, thinks otherwise. Avinash warns seventeen-year-old Panagiota of the possibility of the Turks taking over Smyrna. After all, Smyrna has welcomed the Greek forces, and revenge attacks by the Turks is a real possibility. He tells her to flee to Greece with her family but Panagiota is hesitant.

Emotional scenes of love and heartbreak are described within a setting of war and annihilation. Despite the modular format of the novel, the narration moves smoothly from scene to scene. Characters that are seemingly unrelated come together in an enchanting manner in the last segment of the novel, adding excitement to an already captivating tale. Many languages are spoken by the characters that seem to be from every part of the world, "jumping from one language to another in the middle of a sentence...He had begun his sentence in English, finished it in Greek. Juliette grumbled her reply in French."

The story's dramatic ending shows the author's powerful imagination as well as her command of the tools of writing. Suman weaves the lives of her characters into the structure set by history, seamlessly blending fiction with factual information. Philosophical arguments are placed within

the framework of dialog. “War, Scheherazade, is not what you know. It’s awful, a calamity that makes a man ashamed to be human. May God not wish it on anyone, not even an enemy.”

I must mention that Betsy Goksel’s translation of “The Silence of Scheherazade” is excellent, and one does not have the feeling of reading a translated work of fiction when perusing the pages of this fascinating novel.