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Last Chapter (Modern Arabic Writing)



Synopsis

This thought-provoking, semi-autobiographical book tells the story of Aisha, a young Moroccan woman, and her struggle to find an identity in the Morocco of the second half of the twentieth century. Charting Aisha's path through adolescence and young adulthood up to the present, her story is told through a series of flashbacks, anecdotes, and glimpses of the past, all bound up with a strong, often strident, always compelling worldview that takes in Morocco, its politics, people, and traditions, Islam, and marriage. Male female relationships feature strongly in the narrative, and by exposing us to Aisha's troubled romantic encounters, Abouzeid uncovers the shifting male/female roles within the Morocco of her lifetime. Many aspects of Moroccan society are also explored through the other clashes of the modern and the traditional in Aisha's life. The workplace and corruption, the struggle for women's rights, the clash between Islamic and Western values as well as with the older practices of sorcery and witchcraft, and the conflict between colonial and native language use are all intertwined in a narrative that is both forceful and often poetic. Through a series of tales of emotional disasters, the reader becomes aware not only of Aisha's frustrations but also of her deep commitment to her country and her struggle to defeat suffering, uphold justice, and retain a fierce independence as a woman and a clarity of conviction in her life. Leila Abouzeid is a pioneer among her Moroccan contemporaries in that she writes in Arabic rather than in French and is the first Moroccan woman writer of literature to be translated into English. This stimulating and revealing book adds a new perspective to Maghrebi women's writing, and is an important addition to the growing body of Arab women's writing in translation.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Abu Zeid's The last chapter is a realistic novel about an Arab woman's struggle in her own community. She honestly and skillfully depicts the problems of her own community like superstition, backwardness, sorcery...etc. Moreover she highlights the misinterpretations of Islam for personal interest and to dominate women. What struck me most is her efforts to reconcile modernity with Islam which maybe very odd for a western reader. As an Arab Muslim woman myself I find it possible that Muslim women can pray and fast and at the same time wear modern and western clothes. Here she depicts how religion can be viewed as a defect in an educated woman's personality. For example, in the novel a guy asks her, I heard you are religious waiting her to deny as it was a sign of backwardness but she doesn't deny instead she affirms. Her struggle is that she tries to be modern and religious. Although this is possible at the same time its not fully accepted by everyone around and she is often misunderstood by people around her as we see through out the novel. Moreover, the narrator tells the story of Aisha, her career-orientated high school friend who prefers to be single in order to devote herself to her career. On page 151 "the journalist had asked her (Aisha) whether she chosen to be single in order to devote herself to her career" "it's a big question," she said. "I could write a book on it" which leaves the novel open-ended. When Aisha appears on TV so elegant and beautiful glowing with intelligence and leading a smart discussion at the same time looks sad, the narrator's religious husband states, "A woman's kingdom is her home...I'll bet she's dying to exchange that nonsense for a husband. A Woman should learn enough to raise her children and say her prayer's." (133).

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