

Vida Mashayekhi* wins literary prize



Vida Mashayekhi has always loved storytelling. She took every opportunity to write, even on a napkin or a piece of scrap paper. Vida never had the confidence to read her stories to others, until a very good friend of hers, publisher Zevan Ghokasian, encouraged her to present her works.

Vida's first work was a literary research of musical bibliographies and was published in 1976 with the cooperation of the UNESCO office in Iran. In this book Vida researched 50 years of literary works about Iranian and western music.

Before the 1979 Iranian revolution, Vida wrote articles for a Tehran-based magazine called "*Life and Culture*".

During the revolution and the time of her emigration to Austria, Vida stopped writing. She recalls those days as difficult, but it was also a period to gather valuable experience. Later she used those experiences to write her stories.

For the last six years she has been translating operatic literary works into Farsi and hopes that one day they will be published in Iran.

Vida's translation of the "*Good-Fellas*" screenplay (by Nicholas Pileggi, which Martin Scorsese filmed in 1990) into Farsi was published in 2001. That of the screenplay of "*Sleepers*" (1996) by Barry Levinson

is now in the publishing process.

In her own words, Vida has only begun writing seriously since last year. She has found the courage to share her stories with friends and relatives who in turn gave her confidence to continue.

Her short story "*The endless green corridor*" which represents Vida's life in Austria, won the first prize at the 2004 Literary Contest in Isfahan.

Last year alone she wrote two novels and more than ten short stories. Vida's

first novel "*Azar and Anjadih*" is in the process of being published. It is a story which takes place in old Tehran. All those years of writing stories has filled Vida's life and has become her reason for existing. All her stories originate from true experiences and the observation of other peoples' lives.

Manijeh Torabi

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My Nose and I by Vida Mashayekhi

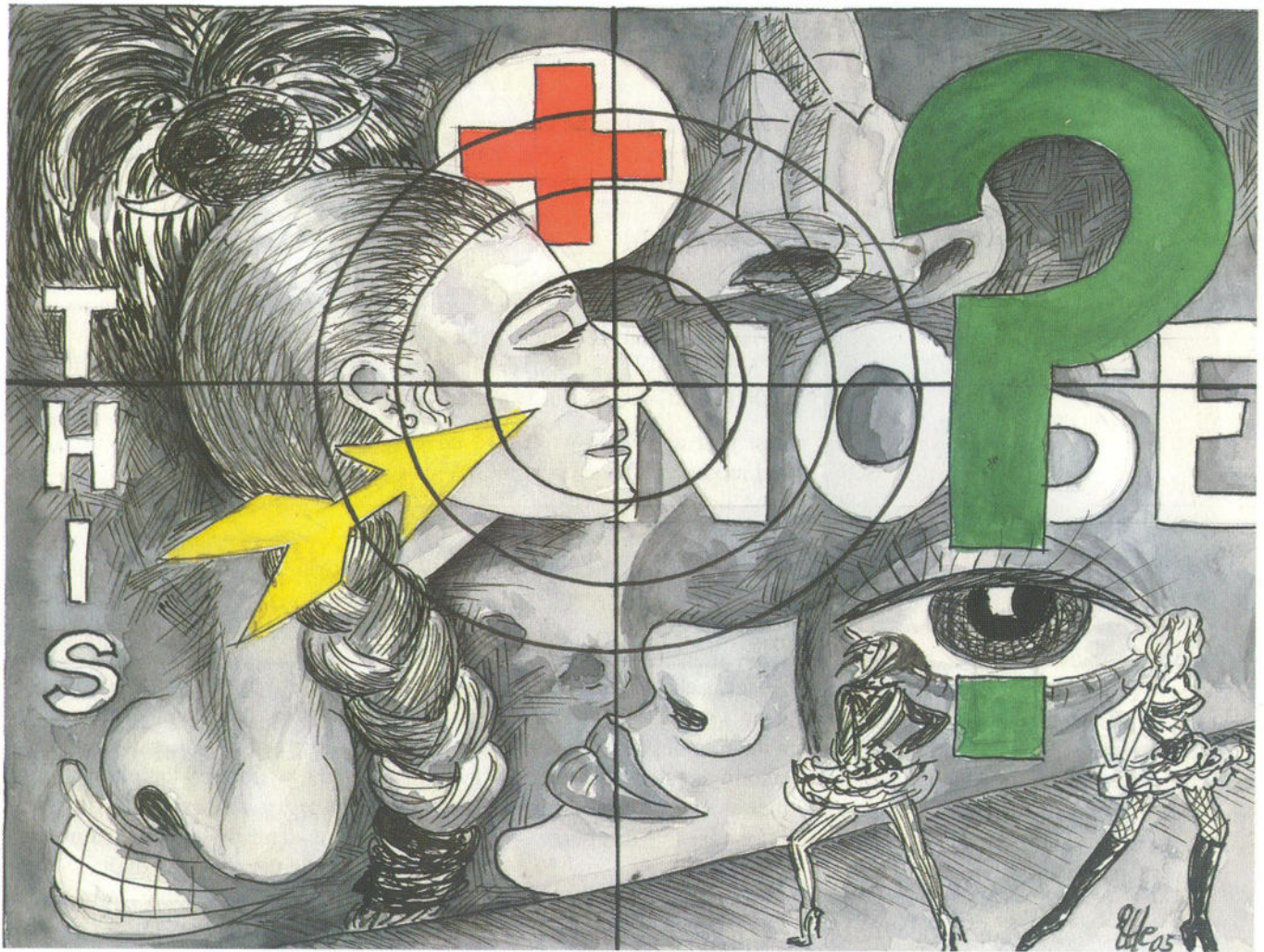
As far back as I remember my nose has been a nuisance to me. I had to put up with countless troubles this nose constantly created for me, not knowing that this very nose would play such important role in my life.

From early childhood my runny nose was "runnier" than other kids my age. My mom used to remember the many times that I begged my nanny to wipe my "boobos". Handkerchiefs were my life's most indispensable tool, without them I felt simply naked and exposed. Those days there were no tissue papers, or at least we didn't use them in our household. My mom used to sew white cotton handkerchiefs with our initials nicely stitched in one corner. They were kept neatly folded in a drawer and of course mine would run out first forcing me to steal from my elder sister's pile. If I ever forgot my handkerchief, disaster was inevitable. The sleeve of my school uniform would then replace my missing utensil for my ever so running river, eh nose. My mom often wondered about the white stains on my cuffs. When she did realize where they came from, I was punished with a soft ear pinch. On other occasions in class I would simply pretend to pick up my eraser or sharpener from the floor and stay there under my desk. Boy was I happy that

my uniform was skirted to replace my forgotten handkerchief. Once in the fifth grade I was called to read my essay in front of the class. This time my essay was exceptionally excellent as I had neatly copied it from my older sister's the previous night. So, there I was proudly reading from my essay and what do you know? My damn' nose called for attention again. With every word came a long sniff. Sniff, word, sniff. Finally my teacher, I don't know out of mercy or anger, opened her handbag and gave me a handkerchief of her own. My biggest wish at that moment was to blow my nose in that nicely ironed handkerchief, but I did not dare.

Finally the essay was read and I got to the safe haven of my seat away from everybody's gaze. My classmates complimented me on my hilarious theatrical performance. They didn't have the faintest idea what hell I had gone through!

Puberty brought many physical changes and a nose double in size. In the school bus I never sat on the seats vertical to the driver's where the rest of the crowd would get to see my prominent profile. That was it. I had to get rid of this nose.



I decided to have a nose job the minute I had my own income. At home whenever I brought up this subject my father would say *"Don't interfere with nature. What your creator has given you is the best for you."* Now I was at war with my creator! Why hadn't he given me a nice slender nose, if he was such a great creator? For sure when god was distributing first class noses I was lining up somewhere else and when my turn came, good ones had run out and God just gave me the next best thing he had on his desk, a trumpet!

I was trying to avoid people and new acquaintances, especially boys who would make fun of me and my nose on the way to school. After high school graduation, I managed to find a part time job in the office of my uncle as office help. Not a penny of my income did I spend, it all went right into my savings. Despite my father's objections, I set up an appointment with a plastic surgeon. A week before the

operation I went to see a Barbra Streisand film with my friends. It was her first movie to come to Iran. After the film my friends nastily asked me why I wanted to get rid of a nose so similar to Barbra's? The night before the big day two girlfriends came to stay over at our house for moral support. Tehran's summer heat often drove families to sleep on the house rooftops under the clear starry sky. Lying in our beds, we all stared into the dark sky full of twinkling stars, silent with anticipation of the great event the following day. With every breath I took, a mild whistle came from my nose. *"Such a pity to have a multi-talented nose like this operated on. It even plays songs!"* My friends said sarcastically.

After the operation when the surgical cast was removed, I realized that my new nose was smaller but rather curved to the side with unequal nostrils, one bigger than the other. Now, apart from tissue papers, nose drops were added to

my life-saving accessories as my nose was perpetually blocked. *"It doesn't matter, my voice has become smoky and sexy."* I would suggest to myself. Eventually I did gain back my long lost self-confidence. Was it my confidence that found me a husband or my new nose, I don't know? But I found a husband, and I got married. At my wedding, the only content of my little white satin bag was a handkerchief and my nose drops. I was grateful to God, who was now my friend again, that my nose stayed dignified and dry the whole evening.

After the guests left the long awaited magical moment of being alone with my husband approached. My heart was pounding with anticipation. But the romance was short-lived. Embracing me, my husband covered my lips with a long passionate Clark Gable kiss and I turned blue after about 30 seconds being cut off from air. Shortage... no, lack of oxygen! Kissing was not my

thing, I decided. Still a sensitive subject to me, I did not break the taboo story of my nose to my husband and my new relatives. I even tore up all my childhood photos as I did not want to be reminded of my old face. A distant relative of my husband's whose typical curiosity was well known often asked whether my nose was natural and if yes, why were the nostrils not equal? "No two organs in our body are identical" I would say! My main concern, when pregnant, was that my child would take after me and have my monstrous nose. Luckily my husband's genes were more dominant and the baby was practically all him...

Years later we were invited to the house of an old girlfriend who after my marriage stayed very close to both my husband and me. We were talking about "the good old days" and she happily brought for us albums full of old photos. I never forget the look on my husband's face as he saw those pictures of me and my nose, or shall I say my nose and me. His silence lasted only until we reached home. There, he announced that he no longer wished to live with a woman who had lied to him. "You lie about something as obvious as this, how can I ever trust you again?" My poor nose became the excuse for my divorce. Mind you, within a month of our divorce, he and the very same girl friend with the notorious album got married. I was not invited.

A few years later my son finished high school and left Iran to study in Europe. Missing him a lot I finally visited him after two years. During a shopping trip to a department store I missed seeing an unfortunately very well cleaned glass door, and bang! What do you think broke? I bet you are not surprised. I was quickly transferred to Iran and had to undergo correctional surgery on my nose! Though the unequal nostrils could not be fixed.

On my next visit to Europe, my son now working in a reputable firm as an intern insisted on introducing me to one of his colleagues, a middle-aged widower. Eventually we invited him to our place for traditional Persian food. At dinner he sounded very intellectual

and cultured and I felt we had many common interests. On several occasions that we went out together we took in concerts, operas, art galleries, plays and so on. To impress one another we acted too intellectual, even for our own standards! Until that horrific night, when he invited me on a "special date", as he called it.

I was positive he was going to propose to me. What better than this? Even my son liked him and approved of him. And I? I would be all settled again and my son did not need to worry about me. All morning I was excited with my preparations for the evening. I bought a new evening dress, had a complete facial, had my hair done, manicure and pedicure... You name it, I did it. We were going to eat first and then go to the theatre.

Before leaving the house I, of course, used a strong decongestant to keep my nose open. I could not afford sniff attacks. Not tonight. He picked me up in his car and we ate at a fancy restaurant. Wine and candlelight. Everything was perfect and I was wondering all the time when the big moment would come. No sign of it yet. At the theatre we sat to watch an avant-garde play on a small dark stage with just a chair and a few books on the floor as the only setting. It was a small theatre with about 50 seats all occupied. When the lights went out I was starting to become drowsy. I had had a hell of a day preparing for the evening, or was it the red wine? The first actress appeared on stage and started screaming. The other character sat on the chair. My eyelids were growing heavy. The woman left the stage and the actor was left alone. The tapping noise of the shoes on the wooden stage was the only audible sound effect. I had serious problems keeping my eyes open. I was vaguely dozing. The two characters on stage were now staring silently into each other's eyes. I was gone. What a sweet moment of surrender... Some-one pinched my arm and woke me up with a start "you are snoring!" All around us was absolutely silent. I broke into a cold sweat thinking how all these people must have heard my snoring. Stupid

nose was clogged again despite all the nose drops... I would give anything to get out of that situation as quickly as possible. The play was over and we left quietly. I was brought home in silence and dropped off with a cold good-bye at my son's door. To my great disappointment, I saw no sign of him again.

Didn't I say that my nose was always a nuisance to me? After a while I came to the conclusion that perhaps this was not such a tragedy after all. Who wants a man who drops you like a hot potato just because you snored? Who knows, perhaps his own snoring was even louder? To hell with him. Perhaps I should be grateful to my nose after all...

Translated from Farsi by Nushin Zaher

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