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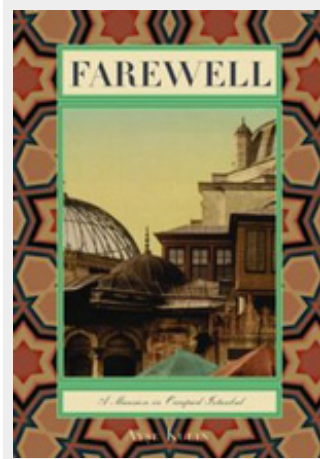
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FAREWELL: A MANSION IN OCCUPIED ISTANBUL ▾



Dalkey Archive, paperback,
9781564787248

FAREWELL: A MANSION IN OCCUPIED ISTANBUL

by *Ayse Kulin*

Translated from the Turkish by *Kenneth J. Dakan*

Reviewed by **Tad Deffler**

Like the story of the blind men and an elephant, the answer to the question, "What type of book is this?" will depend greatly upon your perspective.

Some might describe *Farewell* as an adventure set during the Turkish War of Independence. Kamal is a radical supporter of Mustafa Kemal (the nationalist revolutionary who will become known as Atatürk) and is wanted by the authorities. He has serious health problems, and a relapse sends him into hiding at the house of his uncle, Ahmet Resat Bey, the newly-appointed Finance Minister to the Sultan. As Kamal struggles to regain his health and rejoin the fight, his actions create problems in a household divided over family loyalty and fear of the police.

Or, this might be considered a love story, since much of the plot concerns the relationship between Kamal and Mehpare, a distant cousin, who struggle with the barriers of class, beliefs and familial disapproval.

Other readers might focus on the discussion of changing gender roles. The two strongest characters in the story are young women who, through personal conviction or necessity, step beyond the traditional behavior exemplified by the older female characters in order to shape their own lives.

And, of course, the book can be read simply as a historical novel, providing a glimpse into the time of the Republic of Turkey's emergence from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.

For my part, however, the most notable aspect of the book is the examination of the changing national ethos as encapsulated in the character of Resat Bey. On one hand he is an intimate of court life, conscious of the pull of

tradition in a society that formalized it for over six centuries. On the other, he is intelligent enough to realize that the imperial ambitions of the European powers are changing the world and that blind adherence to an old way of life would result in it being swept away. Resat's personal struggle to move from being a subject sworn to the service of the Ottomans to a citizen of a modern state reflects the larger conflict happening in his entire society.

One question I found myself asking while reading was, "Why this particular story?" There were larger, more colorful events during that period of Turkish history. My copy of the book doesn't have a preface by the author, nor does the short biography of Kulin at the end provide any insight. However, some searching on the Internet reveals that this is more than just historical fiction: it is biographical fiction. Ahmet Reşat was a real person; in fact, he was Kulin's great-grandfather, and the final pages of the story contain the announcement of the birth of Sitare, Kulin's mother. In some sense, Kulin, herself, straddles the two worlds: she grew up in Ankara, the capital of the new country Atatürk founded, but spent her summers in her great-grandfather's house in Istanbul, the capital of the older nation.

So, for better or worse, *Farewell* is a novel that is hard to categorize into any specific genre, and many types of readers may find it piques their interest in the final days of the Ottoman Empire and Caliphate.

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