Recommended Iranian Novels

This list of Iranian novels was developed by Heba El-Shazli, an Egyptian political science professor at George Mason and Georgetown Universities. I took a number of courses she taught on Understanding the Middle East Through Literature, including a 6-six lecture course on Iran. Heba’s classes mix lectures on the politics, economics and cultural side with discussion of particular novels. They are given at Politics and Prose, a terrifically creative bookstore in D.C.

Andy Mott, Pahlavi University, Shiraz 1965-7

Iran:

1. My Uncle Napoleon: A Novel – April 11, 2006 by Iraj Pezeshkzad (Author), Dick Davis (Translator), Azar Nafisi (Introduction)

The most beloved Iranian novel of the twentieth century

“God forbid, I’ve fallen in love with Layli!” So begins the farce of our narrator’s life, one spent in a large extended Iranian family lorded over by the blustering, paranoid patriarch, Dear Uncle Napoleon. When Uncle Napoleon’s least-favorite nephew falls for his daughter, Layli, family fortunes are reversed, feuds fired up and resolved, and assignations attempted and thwarted.

First published in Iran in the 1970s and adapted into a hugely successful television series, this beloved novel is now “Suggested Reading” in Azar Nafisi’s Reading Lolita in Tehran. My Uncle Napoleon is a timeless and universal satire of first love and family intrigue.

Series: Modern Library Paperbacks
Paperback: 528 pages
Publisher: Modern Library; Reprint edition (April 11, 2006)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 0812974433

by Shahrnush Parsipur (Author), Faridoun Farrokh (Translator), Shirin Neshat (Preface)

"Using the techniques of both the fabulist and the polemicist, Parsipur continues her protest against traditional Persian gender relations in this charming, powerful novella."—*Publishers Weekly*

A modern literary masterpiece, *Women Without Men* creates an evocative and powerfully drawn allegory of life in contemporary Iran. Internationally acclaimed writer Shahrnush Parsipur follows the interwoven destinies of five women—including a prostitute, a wealthy middle-aged housewife, and a schoolteacher—as they arrive by different paths to live together in a garden in Tehran.

Shortly after the 1989 publication of *Women Without Men* in her native Iran, Parsipur was arrested and jailed for her frank and defiant portrayal of women's sexuality.

This volume is the first author-approved translation of *Women Without Men*.

**Shahrnush Parsipur** is the author of *Touba and the Meaning of Night*, among many books. Born in Iran in 1946, she began her career as a fiction writer and a producer of Iranian National Television and Radio. She now lives in exile in California.

**Shirin Neshat** is an internationally acclaimed visual artist from Iran who adapted *Women Without Men* into a feature film.

**Faridoun Farrokh** is a professor of English at Texas A&M International University.

**Paperback**: 192 pages  
**Publisher**: The Feminist Press at CUNY; Second Edition (January 10, 2012)  
**Language**: English  
**ISBN-10**: 1558617531  
**ISBN-13**: 978-1558617537


*Persepolis* is the story of Satrapi's unforgettable childhood and coming of age within a large and loving family in Tehran during the Islamic Revolution; of the contradictions between private life and public life in a country plagued by political upheaval; of her high school years in Vienna facing the trials of adolescence far from her family; of her homecoming--both sweet and
terrible; and, finally, of her self-imposed exile from her beloved homeland. It is the chronicle of a girlhood and adolescence at once outrageous and familiar, a young life entwined with the history of her country yet filled with the universal trials and joys of growing up.

Edgy, searingly observant, and candid, often heartbreaking but threaded throughout with raw humor and hard-earned wisdom--*Persepolis* is a stunning work from one of the most highly regarded, singularly talented graphic artists at work today.

**Series:** Persepolis  
**Paperback:** 341 pages  
**Publisher:** Pantheon; 1 edition (October 30, 2007)  
**Language:** English  
**ISBN-10:** 0375714839  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0375714832

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**4. Strange Times, My Dear: The PEN Anthology of Contemporary Iranian Literature** Paperback  
— January 2, 2013

*by Nahid Mozaffari (Editor) and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak (Editor)*

When Arcade Publishing originally contracted this extraordinary collection of poetry and literature, the Department of the Treasury was attempting to censor the publication of works from countries on America’s “enemies list.” Arcade, along with the PEN American Center, the Association of American Publishers Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division, and the Association of American University Presses, filed a lawsuit in federal court against the United States government. Their landmark case forced the Office of Foreign Assets Control to change their regulations regarding editing and publishing literature in translation, and Arcade is proud to reissue this anthology that showcases the developments in Iranian literature over the past quarter-century.

Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, the United States has been virtually cut off from that country’s culture. Despite severe difficulties imposed by social, political, and economic upheavals, as well as war, repression, and censorship, a veritable cultural renewal has taken place in Iran over the past quarter-century, not only in literature, but in music, art, and cinema. Over forty writers from three generations contributed to this rich and varied collection—or, to use the Persian term, *golchine*, a bouquet—one that provides a much-needed window into a largely undiscovered branch of world literature. In the wake of the Green Revolution and sweeping changes in the region, this particular *golchine* is more relevant than ever, and will
bring literary enjoyment as well as a fuller understanding of a complex and ever-shifting culture.

**Paperback:** 496 pages  
**Publisher:** Arcade Publishing; 1 edition (January 2, 2013)  
**Language:** English  
**ISBN-10:** 1611457289  
**ISBN-13:** 978-1611457285


In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, rare-gem dealer Isaac Amin is arrested, wrongly accused of being a spy. Terrified by his disappearance, his family must reconcile a new world of cruelty and chaos with the collapse of everything they have known. As Isaac navigates the terrors of prison, and his wife feverishly searches for him, his children struggle with the realization that their family may soon be forced to embark on a journey of incalculable danger.

**Series:** P.S.  
**Paperback:** 368 pages  
**Publisher:** Harper Perennial; 1st edition (April 29, 2008)  
**Language:** English  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0061130410


by Sadegh Hedayat (Author), D.P. Costello (Translator), Porochista Khakpour (Introduction) The story is narrated by a young man, a painter of miniatures, whose name is never given. He feels an overbearing need to recount an experience he went through that has shattered his whole existence. A beautiful woman, an old man and a cypress tree are the recurring motifs.

**Paperback:** 160 pages  
**Publisher:** Grove Press; 60309th edition (October 12, 2010)  
**Language:** English  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0802144287