

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

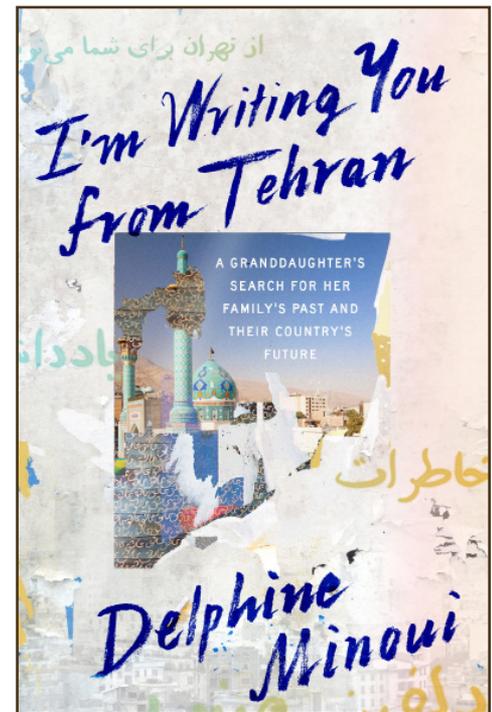
Reading Group Gold

I'm Writing You from Tehran

A Granddaughter's Search for Her Family's Past
and their Country's Future

by Delphine Minoui

Translated from the French by Emma
Ramadan



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Born in Paris to a French mother and an Iranian father, Delphine Minoui visited Iran as a child, shortly before the 1979 revolution. Nearly twenty years later, grieving the recent loss of her beloved grandfather, she decided to return to Tehran and apply her skill as a burgeoning journalist to discern the truth about her ancestors' homeland. She would stay for ten years.

As she gets to know her devout grandmother for the first time, makes friends with women who host secret dance parties, and slowly starts to learn Persian, she begins to see Iran through her grandfather's eyes. When the political situation falters, leading her to lose her press credentials and contend with police interrogations, her commitment to Iran and to human rights only deepens. Illuminating a part of our world that is too often obscured, *I'm Writing You from Tehran* raises compelling questions about democracy, identity, and the resilience of the human spirit.

We hope that the following guide will enhance your enjoyment of this transformative memoir.

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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Delphine Minoui writes directly to Babai, her grandfather, interweaving his life story with hers throughout the book. What is the effect of this approach? Which aspects of Babai's identity echo hers? If you were to write a memoir, which family member would be the most prominent?
2. Discuss the role of the morality police. What are the focuses and limits of their power? How does their very existence affect the "immorality" they are assigned to eliminate?
3. What did you learn about the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran? What new knowledge surprised you the most?
4. How does Delphine navigate the cultural differences of her French-Iranian ancestry? As she masters the subtle nuances of Persian, what does she discover about language and its influence on her sense of self? Ultimately, where is her homeland?
5. What were your impressions of Mamani, Delphine's Iranian grandmother, and her unlikely friendship with Marie? What do Mamani and Marie provide to one another? Could you have a similar relationship?
6. As you read about Ahmadinejad's reelection in 2009 and the subsequent crackdowns, what were your thoughts about the election process and what it takes to achieve true democracy?
7. Describing her departure from Iran on June 25, 2009, Delphine recalls the subsequent censorship experienced by Sepideh and Sara, and the airport arrest of a French researcher, Clotilde Reiss. What does Delphine's experience tell us about the peril of journalists and other writers around the globe?
8. What transformations did you see in Mahmoud and his wife Fatemeh, and in Niloufar, Sepideh, and Leyla, as they struggled to endure? What lasting gifts did these friendships impart to Delphine?
9. When Delphine's fascination with mullahs led her to twenty-six-year-old Mehdi J., what did you discover about life in a country where religion and the government are united? Is true faith more or less likely to survive in a secular society?
10. After Delphine's computer is stolen in Paris, she returns to Tehran to reclaim her notebooks. What is the significance of this archive? In what ways does it provide evidence of herself and history?
11. What portrait of Babai emerges? In a closing passage, Delphine asks him, "How would you have reacted to that fierce repression?" How do you think he would have reacted, and how would you personally have reacted? Would you have fled or remained?

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12. In Beirut, the author finds a comforting blend of facets: French and Iranian people, the freedom to choose whether to wear her scarf around her neck or on her head, and the urge to write a personal narrative. At this pivotal point in their lives, how do Delphine and her fiancé, Borzou, reconcile their connection to the West with their determination to give the world a window on Iran?
13. The book's opening pages include four lines from the fourteenth-century poet Hafez, and it closes with the poem that Sara passed to Delphine. How do these two poetic visions reflect the experiences described in *I'm Writing You from Tehran*? Is poetry as necessary as journalism in telling Delphine's complete story?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Delphine Minoui is a recipient of the Albert Londres Prize for her reporting on Iraq and Iran, is a Middle East correspondent for *Le Figaro*. Born in Paris in 1974 to a French mother and an Iranian father, she now lives in Istanbul.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Emma Ramadan lives in Providence, Rhode Island, where she is the co-owner of Riffraff, a bookstore and bar. She is the recipient of a Fulbright scholarship, an NEA fellowship, and a PEN/Heim Translation Fund grant. Her previous translations include the genderless novel *Sphinx*, by Anne Garréta.

Reading group guide written by Amy Root Clements

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