



# Foreigner

*Nahid Rachlin*

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## Foreigner Nahid Rachlin

"Nahid Rachlin has an intimate insider's knowledge of present-day everyday Iran — of people and places, houses, streets, and families — and she writes of them with a clarity of perception and style that makes them instantly recognizable and even homely and familiar to the reader." — Ruth Prawer Jhabvala "Rachlin's prose carefully understates and suggests her heroine's awakening to a pervasive atmosphere of menace and sensuality; residue of a culture she thinks she has abandoned, but which continues to claim her." — Bruce Allen, *Chicago Tribune* "Foreigner gently raises new as well as timeless questions about an unhappy woman's faith and freedom." — *The New Yorker* "Conveys the texture of extended family, the stress of modernization, the strain of Moslem rigidity as well as the harmony of nature, of dust and carpets, fruits, sweets, tea, fine rice and gossip. Always gossip." — Eden Lipson, "Special Edition," WNET/Thirteen

## Foreigner Details

Date : Published July 17th 1999 by W. W. Norton Company (first published April 1st 1978)

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Author : Nahid Rachlin

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# From Reader Review Foreigner for online ebook

## Cyrusmoqtaderi says

This was my first look into N. Rachlin's novels and I found myself quite caught up in the book. It's a short book and the story tends to pull the reader along so as to make it a quick read. I found the story much simpler than her more recent novel, *Jumping Over Fire*, and with less depth. There was more emphasis on the movement of the story as opposed to details about the places the characters visited or deeper inquiry into the day to day lives of each character. However, this did not detract from the book at all, rather it gives the novel a quicker pace (well suited to the main character's search and the theme of discovery that is central to the story).

Very interesting to read this personally, being someone with strong Iranian heritage, but has never visited the country. I did think that some aspects of the story were a bit predictable, but enjoyable none the less. A great read, and an excellent "first read" if you haven't yet tried any of Rachlin's novels.

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## Jackie says

i must admit i picked this book because it was short but i think that that was the problem— it was TOO short! Again, beautifully written but i found it to be way too rushed and i never did feel much for the main character (Fari— an Iranian woman who had moved to America and returns home for a visit and “finds” herself). I wanted to know more but then the book ended. Rachlin’s *Persian Girls* is a way better read if you want to read about life for women in Iran.

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## Jane Brant says

The struggle of cultures and one's identity within those cultures plays the central canvas for this story of an Iranian woman educated in the US and married to an American. What did influence my overall impression of the book was that it was written in the late 70s when the restrictions on women were not as rigid as they are now under fundamentalist Muslim rule. Would this have changed Feri's decision to return to her homeland?

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## Chuck Heikkinen says

An Iran-born biologist visits her family in Iran after many years of absence. The plight of women in a slow-to-change male-dominated society comes under scrutiny, as she searches for her mother, long-divorced from her father. In the process she questions her marriage to an American and her work, and struggles with the dilemma of not being able to get an exit visa to return to the US without written permission from her husband.

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## **Ladyce West says**

More than about Iranians and their customs, or the contrasts between Feri's American and Iranian parameters, this book is about a complex psychological discovery -- the acceptance of self. I read it twice because the story haunted me, not unlike the way Iran haunts Feri. The bonus comes from a portrayal of Iran from the inside, a knowledge precious to me an arm chair traveller. This is a thoughtful, extremely concise and well written book, introspective and beautiful. A quiet adventure.

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## **K M says**

An Iranian woman who was educated in the US, and who has married an American, travels back to Iran to visit her family after a 14 year absence.

The first time I read this, I read from cover to cover in one sitting. I found it very engaging and at times painfully touching. It is quite short- I think I will read it again one day.

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## **Kallie says**

This narrative is compelling and I read the book several times. We tend to think of Iranian women's lives as more limited than western women's and in many ways they are, especially since the Khomeini regime. This book precedes that time however, so the protagonist, who returns to visit family after living in the U.S., has more options and returns to a society that has not reverted to such harsh fundamentalism though it is indeed sexist. Because the differences are not so stark in this story, we can contrast Iranian and American cultural attitudes without dealing with such drastically reduced women's rights. We see more clearly the ways in which our own society is not so great when the character's husband comes to fetch her back to the U.S. He is prim and unfeeling compared to her and the Iranians we meet through this book, which is rich in sensual detail. This book was well-written and evocative, but a later book I read by Rachlin disappointed, and made me wonder if Foreigner's editor shouldn't get a lot of credit for this one.

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## **Jane says**

The story of a westernized Iranian woman and how a trip back to Iran evokes such a powerful pull on her that it is as if she had never left.

This was so evocative that I fully identified with the woman and understood her state of mind and her ultimate choice.

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## **Sheila says**

I flew through this short read and overall was not very impressed with the character development. Perhaps because it was a novella, the author intentionally didn't spend too much time on the details. There were a few moments in the story where the author almost too casually mentions events that are jarring and require more

explanation (for example, the reason for the awkward relationship between Feri and her brother or the moments of distance between Tony and her).

Overall, I think the story just needed more development. I had a hard time empathizing with any of the characters and wasn't very invested in the fate of any of them.

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### **Nicole says**

An Iranian woman Feri returns back home to visit her family after a fourteen year absence - she has made a new life for herself in the US where she attended college/graduate school and married an American. She is initially in a state of reverse culture shock to be back in her native land and starts to pursue returning back to the US early but events outside her control cause her to remain. She appears to be a woman who oscillates between two worlds and initially doesn't quite fit in either. This novella is a depiction of her internal dilemma and her various interactions with family/friends. While it is a pleasant portrayal of modern Iranian culture, the story felt a bit flat to me as there was no empathy towards the protagonist and the details of various side stories are never fully elucidated. Very quick read but unsatisfying to this reader.

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### **Ruby Emam says**

This is a wonderful book and a pleasure to read. I love this story and I regret that I met Nahid only recently on Goodreads, we could have been old friends by now...

FOREIGNER describes what most of the world population has been through, as human beings have always migrated since the dawn of civilization and will continue to do so. The clash of cultures and the problems of adaptation are well described in this book. The Islamic regime prides itself in having pushed the country back for centuries and to the dawn of Islam, but when I read about the end of the previous deposed Shah's regime, I must congratulate Nahid for her honest account of a regime that always claimed to have taken Iran up to the same level as the civilized countries...

I loved this beautiful and so very meaningful sentence which I quote: "A muslim priest came out, looked past the beggar and spat on the ground..." Such an amazing observation.

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### **Beatrice says**

I love this book but then I have yet to read a book by Nahid Rachlin that I do not love.

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### **Greta G. Hambsch says**

This was an engaging and quick read. I found the main struggle to be about alienation and disappointment in relationships and work, with the clash of cultures exacerbating the protagonist's stress. Feri's decision was not surprising, as her need to resolve her childhood trauma was foundational to self-discovery and moving forward with her life.

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## Ashley says

Evocative and quite beautifully written. The narrator is sleep-walking through her life for most of the novel, and there is a dreamlike quality to the author's writing. I just wish there hadn't been the good-mother, weak-father, cold-stepmother family set-up; it felt a little clichéd. I learned a lot about Iranian culture through reading this novel.

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## Ashley says

Every book I've read by Nahid Rachlin (and as one of her editors, I've even read a couple books yet to be published) transports me completely. I don't know if all these years of reading and editing and analyzing manuscripts has made it more difficult for me to be transported by fiction. Perhaps. But with Nahid Rachlin, I know that it's due to the sheer beauty of her prose, the coolness, the clarity of her craftsmanship, the understated emotions, and her spectacular eye for detail. The pomegranate trees, with fruit bursting on the branch to reveal jewel-like seeds. The gurgling waters of the joob. The fresh fruit in the bazaars piled high--glistening grapes, fresh dates, persimmons. Better than any other writer writing about Iran, or even any country in the region, Rachlin brings the everyday Iranian's experience to light--men and women. V.S. Naipul said of this book that it's brilliant because it's not overtly political--politics are not even mentioned--and that Rachlin's understated prose provides the more powerful political statement.

On the face of it, this is a story of a women in transition, pulled to her homeland at a time of personal flux. She's moved to the United States, where she has a successful career as a biologist and is married to an American man who seems distant, changeable, cold. She realizes, while visiting her father and his second wife, that her mother hadn't just disappeared, as he'd always told her. Instead, she'd left the family for another man. Feri, the main character, eventually finds her mother in another town, and it's this meeting that proves to be the catalyst for the rest of the novel.

But this is almost beside the point. It's rare to find a writer these days who writes "quietly"--who doesn't feel the need to cartwheel across the page, tap-dance through chapters, engage in a continual performance aimed at keeping the reader's interest. In *Foreigner*, and in all of Nahid Rachlin's other work, the deep sense of place (and a true sense of Iran) and the elegant portrayal of women, in particular, haunts your days and nights in the most pleasant way imaginable.

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