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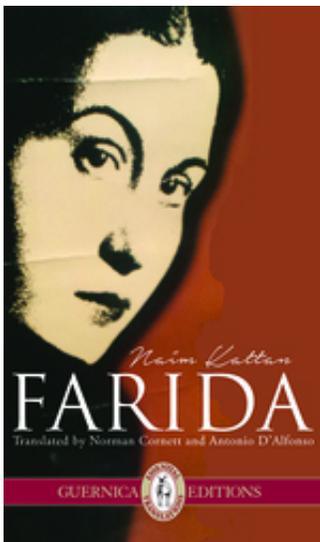
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## **Trans. of Farida Norman Cornett Interviews with Radio Shalom: On Feminism, Identity, and the Middle East**



In a recent interview with Stanley Asher of Radio Shalom, principal translator of

Naim Kattan's *Farida* Norman Cornett speaks about Naim Kattan's life and literary career, his influence on Canadian literature, and his novel, *Farida*, which showcases the vibrant, multicultural communities that existed in Baghdad before the Second World War.

The English translation of Naim Kattan's *Farida*, trans. Norman Cornett and Antonio D'Alfonso, was published by Guernica Editions in Spring 2015.

Naim Kattan was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1928, and left for Paris in 1952 to study at the Sorbonne. He came to Montreal in 1954.

Cornett explains Kattan's unique position as a Canadian writer writing about the Middle East, as he is able to bring with him to the West the perspective from within the Jewish Iraqi community.

“What Naim Kattan permits us to do is [to see it] from within..from the heart of Iraq, from Baghdad, [as] somebody who is born in 1928, and who has as a child, as an adolescent, as a young adult.. because he did not leave Baghdad until after World War II...He's bringing to bear his perspective from the inside: what were the political dynamics and how did they impact the Jewish community?”

“Not only does he bring his Jewishness, his Iraqiness...but he's a Sorbonne educated thinker. This is a remarkable mix...It's a treasure trove of lived experience that he brings to the table in *Farida*.”

Furthermore, Cornett stresses Kattan's role as a major Canadian literary figure: “[his work] constitutes one of the most important literary corpuses in Canadian literature.”

“It goes without saying that Naim Kattan is a principal figure in Canadian Literature, who has published to date 52 books.. he was the head of the Canada Council... [but] he [made] his mark on the literary scene, not only through [what] he set up at Canada Council.. he [is] writing all the time. This is a remarkably disciplined person.”

Moreover, Cornett brings up the topic of identity, as it relates to both Naim Kattan's life and to *Farida*.

In Naim Kattan's literature “we often see him grappling with the issue of identity... of his own identity. And how he deal[s] with his roots or rootlessness.”

Stanley Asher quotes Norma Joseph:

“Naim Kattan said he was born three times. First in Baghdad, then in Paris and the third birth in Montreal.”

In *Farida*, this struggle of identities is presented through literary fault lines, which resemble “one of the first fault lines in Canadian literature— that between anglophones and francophones.”

Norman Cornett explains that one of the reasons why he proposed to translate *Farida* is to “bridge that gap between anglophones and francophones.”

Cornett asks: “How can it be that [for] such a major literary figure in Canada..this is only the 5th book translated into English... [in *Farida*], we see Naim Kattan negotiating between these identities, between these fault lines”

The novel's protagonist, Farida, negotiates in a similar way:

“[In the novel], we see the Sunni, we see the Shia, we see the Armenians..the Christians, the Jews and the