
Reviewed by Nitza Keren, Rehovot, Israel

**The Daughter of an Educated Man**

*In Her Shadow*, Nurit Zarchi's new short-story collection, is a personal and autobiographical book which presents Zarchi as a writer coming into her own. As the eldest daughter of Israel Zarchi, a writer and translator who died at the age of 38, Nurit Zarchi positions herself in these poetical memoirs between an opinionated mother, who overshadows everyone around her, and an absent father. Invoking Virginia Woolf's trope from *Three Guineas*, one could argue that Zarchi as the "daughter of an educated man" is trying her best to pursue her dead father's legacy while evading her mother's shadow.

"[A] woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," famously declares Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*. In a men's world in which there were not many options open to women, Woolf explains, every woman with a modest income (that is, every woman who belonged to the privileged educated classes in Victorian England) could hold a pen. "Anyone can write" if free from the bothers of the mundane world, points out the narrator's mother in the story titled "The Piano" (p. 89), presenting Woolf's premise from a cynical point of view. The mother, who had to give up her passion for music because her husband thought two artists could not live under one roof, didn't think very highly of the genteel man who didn't ride a motorcycle at nights carrying a gun like her second husband, but who in the early days of statehood, when everyone else was either a pioneer or a fighter, became a writer. Nowadays no one questions the ability of women to write, and yet Zarchi, who began her poetic career in the late 1960s writing children's rhymes (in accordance with hegemonic premises) and patiently paved her way up to the central poetical scene, provides living proof of the long road a woman writer, even one with an educated father, has to go before she is declared suitable for the men's club.

This story collection is all about following a lost legacy, the legacy of the dead father, whose rich cultural world remains beyond his daughter's reach. The narrator
symbolically describes this tendency in a story titled "The Suitcase." The suitcase which contained "Zarchi's plans for years to come and books which had not been finished" (p. 29) was placed under the mother's second husband's bed, where, she claimed (quite ironically), it would be safe. But the old and decaying house (a repeated motif in this story collection as well as in Zarchi's other works) is set for demolition. And so, in front of the bulldozers which arrive a day earlier than planned, the mother and daughter witness "the father's pages" flying in the air like a flock of birds, evading the daughter's outstretched hands, leaving her with the feeling that she is "chasing the dead" (p. 34). This scene (quoted on the book's back cover) accurately sums up the girl's hopeless project as it is described in this story collection. "I could not know," she explains, "that plans are horses galloping forward" (p. 29), leaving human life behind. In another story titled "In Our Lady's Shadow" (which serves as the title of the collection in Hebrew), the books which had belonged to the dead father are stored in a barrel of the kind used to import tea from Ceylon or China, and then put on the mother's terrace, exposed to the wind and other plights. Some of the books catch mold and are thrown away, others disappear, as if vanish by themselves, leaving the girl with metaphorically empty hands again. In another story, "Not Precisely Knowing" (referring to Emily Dickinson's lines "Wonder is not precisely knowing and not precisely knowing not"), the books fill up the shabby house, spread out on the walls, barely covering up the cracks.

The collection contains nine stories followed by a long and detailed after-word by Shay Tzur. Most of the stories depict scenes from Zarchi's youth as an aspiring artist who witnesses "the world's spine break down in front of her eyes" (p. 48) and searches for her "inner language" (p. 49), "the language hidden under all languages" (p. 50), the language of the geese passing by (an image familiar to Zarchi's readers from her previous work). Other stories describe episodes from the writer's adult life, "an anonymous lady whose gloomy life does not interest anyone" (p. 70), and who is "torn inside between the desire to express herself and the fear of standing out" (p. 85). The first and last stories in the collection do not follow this scheme, but provide a sort of frame to the poetical memoirs. The opening story, "Dangerous Relations," takes place in the family's backyard and describes a fatal meeting between the next door
neighbors' cat and a romantic and chattering chicken, who runs off from the hen-house on her way to freedom. The gray cat who violently interrupts the enthusiastic speech of the freedom-seeking creature, and his oblivious mistress, a Hungarian-speaking woman known as "Mrs. my man," are not mentioned further on, but the episode remains at the back of the stories as a warning to all romantic souls with feminist agendas wherever they be. Together with the sporadic remarks hovering between the lines, voiced by the narrator's sarcastic mother or by the mature narrator looking back on old events, it provides the book with an additional layer, enriching its meaning.