

Church Valley, Virginia, and engaged-to-be-engaged to her high-school sweetheart" (44).

She had gone from wife to widow in six short years when Joe Davitch died in a car crash, leaving her with his three little girls—Biddy, Patch, and NoNo—and her own daughter, Min Foo. Now, in middle age, she is the matriarch of an extended Davitch family, including the four daughters' husbands and children, not to mention Joe's brother Zeb, a pediatrician, and his uncle, the hundred-year-old Poppy. Beck also inherits the Davitches' Baltimore row house. As sole proprietor of the Open Arms, Beck becomes a professional party-giver: "*All of Life's Occasions from the Cradle to the Grave*, as their ad in the Yellow Pages put it. *For Your Next Important Social Event, 'Experience the Charms of the Open Arms'*" (23).

"Life went on" (45), but sometimes Rebecca felt that "life had treated her unfairly" (52). She dreams she is traveling on a train with her teenage son, as a wash of love engulfs her (22). Min Foo interprets: "you were dreaming how things would be if you'd chosen a different fork in the road" (40). She begins to consider what might have been if she had not let Joe change her life: "she began to lead a whole other life—an imaginary, night-have-been life flowing almost constantly underneath the surface of her day-to-day existence.... Her true real life, was how she thought of this scenario. As opposed to her fake real life, with its tumult of drop-in relatives and party guests and repair men" (92, 94–95).

Beck decides to go home to Church Valley to quest her lost self: "I'd like to go home and sort of ... reconnoiter. Check out my roots" (58). She begins by visiting her mother, and telephoning her old boyfriend, Willard Allenby, Professor of Chemistry at Macadam College. They commence a peculiar courtship as she compares her past and present selves by introducing Will to the extended, eccentric Davitch clan. The question Tyler poses is: can we return to the crossroads where our lives diverged and choose the other path? Few novelists are better equipped than Tyler to explore the ramifications of such a quest. Readers of Tyler will not be disappointed by *Back When We Were Grownups*. And, for those who have never read Tyler's novels, *Back When We Were Grownups* is as good a place to start as any.

Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa, eds.

Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction

Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2004. Pp. 336. \$24.95

Reviewed by Carol Fadda-Conrey

In 1990, in her introduction to *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists* (1994), Joanna Kadi aptly called Arab-Americans "the most Invisible of the Invisibles," thus relegating them to the

lowest rung on the minority totem pole. The events of September 11, however, altered that status overnight, hyper-exposing Arab-American invisibility. *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction* is the first compilation of creative work by Arab-American authors to appear after September 11, with its various featured stories serving in very subtle ways to replace the damning image of the terrorist Arab with more human and realistic portrayals of the everyday lives of Arab-Americans in the U.S. In fact, *Dinarzad's Children* is the first anthology of its kind to feature exclusively contemporary Arab-American fiction. Preceded by such anthologies as *Grape Leaves: A Century of Arab American Poetry* (1988), *Food for Our Grandmothers* (1994), and *Post Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (1999), *Dinarzad's Children* testifies to the coming of age of Arab-American fiction and its elemental role in the burgeoning field of Arab-American literature studies. As the editors note in their introduction, "For better or for worse, Arab Americans have arrived" (ix).

The mix of new and seasoned writers featured in this anthology contribute to a variety of perspectives, offered in the stories by way of an array of Arab-American characters. Some are newcomers to the U.S. faced with alien surroundings and displacement-ridden days. Others are second-generation Arab-Americans who witness their parents' cultural bewilderment while coping with the duality of their own lives. Above all, together these stories articulate a strong statement against the deceptive myth of the melting-pot narrative, highlighting the jagged and laborious side of an acculturation process that might even be impossible to accomplish. Moreover, these stories intricately weave together the complexity of Arab-American identity, with the end result being a mosaic of nationalities, religions, social classes, as well as personal and historical backgrounds. From Randa Jarrar's "Lost in Freakin' Yonkers" to Susan Muaddi Darraj's "The New World," Khaled Mattawa's "First Snow," and Diana Abu-Jaber's "My Elizabeth," the familiar story of the immigrant/expatriate/exile/minority is rewritten and revised to convey multiple Arab-American points of view.

Such multiplicity extends to the diversity of the term *Arab*. Collectively, the stories pinpoint specific national identities including Lebanese, Syrian, Egyptian, and Jordanian ones, among others. In Mohja Kahf's "The Spiced Chicken Queen of Mickaweaquah, Iowa," for example, instead of the general Arab-American label, we encounter more distinct characters like the Syrian-American nuclear physicist Dr. Rana Rashid and the Omani woman Mzayan. Their relationship accentuates the gulf that can separate Arab-Americans from each other (represented in this story mainly by education and social class) while stressing the connecting factors (such as sharing the same language and experiencing discrimination) that bridge differences and render such characters part of one collective identity. Moreover, by conveying the various experiences, traumas, and memories that a more detailed national identity might signify, the stories featured in this anthology give a much-needed depth to the generalized

hyphenated Arab identity. In Patricia Sarrafian Ward's "How We Are Bound," the characters' stories are shaped by the haunting memories of the Lebanese civil war. The characters' sense of loss and displacement in an unfamiliar America is intricately bound to (but far exceeds) the difficulties of enduring fourteen years of war in Lebanon. In this way, this collection of stories succeeds in rendering the world of Arab-Americans more nuanced and in making it more accessible to the uninitiated reader while retaining enough individuality of tone, style, and content to defamiliarize the familiar for Arab-American readers themselves.

As the progeny of Dinarzad, the famous Scheherazade's sister, who instigates the tales of the *1001 Nights* but then "disappears into silence" (ix), these writers defy the stigma of invisibility doled out to them as minority writers. Instead, they become the equally articulate counterparts of their better-known African-American, Latin-American, and Asian-American kin, signaling a shift in their collective representation as Arab-Americans and minority peoples of color. This anthology is a much-needed conciliatory ingredient in the overtly tense relationship between Arabs and Americans in the current political and cultural arena, defying "the stereotype of the Arab [that] remain[s] one of the few racist images that can still be portrayed with unchecked abandon" (xiii). As Kaldas and Mattawa put it, "The children of Dinarzad are facing their own crises. They are obligated by their art to tell their stories well, and their sense of integrity demands that they tell them in truth. We think they succeed in both" (xiv).

Alan Freeman

Imagined Worlds: Fiction by Scottish Women 1900–1935

Frankfurt/M: Lang, 2005. Pp. 247 US \$50.95

Reviewed by Gavin Miller

Imagined Worlds is a study of the female Scottish novelists whose work in the early part of the twentieth century was drowned out by what Freeman aptly terms "the louder voices of the Scottish renaissance" (7). Those who declaimed so loudly tended to be male, and to be poets. At their heart was Hugh MacDiarmid, whose manifestos for Scottish cultural authenticity are now regarded with some skepticism. Scottish women's writing, with its concentration on an often middle-class domestic sphere, seemingly conventional narrative form, and lesser engagement in national or class consciousness, became marginalized, and was neglected by later critics, despite the often striking success of some of these authors. Freeman's book considers seven Scottish women writers from the period: the Findlater sisters (Mary and Jane Helen), Violet Jacob, Catherine Carswell, Lorna Moon, Willa Muir, and Nan Shepherd. The first five authors are considered in the first part of Freeman's book; the last two are considered at greater length in the second part.