



Traces of Enayat

Iman Mersal

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Iman Mersal's biography explores the troubled, unfulfilled life of Egyptian writer Enayat al-Zayyat.

In 1963, twenty-six-year-old Enayat al-Zayyat committed suicide using sleeping pills. Enayat had finished one novel and was working on another; she was also involved in divorce proceedings and a custody battle for her son. Enayat had been given the pills during her treatment for depression and panic attacks.

Enayat's novel *Love and Silence* was published after her death and inspired radio and movie adaptations. Even so, her literary reputation remained somewhat marginalized. After discovering *Love and Silence* in 1993, Mersal began a gradual quest to learn more about the novel's talented, tragic author. She pieced together facts from obituaries, newspaper and magazine articles, and Enayat's journals. She also met with surviving family members and interviewed Enayat's closest friends. Traveling to Egypt from Canada, Mersal retraced Enayat's final years, moving from her home in Dokki to the tomb that holds her remains. Throughout her purposeful obsession, Mersal felt like Enayat's ghost was following her "in earnest." But Mersal, too, began to experience psychological stress and was often diverted from her work by family and career obligations.

The book's historical backdrop is intriguing, placing particular focus on the progression of Egyptian women's rights. In her fiction, Enayat noted that women were "men's possessions." Her divorce petition required her to provide supporting witnesses; Quran-based law mandated that women witnesses testify together so that "if one errs...the other may remind her." A decade later, the release of the passionate film *I Want a Solution* persuaded then-president Anwar Sadat to reform Egypt's restrictive, sexist divorce code.

Traces of Enayat is a haunting biography that rescues a compelling legacy from a fragmented story of loss.

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