



Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade

Assia Djebar , Dorothy S. Blair (Translator)

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In this stunning novel, Assia Djébar intertwines the history of her native Algeria with episodes from the life of a young girl in a story stretching from the French conquest in 1830 to the War of Liberation of the 1950s. The girl, growing up in the old Roman coastal town of Cherchel, sees her life in contrast to that of a neighboring French family, and yearns for more than law and tradition allow her to experience. Headstrong and passionate, she escapes from the cloistered life of her family to join her brother in the maquis' fight against French domination. Djébar's exceptional descriptive powers bring to life the experiences of girls and women caught up in the dual struggle for independence--both their own and Algeria's.

Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade Details

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Author : Assia Djébar , Dorothy S. Blair (Translator)

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From Reader Review Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade for online ebook

Keith says

Can be a bit confusing with the interweaving of time frames from past to more present. Algeria's colonization- and the fragmentation of its history, told from both oral stories and written reports from Algerians, french soldiers, and observers. An interesting piecing together of different views to create a sense of history and identity. Discusses the strength and importance of the role of women in this time of revolution and struggle.

Lindsay says

This was a little hard to get into at first, but after taking my time with it and really looking at everything she was doing, it became an amazing masterpiece. Djébar interweaves stories from across cultures, genders and time in order to create a history of Algeria that focuses on being inclusive and understanding that good and bad are in everyone. It's beautifully written - I haven't come across an author who can write so poetically and brilliantly since I read Steinbeck years ago. The more I think about this book the more I piece together the fragments and see a whole that is incredibly complicated and interwoven. I highly recommend this. Just be prepared to think.

Kayleigh says

3 stars.

Read for my Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Middle Eastern History class, not going to review.

Yomna says

This is a really beautiful book. Assia Djébar, first and foremost, wants to speak honest words and heal past traumas.

"How shall I find the strength to tear off my veil unless I have to use it to bandage the running sore nearby from which words exude?"

She dissects Algerian identity, diaspora identity, how language feels for those who don't feel at home in the colonizer's language and their mother language, Algerian resistance, the quiet suffering of MENA matriarchs who bear their burdens patiently, sexuality, religion and so many more topics that weave her memories, the memories of the women who lived bloody history of the colonization with her and the memories of the women who come after, who have to deal with silent ghosts that are always there.

In the end, she almost writes resignedly that there is no end for the tunnel. You will never heal all those traumas, you will never be able to bandage all the wounds and maybe there is some truth to that but she doesn't know that she gave the first stepping stone and that now, we have the smallest chance, but a chance, at finding healing at the end of the tunnel.

Roger Brunyate says

My Body, my Land

Why am I reviewing this? Do I even understand it? No, not entirely, but I understand enough to know that it is a remarkable work, part philosophy, part personal statement, part a history of Algeria under French rule. Its very language a paradox: an Arab author writing in French, the language of the conquerors—but also the language that gives her freedom as a woman from the patriarchal oppression in her own land. And reading it in French as I did, I got an extraordinary sense of Djébar's writing, sonorous, richly colored, syntactically free, juggling unfamiliar terms and proper names. I attach a sample below;* not for nothing is she a member of the Académie Française. Her prose sometimes has the detachment of an historian, sometimes the immediacy of personal confession, sometimes the intoxication of a poet—but a normal novel this is not.

Look at the cover, a detail of a Delacroix painting, perfectly chosen. It is obviously influenced by Delacroix's visit to Algeria, full of colorful orientalism. But it also represents a rape, and the underlying theme of Djébar's book is surely the rape of a country and the repression of women. Indeed, for her, the failure to fully possess either her country or her own body are one and the same thing. The feminism of her writing is personal, political, and historical at one and the same time. Alternate chapters of the book tell the story of the French conquest of Algiers in 1830, the repressive and even genocidal campaigns against guerrilla resistance that followed, and the final wars before independence in 1962. But in the personal chapters that come in between, Djébar is as much concerned with male dominance as with colonialism.

Her opening scene, "Little Arab Girl's First Day at School," contains virtually the entire book in a nutshell. A woman walking her daughter to school realizes that the girl will learn to write, and that writing will both expose her to oppression and give her the means to overcome it. She remembers once receiving an innocent letter from a boy, and her father tearing it up unread. I'd like to offer the rest of the chapter in the English version by Dorothy S. Blair, translated as *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, because it shows Djébar's extraordinary enfolding of the feminist, political, and sexual in almost every paragraph:

During the months and years that followed, I became absorbed by this business of love, or rather by the prohibition laid on love; my father's condemnation only served to encourage the intrigue. In these early stages of my sentimental education, our secret correspondence is carried on in French: thus the language that my father had been at pains for me to learn, serves as a go-between, and from now a double, contradictory sign reigns over my initiation. As with the heroine of a Western romance, youthful defiance helped me break out of the circle that whispering elders traced around me and within me. Then love came to be transformed in the tunnel of pleasure, soft clay to be moulded by matrimony.

Memory purges and purifies the sounds of childhood; we are cocooned by childhood until the discovery of sensuality, which washes over us and gradually bedazzles us.... Voiceless, cut off from my mother's words by some trick of memory, I managed to pass through the dark waters of the corridor, miraculously inviolate, not even guessing at the enclosing walls. The shock of the first words blurted out: the truth emerging from a break in my stammering voice. From what nocturnal reef of pleasure did I manage to wrest this truth?

I blew the space within me to pieces, a space filled with desperate voiceless cries, frozen long ago in a prehistory of love. Once I had discovered the meaning of the words—those same words that are revealed to the unveiled body—I cut myself adrift. I set off at dawn, with my little girl's hand in mine.

It is hard to know to what extent the book is autobiographical. The "I" might be Djébar herself, or at least as much as the real woman (Fatima-Zohra Imalayen) cares to reveal through her *nom-de-plume*. In the last half of the book, where the sections follow one another like movements in a piece of chamber music, enfolding themes and variations, she will introduce several different "I" voices—resistance fighters, exiles, torture victims in the last wars against the French—any one of which might have been her as a young woman, but one assumes were not. But she becomes all women, just as she becomes her whole country.

And so to the title. The "Amour" is not going to be a history of the writer's romantic life, though she has a remarkable passage when the young bride's cry at the moment of defloration in a Paris apartment becomes like a rallying cry echoing across borders and through time. "Fantasia" is more complex: an allusion to the musical structure of the book, a specific term describing the cavalcades of horsemen with rifles that are features of Arab celebrations, and (by analogy with *fantassin* meaning "fighter") a symbol of armed resistance. Perhaps even a national ideal, noble but fated? The same ambiguity returns in the final section of the book, entitled "Tzarl-Rit." This is an Arab word for an ululation made by striking the lips with the hand (like a child's war whoop). Both Arabic-French dictionaries she quotes ascribe this only to women, but one calls it a cry of joy, and the other a howl of despair. There is much despair in this book, but joy too—and that is what makes it so extraordinary.

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Here is a small sample of Djébar's French, sonorous images with few verbs, admittedly at the end of a short chapter entitled "Sistre" (sistrum), whose intent is both musical and poetic:

Soufflerie souffreteuse ou solennelle du temps d'amour, souffrière de quelle attente, fièvre des staccato. Silence rempart autour de la fortification du plaisir, et de sa digraphie. Création chaque nuit. Or broché du silence.

Amina says

L'Amour, la Fantasia est le genre de livre dans lequel on vit, on voyage, on rêve.. Au fond d'une Algérie ancienne, prise, violée, brûlée, Assia Djébar nous raconte des histoires qui peut-être ont échappé aux historiens, les misères, le courage, la solitude de tout un peuple..

Erin W says

My attempts to be more worldly with my reading sometimes lead to great discoveries, and sometimes they lead me here. Not that Assia Djébar is not a fine writer; her prose is lovely, if a bit joyless. I did not care for this book, however.

One thing I would have appreciated would have been Djébar establishing a stronger narrative through-line. There are many first-person narrators in this book, from all eras, and I couldn't keep them all clear. Is the one who played with her cousins in the opening chapter the same one who later got married in Paris? Whose brother died in the siege? Was it hers or someone else's, or maybe even someone's grandmother's?

Maybe the point Djébar intended to make her was that the land--Algeria--is the real star here. I definitely got

a feel for the constant turmoil of the area, from the French invasion in 1830 up until their war for independence in the 1950s and 60s. Djebbar weaves a nice correspondence between this land teeming with contradictory traditions and the Muslim women, full of conflicting emotions about their lives, their bodies, and their relationships with men.

But when the book moves back into the battlefield--oh, so boring. And the battlefield occupies at least 50% of the narrative. So, ultimately, not a win for me.

Claire says

Read for Contemporary Postcolonial Literature.

There were passages of this book that completely blew my mind because they were so beautifully written. Exploring themes of women, violence, war, memory and writing, Djebbar suggests what it means to tell a traumatic story, to create an archive and to listen to the experiences of everyday citizens.

Bjorn says

1830: France invades Algiers. 1962: Algeria gains independence. (1936: Assia Djebbar is born. 1984: *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* is written.)

It's hard to call this a novel. It's not. I'd call it an essay, except at 284 pages that's stretching it. Orientalism aside, the quote on the front calling it a "mosaic" isn't far off. Djebbar mixes her own autobiography with historical sources from the 19th century and discussions with women who remember the struggle for independence, and what came before and after it.

1950s: a 13-year-old girl joins the fight for liberty after seeing her brother gunned down. Captured by the French, she sneers "What are you going to do, execute a girl? Throw me in jail if you want, you won't be here long enough to keep me in it." 20 years later Assia Djebbar interviews her, a prematurely aging woman, taking care of her husband's children. So it goes.

The central (and somewhat belaboured) metaphor here is the veil: the one women are expected to wear past a certain age, sure, but also the other veils. The one drawn over the victims of colonialisation by letting the colonialists write history. The one drawn by language, by the palimpsest of history (Algiers has Roman ruins, Christian saints, Turkish beys...) The things that are hidden by being made conspicuous, and vice versa. The freedom offered by untouchability.

While the man still has the right to four legitimate wives, we girls, big and little, have at our command four languages to express desire before all that is left for us is sighs and moans: French for secret missives; Arabic for our stifled aspirations towards God-the-Father, the God of the religions of the Book; Lybico-Berber which takes us back to the pagan idols--mother gods--of pre-Islamic Mecca. The fourth language, for all females, young or old, cloistered or half-emancipated, remains that of the body: the body which male neighbours' and cousins' eyes require to be deaf and blind, since they cannot completely incarcerate it...

People are buried, not just in the ground (martyrs, victims, traitors, invaders) but in the language as well; some openly, with huge monuments, others quietly, so as to pretend they never existed. Or at least never needed a monument. Djebbar writes of Algeria in French, the country that enslaved her people, the language that let her mother treat her father as an equal, the language that isolated her from the women of her own family.

Exposing myself by writing my autobiography in the language of the former enemy puts me at constant risk of burning myself up.

It's notable that even *The Battle of Algiers* puts men at the centre of everything. Meanwhile, European politicians want to solve a problem simply by banning a piece of cloth. And so layers keep being added, and all a writer can do is point them out.

Chris says

The book interspersed the history of the Algerian people in their fights against France, especially the 1830 invasion and the liberation war of the 1950s and 1960s, with personal vignettes of the author and other women who lived through these times. While it was often poetical and thoughtful, it was a tough book to read. Maybe if my French was as good as my English, I could have appreciated it more. Not just difficult French vocabulary but also Arabic and Berber vocabulary which weren't familiar. And maybe, if she had so chosen, Assia Djébar could have given us more help in being able to follow some of the narrative. Using Google and Wikipedia I was able to make sense of most of it.

While reading it, there was a danger of me finishing the book and thinking "Why did I bother?" but I didn't. Upon completing the book I thought about all she recounted and how pleased I am that I persevered. It wasn't a conventional novel or history. It was pieces, reflections and some well researched information about a subject many of us in the UK know little. The few Algerians I have met I have liked and because the country is not really open to western tourism, it has a certain mystery and appeal even. About three or so years ago, I read *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* by Yasmina Khadra. That was a completely different story of Algeria, albeit one which also included quite a bit of history of 20th century Algeria. But it made me very interested in the country. I especially liked how Yasmina Khadra described the appeal of the small town of Rio Salade. Another book I have read which is relevant is *L'art français de la guerre* by Alexis Jenni which also intersperses personal vignettes with accounts of war. Jenni follows a French soldier who fought in WW2, Indo-China and Algeria. While Assia Djébar's book is very much from the female perspective, Alex Jenni's is most definitely from the traditional male viewpoint.

Imen Lameri says

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Hadrian says

Fantasia is a book in two parts, which alternate before one narrative takes over. The first is a retelling of the French conquest of Algeria and the following insurgency in the early 19th century. The second is an autobiographical version of the author's life a century later, as she grows as a person and sheds the roles

which are forced upon her from both colonizer and colonized.

Without context, it's easy to assume a novel in French about Algeria or Morocco titled *Fantasia* would be some uncomfortable fetishism. Thankfully there's none of that, at least on the part of the author. This is a project about reclaiming history, from the omissions of the archives and her own veiled position. Djébar reclaims history and her own thoughts, but also holds a wake for the dead and those else who were silenced.

I admire the scale and aims of this project. But, I have reservations on Djébar's style. It is so much a product of the interaction between French and Algerian Arabic that it might not have survived translation. The language is repetitive, and even clichéd at points. Still, I admire the goals and thoughts of this book enough that I will likely look into Djébar's work further.

Helyne says

Ethnically rich and inspiring in its descriptions, this 1985 collection of vignettes is an eye-opening look at a courageous North African country and people that have undergone an incredibly difficult history of colonization, war, and struggles against poverty, and oppression--of its women in particular. Assia Djébar is not easy to read in English translation much less in her original French. However, as I read the translation *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* (original title: *L'Amour, La Fantasia*), I realized I was actually doing both the author and myself a disservice. The French language is an integral part of this narrative because it brings out an ugly irony about colonization. One of Djébar's main themes that runs all through these varied stories on Algeria's difficult history is the oxymoron of communicating her passionately patriotic feelings for her country in the language of the conqueror/colonizer--France. So, why, then, didn't Djébar write the story of this painful history from 1830 to 1962 and beyond in Arabic? I believe she wanted her stories to reach a wider audience, particularly in France where she wished to remind readers of France's brutal treatment of her people in the mid-19th century and later during the bloody war in independence, 1954-62, as well as France's attempted absorption of the Algerian culture into its own. ". . . faced with the language of the former conqueror, which offer me its ornaments, its jewels, its flowers, I find they are flowers of death--chrysanthemums on tombs! (181) . . . This language was imported in the murky, obscure past, spoils taken from the enemy with whom no fond word was ever exchanged: French . . . This language was formerly used to entomb my people; when I write it today, I feel like the messenger of old, who bore a sealed missive which might sentence him to death or to a dungeon" (215).

The collection of stories includes accounts of the original arrival of the French to Algeria's north Mediterranean shore in 1830, and provides vivid descriptions of the atrocities of the conquest--attempted genocide of Algerian tribes who hid in caves and died when French forces set fires outside the entrances to smoke them out. There are also tales of tragic outcomes of later 19th-century insurrections. (The Algerians did NOT want to be conquered by anyone!) Djébar also writes about her own childhood in the 1950s as well as tales of the painful aftermath of the independence for various widows and children.

The book begins and ends with the image Djébar had of herself as a small girl being led to a French school by her father, who had been privileged to receive an education and secure a position as a teacher at that school. He wanted to give young Assia the same advantage of education, the French language, and freedom from the Muslim veil that her young cousins were already forced to wear. But with privilege came guilt and irony. "At the age when I should be veiled already, I can still move about freely, thanks to the French school. . . Unlike [my classmates:] who haven't got cousins who do not show their ankles or their arms, who do not even expose their faces. My panic is also compounded by an Arab woman's 'shame.' The French girls whirl around me; they do not suspect that my body is caught in invisible snares" (179).

This collection is much more than just a self-analysis of Djébar's own identity. It's a whole saga of a country's centuries-long struggle to seize and maintain its identity and unique character despite its tragedy-laced history. As I said, not simple to read, but well worth the journey through Djébar's peculiar mode of expression.

Terence says

Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade is not a novel, or a memoir or an oral history, though it shares characteristics with all three genres. It's a piece of literature that defies easy categorization. It is, perhaps, best described as a meditation on history (Algeria's in this case), alienation and women based on sources from both the French and native sides of Algeria's recent, tragic history, including the author's own experiences (she fought in the last rebellion that ended in Algeria's independence).

There are passages that are intensely interesting and even moving; the reader gets swept up in Djébar's world but then she drops into an off-putting, deconstructionalist voice that threw me entirely out of the book. I would have enjoyed it more had she not found it necessary to pull back from the immediacy of the narrative to beat me over the head with its meaning. Djébar should have had more confidence in her audience, or put the metafictional part of her musings in a separate context.

I'm on the fence still with Assia Djébar. I'm impressed enough and respectful enough of her writing to be interested in reading further but I'm reserving a final opinion.

Pascale says

A book that I can honestly say I hated, from the first page to the very last one. I started reading it in English (part of a series of books for a class on Arab Women Writers), and got suspicious about it while reading the apologetic preface: here we had a translator writing about the “brilliant” style, the “luminous” effects of language, and how the English translation doesn't do justice to the original French, etc. In short, this indicated to me that the translation was either pretty bad, or that the book itself was pretty bad. To confirm my suspicions, barely a few pages in, I realized I hated the reading this book. It takes a lot to get me frustrated like that. The writing was clunky, flowery and convoluted; like trying to read Victorian wallpaper! I got so frustrated with the writing style that I stopped reading the English version of the book and managed to get a hold of a copy in the original French at Powell's. Reading the book in French was a great improvement, since French is a more pictorially poetic language than English. But, Gosh, darn it!, the book still consisted in disjointed and stylistically ethereal, pardon me, incoherent ramblings about the French invasion / rape of Algeria, a jumbled, meaningless amalgam of vague musings about the poetry / constraints of language, about women's repressed / oppressed condition throughout the decades, etc. (snore). It was a struggle to find some shreds of direction towards a meaning of some sort. Reading it, I was grasping at straws, struggling to continue reading; each page turned a motivation to keep on going. It was the literary equivalent of a Bad Trip or a root canal. However, in all things there are positives: Today is a Good Day; I am done with this book and look forward to get rid of it, in French as well as in English! In French (L'amour, la fantasia).

Nathaniel says

Assia Djébar wants you to write a term paper about her book. She wants you to deploy trendy crit theory terminology to unpack her overtly symbolic and extremely self-aware meta-narrative of historical readings, elided autobiography and tiresome, italicized hinge pieces. But she also wants you to learn about Algerian history, about life as an Arab woman and about the torturous process of forging an identity in the liminal

space between a conquering and a conquered nation. Unfortunately, she has little faith in her readers and frequently interprets her own book to be sure that everyone understands how fractured she is, what “the other” has done, on how many levels the metaphor of being veiled can operate, or what a compromise it entails that she is writing in French.

When Djébar gives voice to the Algerian women who aided the native resistance or when she frames the observations of victorious Frenchmen, she shares memorable and moving stories. Her offering of Algeria’s history is absorbable and relevant, knit from carefully chosen details that contrast each other quite appropriately (for instance, the Frenchman observing the battle at an aesthetic remove, peering out at the spectacle and the Frenchman drily tallying the dead stand in pointed opposition to the women who report how often “France” burnt down their homes and destroyed the men of their community). Some of these retellings are gripping and devastating because when Djébar restrains her anger and allows history to speak for itself, the book sails.

I was considerably less interested in her autobiographical chapters, in the precocious observations of the privileged young child who escapes the veil through reading and scholarship. Similarly, the portion of the novel that shows a young Djébar being deflowered in Paris amongst great inward drama and traditional lament verges on melodrama and isn’t strong enough to stand up to the real tragedies in the book.

At one point, Djébar writes, “When writing, I have but one concern: that I should say enough, or rather that I should express myself clearly enough. Rejecting all lyricism, turning my back on high-flown language; every metaphor seems a wretched ruse, an approximation and a weakness.” Aside from the fact that those sentences contain numerous metaphors, Djébar is simply lying. How can she square that sentiment with, “To attempt an autobiography using French words alone is to lend oneself to the vivisector’s scalpel, revealing what lies beneath the skin. The flesh flakes off and with it, seemingly, the last shreds of the unwritten language of my childhood.” Or, “every language is a dark depository for piled-up corpses, refuse, sewage, but faced with the language of the former conqueror, which offers me its ornaments, its jewels, its flowers, I find they are the flowers of death—chrysanthemums on tombs!”

When Djébar works to “resurrect so many of (her) vanished sisters,” her book is unique and engaging; when she pulls back to be her own theorist and when she spotlights tiny moments of her personal development on the world historical scale of her novel, she weakens her project on the whole.

Beth says

This is a book about giving a voice to those who are silent. And to those who have been silenced. Many people’s stories weave in and out of one another, a tangle of emotion that eventually forms the tapestry of a nation’s soul. The stories center on Algeria – France’s initial occupation of Algeria in the 1830s and Algeria’s war for independence in the 1950s.

Most of the voices heard in this book are those of Algerian women. The author herself, older war widows, young brides, outspoken women held in French prisons, silent watchers hidden behind their veils. Ms. Djébar (an Algerian writer and member of l’ Académie Française) juxtaposes stories and images to communicate in an understated way: the freedoms of French women up against the brutality of French generals, the repression of the veil alongside the bravery of Algerian women during the desperate circumstances of the war, the heartwarming along with the savage.

As I was reading the book, I found it to be quite frustrating. It's written almost entirely in the first person, but the narrator shifts without warning. In each chapter, it required effort to discover the identity of the narrator. At one moment the narrative is a memoir, at the next it's a historical account, then it's an interview with survivors of the war. This made for a very frustrating read at times, but in the end the pieces all came together like a mosaic, all the more beautiful and intriguing for the confusion and diversity of its materials. Ultimately I was left with the impression that it was less important for me to know the identity of each speaker than to know that their combined voices made up the pulse of their struggling nation – a heartbeat of shared experiences during a time of war and suffering.

Amid my frustration with the book's form, it was the style of the language that kept me reading. The words and images struck me with force; each scene felt vivid and immediate. I was struck by the recurrence of the image of the veil: we see the veil not only as a garment that hides, covers, and secludes women in their own cloistered world, but also as a metaphoric covering or baring of emotions in daily interactions. Djébar points to the power of the veil as an image both when she describes a veiled face as a *face tuméfiée* and when she speaks of writing as a refusal to veil her voice.

Among the many stories, each told in its own unique voice, there is one chapter that brings an intimacy between the reader and the text that is almost hard to bear. It is written in the second person (in French the even more intimate *tu* form), and tells the story of a pregnant Algerian hostage on a French ship. She gives birth to a stillborn son and we feel her desperation as she senses that she no longer has a land in which to bury him. The immediacy given by the feeling that the story is being told about oneself gathers the reader up into the full storm of emotion in the Algerian plight. I can only end with the power of this woman's words: *Notre terre est à eux! Cette mer est à eux! Où arbirer mon fils mort? N'y aura-t-il plus jamais un coin d'Islam pour nous, les malheureux?*

If you appreciated this review, check out my blog at pagesandmargins.wordpress.com

Erika Higbee says

The way Djébar grapples with her French/Algerian identity in this book shows itself through the form. Carefully crafted in all its parts - she plays with ways of historicizing and organizing information. One just has to remember that some of the narrative is, in the end, overwhelmingly in her perspective. Still a lovely way to humanize the experience of the French conquest of Algeria and the National Liberation movement.

Bob Newman says

A Rich Mosaic of Fragments

This is the first novel written by an Algerian, man or woman, that I have ever read. I suspect that could be true for many readers. As a new voice in my world of literature, then, it's an important book. I saw FANTASIA as a kaleidoscope, though, always producing patterns and colors, always arranged, but not always understandable. I found it very hard to judge this work because it has many facets, like a shifted kaleidoscope.

***** Five stars for the idea or conception of the novel, for language (if it is well-translated), for the whole effort of bringing a woman's perspective on colonialism, on revolutionary struggle, and on tradition. Djébar is obsessed with the "word", especially the written word and its strength. "The word is a torch; to be held up in front of the wall of separation or withdrawal..." Words preserve and pass on memories, tragedies, pain, love and lack of love. Words hold the keys to Algeria's past, the world shattered by the French invasion and conquest of the mid-19th century, when 25 years of war ruined the country. But the French conquerers wrote of it, much more than the Algerian defenders. Their words must be mined for the reality, we must forge the Algerian view from the 'ore'. Words again unite the Algerian women and men who fought France in the 1950s. But those very French words, the language of the conquerers and destroyers, are used to pass on here, in this novel, the very heartfelt, most intimate emotions of the author. She speaks of this. Perhaps silence is more powerful, implying resistance. "Writing does not silence the voice, but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters." Those are the sisters who didn't know French, who could not speak out from their cloistered existence.

****For bringing Algerian history to life from an Algerian perspective, and an Algerian woman's view at that, a woman who, through an educated father and schooling escaped the enclosed future that awaited her. The struggle, the never-ending resistance to the occupation of their land.

***The plot of a novel is a fishing line with some attractive hooks for catching readers. If this line is broken too often, no fish can be caught. The novel becomes a collection of beautiful fragments, leaving the reader to imagine what it could be if it were all joined somehow. FANTASIA suffers from a too intricate sub-division of the voices. It is a layered approach, the conflict between two worlds---a conflict that entered even into the author's soul--- it is effective poetically, but not as prose....we lose track of who is saying what, who is related to whom, where everyone fits in. Overall Djébar reaches us, but the novel has an abstract quality that does not emotionally involve us much with any characters.

Aziza says

The grande dame of Algerian literature is hailed as a Nobel Prize contender, and one of only four women and the first writer from the Maghreb to have been admitted to the prestigious Académie française. She has won many prizes, and *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* is one of her most famous novels for good reason; Djébar artfully addresses themes such as the written, formal language of French versus the oral traditions of Berber tribes, the colonized Algerians versus the French colonizers, self versus the other, and cultural traditions - such as women wearing veils and staying indoors- versus self expression and emancipation. Experts have pointed out that the novel's structure is like a musical fantasia with a "fugue" pattern that has two "melodic lines" which in turn also have a duality each, and interrelate and enhance each other. Indeed, there are two, dual narratives: The first is the "current" time with flashbacks of the narrator as a girl in colonial Algiers. The second is the storyline of "The Cavalcade," focusing on the 1954-62 Algerian War of Independence as well as the French conquest of Algiers and environs in 830. Although most readers revel in this highly complex structure, I admire, but do not enjoy it. Simplistic as this may be, first and foremost, I want to be told a story of people I can relate to and empathize with so that all the history and insight into a culture will not only become meaningful to me as a person but will also lift me up to become a better, wiser me. While I am keenly aware of the chances of my being labeled a "blasphemer," I have to be honest; as amazing an accomplishment as this novel is, this self-important and overly symbolic meta-narrative disappointed me in English as well as French.
