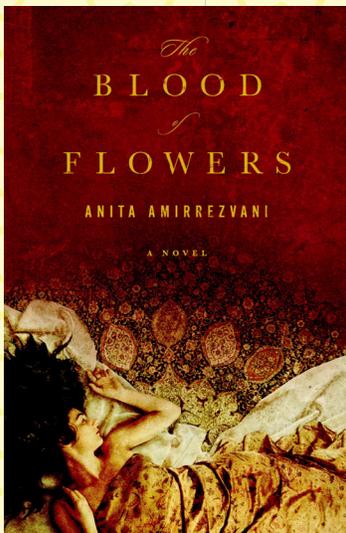


Press Release

THE BLOOD OF FLOWERS

by Anita Amirrezvani



**#1 Book Sense Pick
June 2007**

“The most beautiful book, bar none.”
— Ann Binkley, Director of Public Relations, Borders, Inc.,
in *USA Today’s* Summer Book Preview

“A vibrant debut.” — *Vogue*

“Sumptuous imagery and a modern sensibility make this a winning debut.” — *Publishers Weekly*

Heralded as one of the hottest books of the summer by *Publishers Weekly*, *Vogue*, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, and featured in *Kirkus Reviews’* 2007 First Fiction Spotlight

THE BLOOD OF FLOWERS (Little, Brown and Company; June 5, 2007; \$23.99) has already created a stir around the world, generating an excited auction for publishing rights in twenty-three countries and territories. Now this remarkable novel from first-time author Anita Amirrezvani makes its debut in the United States.

In seventeenth-century Iran, a young girl yearns for her wedding day and anticipates the wisdom and maturity that will come with it. But her luck is about to change for the worse, as the unexpected death of her father leaves her and her mother to fend for themselves in a tough and often cruel world. With nowhere to go and no means to support themselves, they have no choice but to plead for the assistance of long-lost family, the stern but caring rug designer Gostaham and his miserly wife, Gordiyeh.

The young girl, rash and strong-willed, begins to learn the art of making rugs — from choosing the vibrant colors and balancing the intricate elements of design to perfecting her knot sizes and the hard bargaining that will ensure her survival. But when she catches the eye of the son of a wealthy horse trader, she is contracted into a short-term marriage known as a *sighbeh*, which threatens to ruin her reputation and, thus, her future.

THE BLOOD OF FLOWERS offers a rare and insightful look inside the lives of Iranian women and transports readers to the vibrant, bustling markets of Isfahan, the cool stone rooms of the Shah's royal rug workshop, and the privacy of the hammam, the public bathhouse, which provides one of the few places women may truly reveal themselves, both in body and in mind.

In this stunning literary debut, Anita Amirrezvani deftly weaves centuries-old folklore and craft traditions into an observation of gender roles and cultural mores that are as timely today as ever. The rare seamless synthesis of a thorough history lesson — cultural observation, national history, exploration of traditional craftsmanship — with an engrossing story of characters portrayed with meticulous depth makes **THE BLOOD OF FLOWERS** an exceptional work of historical fiction.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anita Amirrezvani was born in Tehran and currently lives in northern California, where she is pursuing an MFA in fiction at San Francisco State University. She has received fellowships from the National Arts Journalism Program, the NEA's Arts Journalism Institute for Dance, and the Hedgebrook Foundation for Women Writers.

**Learn more at
www.bloodofflowers.com**

THE BLOOD OF FLOWERS

A Novel

by Anita Amirrezvani

Little, Brown and Company

June 5, 2007

\$23.99 / 384 pages

0-316-06576-5/ 978-0-316-06576-4

Also available from Hachette Audio

For more information or for an interview with Anita Amirrezvani, please contact:

Heather Rizzo, Executive Director of Publicity

212.364.1495

heather.rizzo@hbgusa.com

Bonnie Hannah, Publicist

212.364.1350

bonnie.hannah@hbgusa.com

Visit our Web site at www.HachetteBookGroupUSA.com



A Conversation with Anita Amirrezvani

The main character of the story ends up entering into a temporary marriage called a *sigheh*. Can you explain what that is, and what inspired you to incorporate this unusual arrangement into the story?

The *sigheh* has been part of Iranian culture for hundreds of years. It allows a man and a woman to marry for a temporary period of time, and any children born from such unions are considered legitimate. Men pay women for this privilege, and the participants determine how long the arrangement will last. Such marriages can be made for as little as an hour or can go on forever. Understandably, public perceptions of this form of marriage have fluctuated with the times. I decided to incorporate the custom into my novel because it creates a unique set of complications for the heroine, including a Scheherazadian-like deadline as the termination date of the marriage approaches.

We learn a lot about the private lives of the women portrayed in the book. Do you think Americans will be surprised to see these strong-willed women living underneath their chadors?

Iran and Iranians have become increasingly mysterious to westerners ever since the United States severed relations with the country nearly thirty years ago. When I tell people about an ordinary activity like smoking apple-flavored tobacco in a cafe in Isfahan, I get a flurry of bewildered questions about everything from food to the status of women. In my novel, I posit that seventeenth-century women would have been quite strong in their own spheres, meaning in the home, in social centers like the bathhouse, in raising children, in supervising house-related staff and purchases, and in craft-related work performed at home. I think these are quite reasonable assumptions. When it comes to Iranian women today, it would be a gross misconception to think of them as shrinking violets. Iranian women represent 60 percent of the students enrolled in universities, and in recent years, women have been quite organized in fighting for their rights. One of these women, of course, is Shirin Ebadi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her human rights work, and the first Muslim woman to be so honored.

Another pervasive stereotype about Middle Eastern women is one familiar to us from the great Orientalist painters like Eugène Delacroix, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, and Jean-Léon Gérôme. As much as we may admire the beauty of their paintings of, say, naked women at the bathhouse, it's impossible not to notice that their "male gaze" focuses on things like sensual dates, split pomegranates, and of course, lush female body parts. One of my key concerns in writing the novel was to portray women as they might have seen themselves. The bathhouse, for example, becomes a place that's not about male desire, but where ordinary women go to get clean, socialize, take or give counsel, and transact business such as seeking spouses for their children. My goal was to provide a more nuanced view of pre-modern Iranian women.

How common were women rug makers?

Very common, just as they are today. On a recent trip to Iran, my family and I stayed in a hotel in the town of Kashan and noticed that a loom had been set up in the lobby, displaying a half-finished rug. A woman came to work on it every morning, and the hotel staff told us that the rugs she made always

sold before being finished because guests would fall in love with them. In small villages and among nomadic tribes, women and their daughters made all kinds of knotted goods (and still do) including rugs, saddlebags, cushions, tent coverings, and so on, which were used by the household or contributed important revenue to it when they were sold. Men and boys also learned to make rugs, and it is almost certain that highly skilled artisans who worked in the royal workshops described in my novel were men performing at the absolute pinnacle of their craft. (I'll note in passing that I avoid the term "weavers" because Iranian rugs are typically created knot by knot, as opposed to being woven through an intersection of warp and weft threads.)

The heroine learns how to knot rugs from her uncle, a wealthy rug designer in the court of the legendary Shah Abbas the Great. Tell us about the impetus to this story line.

Many people have heard about medieval rulers like Tamerlane or Genghis Khan, but I've been surprised by how little Shah Abbas is known in the West, given that he was one of the great monarchs of all time. Shah Abbas took control of Iran when he was only seventeen, guided the country out of a state of utter political chaos, and led it firmly for more than forty years. In addition to his talents as an administrator, Shah Abbas was an ambitious urban planner along the lines of Sheikh Mohammed of Dubai, but rather than building islands in the shape of palm trees, he concentrated on refashioning the city of Isfahan into the marvel that it is today. The Shah had great admiration for architects, engineers, calligraphers, tile makers, and other craftspeople, and he used the best minds of his court to create the "Image of the World" (the great square of Isfahan), which was a source of astonishment to foreign visitors and still attracts countless tourists. The Shah loved crafts to the extent that he was said to be expert at a number of them, including weaving cloth. To fund the state coffers, he created workshops for carpet making, since hand-loomed silk rugs were starting to become known and admired in Europe. In 1601, for example, King Sigismund III of Poland ordered Iranian rugs made with real silver thread and with his coat of arms. Hand-made carpets also started to appear in seventeenth-century paintings by Rembrandt, Rubens, and Velázquez, often in formal portraits of the kings and noblemen who could have afforded them.

How good were the Iranian rugs of the period?

Some of the greatest carpets ever made were produced in Iran during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As an example, for the cover of my book, my publisher chose one of the two Ardabil carpets, which are thought to have been made for a shrine housing Shah Abbas's ancestors in the northwestern town of Ardabil. One of these carpets was finished in 1540; we know this precisely because the date of completion (in the Islamic calendar) was actually knotted into the rug, which was rare. The Ardabil carpets are unbelievably fine, with at least three hundred knots per square inch, and so detailed that each one probably took eight men three and a half years to create. When the Victoria & Albert Museum in London reopened its Islamic galleries in 2006, the curators described it as "one of the star objects" and made it a centerpiece of the permanent collection. (The other Ardabil is housed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.)

The main character's name is never revealed in the book. Why not?

One morning when I was looking around my living room at my Iranian rugs, embroidery, and miniature paintings, it occurred to me that none of the work was signed. As in most parts of the world, the identity of the craftsperson was considered unimportant and went unrecorded and unrecognized.

When I was writing my novel, my thoughts turned to the lives of these artists, and I began to wonder where they came from, what their stories were, and whether they were still alive. My heroine could well have been one of their ancestors. By not naming her, I hoped to point out that no records exist of these craftswomen (and men) who lived, breathed, and made beautiful things that we admire so deeply. In short, my goal was to acknowledge the labor of the “unnamed craftsperson” whose work has endured through the centuries. To this day, most Iranian carpets are not signed in any way.

You blend your heroine’s story with several traditional Persian tales. Tell us about these tales — how would you describe their significance in Persian culture to a modern American audience?

Many travelers to Iran in the pre-modern era reported with surprise that illiterate peasants could recite extremely long passages of poetry. The place of poetry cannot be overestimated in the culture; it has always been considered the highest art, and many epic poems by celebrated authors such as Rumi, Attar, and Sa’adi include retellings of traditional tales. When I was writing my book, it occurred to me that although westerners are familiar with European tales collected by the Brothers Grimm, as well as with the Greek and Roman myths and *A Thousand and One Nights*, Iranian oral culture is little known to the general American public. There are seven tales in my novel, some of which come from sources that are about a thousand years old. I wrote the first and the last tales myself because I needed stories that reflected the emotional arc of the book.

As an Iranian American, how do you come to terms with the tenuous relationship between the two countries?

It’s fascinating to look back at what has changed between the United States and Iran in the past thirty years. In the 1970s, there were about forty thousand Americans working in Iran, and relations were quite open. Ever since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, relations have been sour, and each country’s knowledge of the other at an ordinary human level has steadily decreased. That’s one of the reasons I wrote my novel. After so many years of blackout when it comes to Iran, I thought people might be interested in learning things about it that go beyond the politics of the moment. After all, Iranian culture has been around for thousands of years, and that’s what will endure into the future. When you travel through the country, you can literally see the layers of history in monuments going back into ancient times. I wanted to give readers insight into the soul of the culture: the wedding customs, the cuisine, the life of women, the craft of rug making, and the uses of traditional storytelling — the things that have made Iran what it is and Iranians who they are. In doing so, I hope to get beyond the headlines and broaden the dialogue about Iran.



Bookseller Quotes

Here's what booksellers around the country have said about *The Blood of Flowers*:

"A unique and luminous coming-of-age story that takes place in 17th-century Iran. A young woman and her mother struggle to survive after her father's death, and end up in the home of a wealthy uncle who teaches her the craft of rug weaving. A tale as brilliantly woven as the rugs she weaves, the prose full of poetic imagery, with characters that come to life. I could not put this book down. A sure-to-be book club favorite — I cannot wait to start recommending this compelling read!"

— Linda Grana, *Lafayette Books (Lafayette, CA)*

"This wonderful novel transports you to 17th-century Iran and a world full of beautiful images of the Iranian countryside — a fabulous city, its markets, slums, and wealthy homes. This compelling novel provides the charm of an old-fashioned fairy tale, which will keep you wanting more."

— Lynn Gonchar, *Tudor Bookshop (Kingston, PA)*

"This story of one woman's struggle to establish her own life in 17th-century Iran is as complex, intricate, and beautiful as the exquisite rugs she designs. Setting her story against the background of the dynamic city of Isfahan, Anita Amirrezvani has written a novel with a great stylistic touch that is so lush and magical in its plot and telling, it will conjure images of Scheherazade."

— Bill Cusumano, *Nicola's Books (Ann Arbor, MI)*

"*The Blood of Flowers* is a dip into the life of a young woman in 17th-century Persia. I enjoyed reading it from many perspectives: that of a 21st-century American woman learning about what was possible then and there for women; that of a 21st-century American bookseller interested in what women's book clubs want to read and discuss; and that of someone who likes good writing. *The Blood of Flowers* qualifies as a successful book on all counts."

— Janet Boreta, *Orinda Books (Orinda, CA)*

"It is a feat to bring off a serious, historically set novel where the history doesn't overwhelm the human story, nor does the human tale simply use the history as furniture. Anita Amirrezvani in her most impressive, captivating debut, makes her novel of a young woman finding her way into life in 17th-century Iran one that does justice to both story and history."

— Rick Simonson, *Elliott Bay Book Company (Seattle, WA)*

"What is it like to live secluded by the veil? *The Blood of Flowers* immerses us in the opulence of 17th-century Persia, where a young woman vies to pattern her own life and passions in a traditional world run by men. The setting may be exotic to contemporary readers, but her fiercely modern spirit is instantly recognizable. A classic story rich in period detail, it's sure to delight."

— Ken White, *San Francisco State University Bookstore (San Francisco, CA)*

"Airplane read: a book compelling enough to make you miss take-off, and leave you surprised when you land on the runway. *The Blood of Flowers* is a guaranteed airplane read. Even if you're not going anywhere!"

— Sarah Bagby, *Watermark Books (Wichita, KS)*

"In *The Blood of Flowers*, I was transported to 17th-century Iran by a beautiful story written by Anita Amirrezvani. She weaves fables throughout her story, and I could see the rugs taking shape and color in her storytelling. After finishing the book, I took a few moments to reflect on the story, the lyrical writing, and the images that were in my mind."

— Eileen Dengler, *Executive Director, NAIBA*

“A beautiful story, woven like the rugs within it, with colors and images and sensations. A really great read!”

— Margie Scott Tucker, *Books, Inc.* (San Francisco, CA)

“The story pulled me in right away. Dare I say it, but it was better than *Memoirs of a Geisha* and the story kept me up all night, worried about what was going to happen to the main character! Needless to say — I could not put this book down! Great first novel!”

— Shannon Alden, *Borders #0303* (Ann Arbor, MI)

“Seventeenth-century Persia comes alive in the pages of Anita Amirrezvani’s debut novel. It’s a time in history rich in culture and superstition, and a time where women are not allowed to seek their own paths. Follow a mother and her young daughter who overcome tragedy and their traditional roles in society to create a life with integrity and passion in a world ruled by men.”

— Cynthia St. Johns, *Kepler’s Books* (Menlo Park, CA)

“This is a beautiful story about life, love, sacrifice, and honor. Absolutely wonderful to read. Once you start, you can’t put it down. I know I didn’t.”

— Dawn Mosher, *Waldenbooks* (Spokane, WA)

“Like the heroine of her novel, Anita Amirrezvani has crafted a multicolor tapestry tale with *The Blood of Flowers*. Each chapter, each interwoven fable, is like a different-color thread being knotted to create a beautiful rug. Her prose mixes a tense coming-of-age tale with 17th-century history, taking you along the journey from tiny village to large unknown city. Each new experience, each adventure creates a different color in her tale and her ‘rug’ becomes more beautiful. I will be pushing this novel to those that enjoyed *Kite Runner* and *The Namesake*, and to literary fiction reading groups.”

— Dan Radovich, *Barnes and Noble* (Vernon Hills, IL)

“*The Blood of Flowers* marks the spectacular debut of Anita Amirrezvani. It tells the tale of a 17th-century Persian girl, who, after the death of her father, becomes a servant of her wealthy uncle, a maker of exotic rugs for the Shah. Under her uncle’s instruction, she learns the art, craft, and business of exotic rug making, a vocation that may prove to be her salvation. With a Dickensian story and prose as precise and as gorgeous as the carpets it describes, *The Blood of Flowers* is a book to put beside the works of Lisa See, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Khaled Hosseini.”

— Scott Doddington, *Cody’s Books* (San Francisco, CA)

“This story was so vibrant and accessible, I felt attached to the characters and the events they were living. The description was beautiful, and the use of storytelling gave the book a fairy-tale quality.”

— Cies Charbeneau, *Barnes and Noble* (Austin, TX)

“I thoroughly enjoyed this book, the way she described the richness of the rugs, the way the girl was waiting for her temporary husband, the way she fell to rock bottom. I was there watching from the sidelines. I also learned about the ‘sigheh.’ According to the author, this still happens. The way the author describes everything is fantastic. I could picture every moment. I can’t wait for the follow-up — it left me wanting to know more about the main character and how the rest of her life unfolds.”

— Kate Cooke, *Kepler’s Books* (Menlo Park, CA)



Tour Dates

Debut at Book Expo America 2007

www.bookexpoamerica.com

June 1, 2007

1:00-2:00 p.m. Signing in the Little, Brown and Company (HBGUSA) Booth

June 2, 2007

10:00-10:30 a.m. Signing in the Book Sense Lounge
4:00-5:00 p.m. Emerging Authors Panel (Room 1E06)

The Blood of Flowers Tour

June 1, 2007, 7:00 p.m.
RJ JULIA BOOKSELLERS

768 Boston Post Road
Madison, CT 06443
203-245-3959
www.rjjulia.com

June 4, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
BARNES & NOBLE Country Glen Center

91 Old Country Rd
Carle Place, NY 11514
516-741-9850
www.bn.com

June 5, 2007, 6:40 p.m.
ASIA SOCIETY WASHINGTON CENTER
Co-hosted by the International Research and Exchanges Board

at
2121 K Street NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20037
202-833-2742 (Asia Society)
202-628-8188 (IREX)
<http://www.asiasociety.org/visit/washingtondc>

*Panel discussion with Afshin Molavi, author of *Persian Pilgrimages: Journeys Across Iran and Fellow* at the New America Foundation, and Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, Professor and Founding Director of the Center for Persian Studies at the University of Maryland and former President of the International Society for Iranian Studies.*

Jacki Lyden of NPR's "All Things Considered" to moderate.

June 6, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
BORDERS Baileys Crossroads
5871 Crossroads Center Way
Baileys Crossroads, VA 22041
703-998-0404
www.borders.com

June 10, 2007, 1:30 p.m.
BOOK GROUP EXPO
San Jose McEnery Convention Center
150 West San Carlos
San Jose, CA
408-821-2967
www.bookgroupexpo.com

Panel discussion: "Kicking Butt: Against All Odds in a Man's World"
Samina Ali, author of Madras on Rainy Days
Janis Cooke Newman, author of Mary: A Novel
Donna Woolfolk Cross, author of Pope Joan
Moderator: Barbara Mead of Reading Group Choices

June 14, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
DIESEL BOOKSTORE
5433 College Ave
Oakland, CA 94618
510-653-9965
www.diesel.booksense.com

June 16, 2007, 2:00 p.m.
SEATTLE PUBLIC LIBRARY Northgate Branch
Co-hosted by Elliott Bay Book Company
10548 Fifth Ave NE
Seattle, WA 98125
206-386-4636 (SPL)
206-624-6600 (Elliott Bay)
www.spl.org
www.elliottbaybook.com

June 19, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
BOOKS INC
301 Castro Street
Mountain View, CA 94041
650-428-1234
www.booksinc.net

June 20, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
BARNES & NOBLE Walnut Creek
1149 S Main St
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
925-947-0373
www.bn.com

June 21, 2007, 7:00 p.m.
BOOK PASSAGE
51 Tamal Vista Blvd
Corte Madera, CA 94925
415-927-0960
www.bookpassage.com

June 23, 2007, 2:30 p.m.
PACIFIC ASIA MUSEUM
Authors on Asia Series
46 N. Los Robles Ave.
Pasadena, CA 91101
(626) 449-2742
www.pacificasiamuseum.org

Coinciding with the opening of [Persian Visions: Contemporary Photography from Iran](#).