Clarion Review

Poetry

From the Graveyard of Civilizations: A Muslim's Rejoinder to Huntington's Clash of Civilizations

Feza Aazmi
Feza Aazmi translated by Farzana Ahmad
Farzana Ahmad, translator
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4251-2293-5
Three Stars (out of Five)

Feza Aazmi gives us a powerful plea for peace not among nations, but between the two leading religions of our day: Christianity and Islam. In this book-length poem he predicts that failure to learn to tolerate each other rather than do battle could result in the destruction of both.

Aazmi's ostensible target is Samuel Huntington's controversial book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), but he takes on scholars from both East and West. The fifth of twelve sections lists the many atrocities perpetrated by Western nations, most of which called themselves Christian, and he is surely right—our history is drenched in blood. Later in the book he tries to do something similar for Islamic societies, but in the past five centuries Westerners generally won; from his point of view, there's precious little to complain about from the Islamic side. He's biased, of course, but no more so than would be an American making a similar argument.

Huntington argues that future wars will not be fought for ideological or economic reasons, as in the past, but will pit cultures against each other, and he insists that the U.S. must win such conflicts. Though Aazmi doesn't dispute the first thesis, he demands that leaders of both sides should not prepare for war, but should teach their peoples to tolerate each other's beliefs. Jesus and Mohammed both sought peace, not war, and Aazmi pleads for both sides to adopt their positions:

> *O denizens of the occident*
> *Our salvation lies*

In harmonious ties
With religions diverse
Break away you must
From clash of Cross and crescent

Almost completely shorn of metaphor, simile, symbolism, is it poetry? If the message is clear, requiring no effort on the part of the reader to discern it, can it be poetry? But trying to define poetry is a bootless task, as is trying to define art. Feza Aazmi is famous among the Urdu poets of Pakistan, so what he has written in this book therefore must be poetry from that culture's point of view. Ishrat Rumani, a Pakistani critic, calls Aazmi, who has published several books, "a major voice of reason in Urdu literature."

The translation, by Aazmi's wife, seems adequate, but the introductory essays by various scholars are badly edited. Most English speakers will find the poetry wanting, but Aazmi's argument could make those who read this book think of the horrors that may well face us and our children. It's always worthwhile to know the minds of people who may be classified by some as our enemies.

Carter Jefferson