ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SHORT STORIES

Pusakis at Paros: And Other Stories
Miriam Gallagher
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4251-4977-2
Four Stars (out of Five)

With characters as varied as an aging widower in Ireland and a pimp in New York City, Irish playwright and novelist Miriam Gallagher's collection of short stories provides a taste of desperate life on two continents. Her lonely characters despair, reminisce, and keep secrets.

In the title story, the narrator waxes nostalgic about the happy time her family spent in Greece, and the cats (*pusakis*) that roamed the property. "As I write in the garden at Nissiotiki Spiti, the black kitten seems to have adopted me. It plays with my notes, scampering under the pine trees chasing pages," she remembers. Back home, the family's pusakis bear names like Sappho, Orpheus, and Plato. And even a CD case from the Naxos record label reminds her of their time abroad.

In "Web of the Thespian Giant," an actress in Ireland, anxious to escape her "convenient home where sleek machines purred daily," tries not to fall in love with her charismatic costar from her theater group. After a pint at the pub with him, she conscientiously sweeps away the "gossamer web" of infatuation.

Theater director Angela is reminded by a radio host of her time in New York in "Just Like Home," and realizes that, despite her fear of the pimp who lived next door, she'd like to return some day. In a separate story later in the collection, she recalls a bizarre Halloween encounter with Elina, who promises to publicize her play on her talk show, but instead plans a party on the thirty-fifth floor of a funeral parlor in the Big Apple.

Gallagher's brief stories provide surprises that keep readers on their toes. Never revealing too much, she leaves readers to come to their own conclusions about the reality of the relationship between the elderly Sybil and her new young man, and what happened after the hopeful residents of the village of Carmoney decided to build the pier that all hoped would bear their name. Indeed, if readers could ask for anything, it would be more detail and background for the characters.

Revealing her playwright roots, the author has a definite ear for dialog. Occasionally

though, she errs in her dialect and slang, and American characters sound like they belong on the other side of the pond: “Come on, we’ll knock up my cousin,” says Elina, suggesting they *visit* her cousin around the block.

Overall, *Pusakis at Paros* contains an intriguing assortment of stories and mysterious characters that will remain with the reader.

Whitney Hallberg