

Zarathustra: A Historical Novel

Betty Clark

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Betty Clark's novel *Zarathustra* addresses the life and teachings of Zoroaster, prophet and founding father of Zoroastrianism. An ambitious book that is as entertaining as it is reverent of religiosity, *Zarathustra* is also an epic work about a humanitarian before his time.

Zarathustra was born in ancient Persia during a time when the majority of his peers were polytheists that worshipped many gods, demons, and other supernatural entities. Through animal sacrifice and sometimes the sacrifice of children, the ancient Persians attempted to win favor with the pantheon of mystical beings. Zarathustra preached that Ahura Mazda was the one true God and, as the one true God, gave humanity the free will to worship him or not. Clark compares Ahura Mazda to the Jewish Jehovah and claims that Ahura Mazda and Jehovah are the same deity. In a conversation between Zarathustra and the archangel Asha Vahista, Clark explores the connection. She writes, "The Jewish people believe there is one God. As you know, they believe it is sacrilegious to worship any other beings that appear to have supernatural qualities...God has allowed His people in different parts of the earth to become quite different. Their diversity is a great blessing to them. Because of their differences, they give different names to God...The Hebrew people call Ahura Mazda by the name Jehovah, and their notions of Right Thinking (morals and ethics) are much the same as yours."

Regardless of a few punctuation and spelling errors, Clark's writing brings the life of Zarathustra and the Zoroastrian scriptures to a level that has the essence of traditional oral storytelling, or a bedtime story. She creates a portrait of a powerful prophet with child-like humility and holiness. The way she describes his travels and trials around the ancient Persian countryside is timeless. The impact on the heart would be no less powerful if read by an urban mother tucking silk sheets around her child in a condo, or by a nomadic mother and her child bedding down in a tent of animal hides. Clark's descriptions of Zarathustra's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual states impart to the reader the harshness and surrealism of his journeys and adventures. One can feel his loneliness about being different and his longing for his family. One can also sense his exhilaration and sense of purpose and destiny mixed with interwoven threads of guilt and doubt. The author adds some modern emotional hang-ups to his character, which contributes to Zarathustra's endearment for the reader. For example, Zoroastrians strongly believe in living in harmony and communion with all of humanity, as well as with animals and plants. As servants of Ahura Mazda, humans, animals, and plants should have a symbiotic relationship and a system of checks and balances, encouraging sensitivity to one another's needs. This the author illustrates in the following passage, where she describes the deep relationship Zarathustra has with his horse, Persia. She writes, "...he found his majestic horse, Persia, waiting. Something in the Prophet's gait, some stiffness in his neck and real sadness in his eyes told Persia his friend would need a great deal of comforting that night. The great steed reaches deep into himself and summoned all the love that Zarathustra needed. His soft, kindly whinnying and companionable snorting brought Zarathustra the consolation that he required."

The reader will find that the honesty and infallible faith that Clark maintains in her writing make up for any shortcomings and triteness. Her belief in and her love for Zarathustra and his teachings is so palpable that his humanitarianism comes alive like a 3-D movie.

LEE GOODEN (August 31, 2011)

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