

Letter from Casablanca

Antonio Tabucchi



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The eight stories contained in Antonio Tabucchi's *Letters from Casablanca* introduce to an American audience a rising Italian writer (born 1943) whose intriguing narrative strategies make the reader an active participant in his work. Each story can be seen from at least two perspectives, and each protagonist can be seen as experiencing an objective "reality" or having his own imagined and quite possibly distorted view of events.

Almost like a detective, the reader must try to puzzle out what has happened, what relationship X "really" has to Y. In "Dolores Ibarruri Sheds Bitter Tears," is the mother's report of her son's happy childhood just a remembered mirage? Is life inside a Fitzgerald novel a game invented by the narrator of "The Little Gatsby," or has the game indeed replaced any other reality? From the title story "Letter from Casablanca," with its double and triple inversions of our expectations, to the final thoughts of "The Backwards Game," where the author plays with the idea of reversing life and literature, the haunting theme of this remarkable and rewarding debut is: "Reality is unpleasant and you prefer dreams"—but modified in teasing counterpoint by the observation that "sometimes reality surpasses the imagination." The author implies that many of the stories are "true," but it is the reflecting and refining power of art and language which focuses seemingly random events into patterns of inevitability.



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