Hi Betsy,  
  
I really like what you wrote about the writing style being an appropriate counterpoint to the drama of the novel's events and in keeping with the societal expectation to keep emotions in check.  I was a little reticent to point out the controlled language since when I went back to find examples, I actually came across a more "emotional" narrative than I expected.  But, still, I couldn't shake the feeling that the story was being told in an unusually methodical (dare I say "passive") way. The more I think about it, the more I feel this might be a result of the omniscient narration that refrains from particular allegiances to characters. Could it be that the tone of the novel and the author's handling of the various tragedies is more egalitarian than detached?  
  
I am particularly excited to move ahead and encounter the plot turns and emotional turmoil you mention.  "Revolutionary" sounds intriguing! I will keep you posted on my thoughts and reactions.  
  
Thanks,  
Elana

**From:** Betsy Bailey  
**Sent:** Monday, March 23, 2015 9:09 AM  
**To:** Elana Cohn-Rozansky  
**Subject:** RE: Conversation Sandwich #2

Hi Elana:

I so enjoy our conversations sandwiches each year.  I get to revisit a book I like and through your close reading and thoughtful comments and questions, think about aspects of it that I didn't give as much thought to when I first read it.

While I would say that in my reading, I was more drawn to those elements associated with the characters, the plot, and the setting,  I am intrigued now to think about the writing itself.  I do agree it is measured and for me that provided a calmness and kept the narrative from becoming melodramatic.  It also helped me understand that so many of the characters were struggling with powerful emotions in a society in which meeting obligations was the expectation and emotional expression was seen as a weakness. I am curious what you will think about this contrast as the plot turns (as it will in the chapters you have ahead) and characters experience even more emotional turmoil.  I wish I had the book in front of me to look for examples of dialogue and see if I feel those provide a contrast to the more controlled narrative.  And as the pages become more filled with poetry, I will be interested to see how you "read" the "lyrics."  Will you find them controlled as well or will you think the narrative is deliberately measured to highlight what is "revolutionary" about them -- both in content and form of expression.

Looking forward to continuing our conversation,

Betsy

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**From:** Elana Cohn-Rozansky  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 22, 2015 10:26 AM  
**To:** Betsy Bailey  
**Subject:** Conversation Sandwich #2

Hi Betsy,  
  
After a couple of busy weeks, I was very happy to get back to *Lyrics Alley* this weekend.  I'm well over half-way through (on page 221 of 305) and I can see by the first few lines of chapter 16 that I am about to encounter the part about poetry ("The poem comes out of him in what is like a sneezing fit...").  It seemed like a perfect stopping point for reflecting on the book thus far.  
  
I have been thinking a lot about the author's writing style.  I believe I described it as subdued in my first Conversation Sandwich and now I might say it feels controlled and measured--not in a bad way, but in a noticeable way.  Nur's accident shifts the level of emotion of the characters and the circumstances dramatically.  Some of those shifts are in response to what happened to Nur (for example, his father's wailing after the unsuccessful surgery, followed by Nabilah's renewed attraction to Mahmoud; Soroya and Nur's declarations of love; then Nur's hunger strike when they are forced to end their relationship because of his condition) but even the tutor Badr's emotions increase separate from Nur's situation (his expression of deep love for his wife and children as well as his frustration with his father and his cousin).  All of this is to say, that there is a palpable difference in the level of emotions, passions, frustrations, and disappointments in the book after Nur's accident, yet the writing style maintains a kind of control and calmness I didn't expect nor can I truly describe.  I am wondering if this is the result of the third person omniscient point of view, the moving back and forth between the varied stories (even though there is much overlap), or that the writer is a Muslim woman who I assume lives in a fairly controlled environment and, like Badr, reacts to the chaos of life by finding calmness in religious faith.    
  
So, my question for you is: Do you remember noticing anything about the writing style as you were reading *Lyrics Alley* or were you more drawn to those elements associated with the characters, the plot, and the setting so that the writing served more as a vehicle rather than the story's core?  
  
We have 'til Friday to finish this "Sandwich," so no rush...  
  
Elana