

Translated excerpt

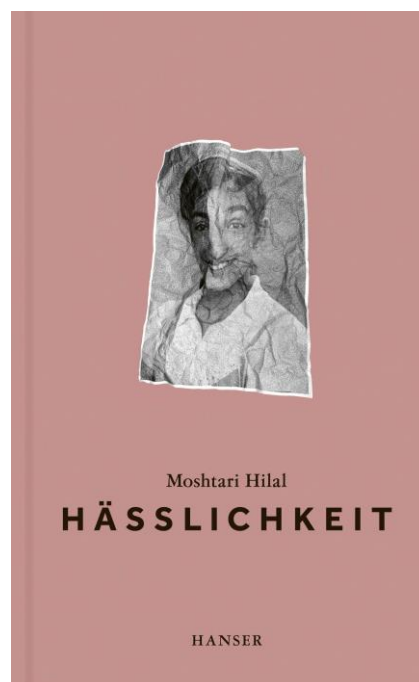
Moshtari Hilal
Hässlichkeit

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Moshtari Hilal
Ugliness

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SHADOW ON THE NOSE

We trace our forefingers along our big sister's small nose. Until my niece was born, there were four women in our family. When my mom died, there were five of us. Four long faces with long noses. I always thought I looked the least like my mother because my eyes were bigger than hers. As I grew older, I would run my fingers over her face again and again. Over a face that looked earnest and shy in the few photos from her youth. As I grew older, I wore my hair long and parted it in the middle, just as she had in her early twenties. After she died, I started wearing her coats that were too wide, her soft white cotton trousers with lace at the ankle, her rings that were too large, her rose perfume.

My eldest sister told me that two men had commented on her nose before she finally had made up her mind to get a nose operated on. She promised herself that once she earned enough money, she'd get rid of her ugly nose.

One of the men was her supervisor at work. He said: "You'd be so pretty without your big nose." The other man was our father. He said: "What's wrong with you. Your nose is getting longer every day and your face thinner. All of you take after your mother, all of you are your mother's daughters. I also got a taste of his words. He constantly was reminding me about the huge honker growing on my face. I was sure my father thought his daughters were ugly. He loved his ugly daughters, but kept reminding them how difficult it was to ignore their long faces and long noses.

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My friend D. told me her husband had casually mentioned it would be better if their daughter had inherited his nose. She was hurt. But at the same time, her own family had already started wishing their unborn granddaughter had her father's nose. D. couldn't make herself get upset at him. She knew she was loved regardless of, and not because of her nose. Her mother, her sisters, her aunts, all of them had gotten nose jobs. It was a tradition: first you inherited the nose, then you ridiculed it, then you paid to have it fixed. But when D. inherited it, and people made fun of it, something happened that disturbed her family: She kept her nose. Sometimes when her mother was talking to her, she'd suddenly grow very quiet and start sighing, as if she were trying to imagine her daughter's face without her nose: "Oy, you're so beautiful, but that nose." D.'s mom shook her head theatrically: "tsk, tsk, tsk, what a waste." Her mother reminded her that if she ever changed her mind, she'd pay for the operation.

Our older sister had her nose done when she was twenty-three. She wanted to make it smaller. But her plastic surgeon said he wasn't willing to break normal noses and then put them back together for no reason. Such an operation was too risky, the nose could lose its support and get deformed, and then my sister would have to keep coming back to him to fix it. Such an aggressive procedure could involve a painful and complicated healing process and cause her lifelong breathing difficulties. He refused to give her the Hollywood snub nose she had wanted, but he was willing to correct two small details for 5000 Euros: he'd remove the bump on the bridge of her nose as well as the hanging tip. The procedure would be minimally invasive to correct her imperfections without looking artificial.

She later told me: "Nobody doubts my nose, nobody doubts me."

After my eldest sister got her nose fixed when she was twenty-three, my second eldest sister ran her index finger over her own nose at age nineteen. Was she also so ugly that she needed a procedure? I was fifteen years old, when I stood in front of the mirror and studied my profile from over my shoulder and out of the corner of my eye. I wanted to see myself from a stranger's point of view. My second eldest sister told me that she'd never thought about her nose until our eldest sister came home with a bandage and blue rings under her eyes: "I thought I was ugly and dirty, because I was dark and brown and none of you were. We all had those noses, until one of us didn't have one anymore." My second eldest sister told me that people stared at her incredulously when she accompanied our pale little brother to the playground. That can't be her brother. Does she work for him? My second eldest sister couldn't shake the feeling that she was being punished for the color of her skin, even when our mother caressed her and promised her she wasn't black, that she was the color of wheat. When she played Kajol Devgan in an Indian romantic drama of the 1990s, and saw how much she was desired and loved, a knot had finally dissolved in my sister's chest.

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When D. dressed up as a witch for carnival at elementary school, a little boy came running towards her. He stood right in front of her, grabbed her plastic nose with his white, sweaty hand and pulled on it until her own nose stuck out. With a huge grin on his face, he whispered: "You don't even need to wear a fake one."

D. was constantly being reminded about her big nose. Had she not constantly been confronted by how others viewed it, she wouldn't have thought about it at all. When she looked in the mirror in the morning, she saw a slim nose that belonged to her and that was located in its proper place. She breathed in and out deeply and started her day. When she got pregnant, her face also put on weight and everybody watched as her features became fuller and softer. When her daughter was born, everybody held their breath, until a small nose flashed out of the child's face and her family breathed a sigh of relief. In the months that followed, D.'s face grew thinner again and everybody watched as her old features returned.

She told me: "Ever since my daughter was born, I've been constantly thinking about my nose. I wonder: What do people think when they see us together, do they breathe a sigh of relief?" D. realized what her nose meant in elementary school. A Turkish boy ran up to her with a huge grin on his face: "You're Kurdish," he said. "My father said you can recognize Kurds by their nose." D. then aligned her body with her nose. She vowed never to do her nose any harm. This nose should never fall like the way all the noses before her had, like all the noses of the women in her family. She ran her finger along her nose and whispered to it: "I will protect you."

THE SUFFERING OF THE NOSE

The poor nose had been denounced throughout history. It was condemned, even during the so-called European Renaissance. From then on, every conspicuous nose had been suspected of being a syphilis nose. Given the outbreak of the sexually transmitted infectious disease, such a nose was tantamount to moral decline. The syphilis nose was seen as a just punishment for the sins of those who had to wear it like a mark on their face. The nose, often sunken and destroyed by the disease, was a horrifying image, although it could also have been an emblem for those who had survived worse. The person without a nose was marked and despised. To be cured of the nose, no scar, no sign of a surgeon was to be left behind. A nose with a scar had been a syphilis nose. Nobody should be reminded that there had been an old nose where the new one now stood.

At the start of the 20th century, Jacques Joseph was one of the first surgeons to find a solution to avoid visible scars, which earlier skin grafts or external incisions had left behind. He dominated the field of cosmetic surgery because his patient clientele suffered particularly from the visibility of

their noses in Europe. Their noses were inspected, marked, identified and humiliated as Jewish noses or hooked noses. Society drove them into the arms of the surgeon who promised them salvation.

German anti-Semites were obsessed with proving the foreignness of Jewish women and advocated their exclusion from the white races. Ethnologists of the late 19th century attempted to find evidence of a common ancestry between Jewish people and black people from Africa. According to this racist world view, such a connection allowed them to dehumanize the “other” as they had done in the colonies. The ethnologists and medical practitioners compared skin color, hair color and structures as well as the shapes of Jewish women’s noses in order to categorize them together with races that had already been established as inferior according to the European world view, as well as to justify their exploitation. The nose was of particular interest in this regard. The German race theorist Hans F.K.Günther, who taught at Berlin University during the National Socialist era had even differentiated between black and white Jewish women on the basis of supposedly flat or long noses.

The natural scientists studied the curvature of noses because they believed they could determine a person’s heredity in their face. In addition to the nose, the alleged shape of the ears and feet became the focus of pseudo-scientific discussions about Jewish physiognomy. These ideas soon found their way into standardized physiognomy and anatomy textbooks of the German educated middle classes. They formed the core of the racial theory that used appearance to determine who was good and who was bad, who was healthy and who was ill, who was allowed to reproduce and who was not, who was allowed to live and who was not. Only in a world in which the curvature of the nose, or the protrusion of the ears make a face different; i.e. in which the curvature or protrusion are at the mercy of the prevailing human image, could a surgical intervention be life-changing.

Cosmetic surgery of the 20th century promises to change the body, so that it appears healthy and therefore racially acceptable. Only after rhinoplasty established that ugliness caused by disease, injury, and race could be corrected, were they able to justify it as a viable medical procedure. This is how plastic surgery was able to spread and gave rise to the modern discipline on which today’s beauty industry is based.

Once it was possible to alter a racist characteristic that had been regarded as being socially unalterable, there were no longer any limits to the imagination of how one could modify the body.

The historian Sander L. Gilman writes in his cultural history of aesthetic surgery “Making the Body Beautiful”, that both the modern promise of assimilation and the promise of autonomy over one’s own body always had to remain limited because both of these promises were contingent on a racist role model. The more the subject remodeled the self, the more the racist role model was aware of its supposedly higher value, compared its own authenticity to the assimilated subject: “You turn into a mere copy and pass yourself off as the real thing,” writes Gilman. The fear of being exposed is part and parcel of the new nose.

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Since around 2004, a pixelated before-and-after photo has repeatedly been published in the tabloid news media: Chinese man sues his wife for being ugly. Chinese man sues his wife for giving birth to an ugly daughter. According to this modern legend, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff. The court AGREES, the man should receive the equivalent of 120,000 dollars from his wife because she had pretended to be beautiful. The man named Jian Feng is said to have married his wife out of love for her beauty.

Two blurred female faces stare back at us from a digitally worn out photo that has been downloaded and uploaded over and over again. They don’t look at all alike. The woman on the right – supposedly the one Jian Feng thought he had married – has large eyes and a slim nose. She looks artificial, even though she had given birth to a child made of flesh and blood. The woman on the left appears exhausted or she isn’t wearing any make-up. She has small eyes with dark circles around them. She could be real. We need no further caption to recognize that the left image is before, i.e. she is the before, in a before and after photo, that we are supposed to read from left to right. As though it were obvious that the Chinese woman with the big eyes and the small nose on the right, of course, is the result of a transformation, a beautification, in contrast to the Chinese woman with the small eyes. As if she had freed herself from her previous state, from left to right as the Latin script reads.

After the birth of their child, Jian Feng is said to have been shocked by how ugly the baby was, according to the first two pages of the 6,470,000 Google results for “Chinese man sues wife for being ugly”: “Our daughter was so incredibly ugly that it shocked me.” Jian Feng is said to have filed for divorce and accused his wife of infidelity.

However, a DNA test proved that the child was both their child - the child of Jian Feng, whose looks had never been described in detail, and that of his beautiful wife, whom he is said to have married for love, and from whom he was now trying to divorce, based on her alleged pretense and false facts. The mother's beautiful face was exposed as ugly through the birth of her first child: "The truth only came to light with the birth of the girl -- because the cosmetic surgery did not change his wife's genetic makeup," reports the German television channel RTL: "His wife was not born with her looks."

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The English term "passing" refers to pretending to be something or somebody who you are not.

As early as the 19th century, it was both a survival strategy and accusation. The accusation was that in the act of concealing one's true self, one's own condition, one usually was hiding one's race. This act tacitly transgressed the boundaries of the social order.

In the USA, you can trace the evolution of a kind of surgical eugenics in dealing with the so-called Irish nose. In the 1880s, the surgeon John Orlando Roe worked on the project to develop a new, American nose. Like Jacques Joseph, Roe also had a technique at his disposal that left no scars, and which also had a clientele that had been defined by their noses—noses that stood between them and assimilation into the white mainstream society. In the late 19th century, Irish immigrants in the USA were repeatedly depicted in caricatures as an intermediate stage between Neanderthals and modern Homo sapiens, or as animals that were supposed to have similarities with the dog. These racist images of the allegedly underdeveloped Irish originated in Great Britain and followed the migrant settlers to the American colonies. With a new American nose, Roe promised his patients not just a new nose, but a new invisibility that was intended to liberate them from the European tradition.