Strange new worlds

Ayelet Tsabar's short stories break all moulds of Israeli fiction, says Lyn Julius, on the reissue of the author’s award-winning debut collection

The vast open spaces and forests of Canada beckon. British Columbia bills itself ‘The best place on earth’. It is where Jerusalemite Tamar has escaped to live with her non-Jewish boyfriend. But is she ready to plunge into total assimilation, and start a family? And isn’t ‘the best place on earth’ – the antithesis of the crazy intensity of the ‘holiest place on earth’ – really rather boring?

Dysfunctional families, friendships and tensions abound in Ayelet Tsabar’s collection of short stories. Worlds collide. A Moroccan girl soldier in Casualties, who forges medical forms, verges on the criminal. Strangers fall in love, have wild, washroom flings or exchange shy kisses – the newly-religious with the secular, the Yemeni with the Russian, the Filipina carer with the Israeli next door, the hippy with the Israeli with the Bedouin Arab.

Tsabar’s book is peopled with young Israelis trapped in the stifling reality of war, suicide bombings and missile attacks. The world outside is seductive to free spirits: pacifist India, where young Israelis go after their army service, is swathed in pot smoke and incense. As much as she tries to invent herself, Maya, an Israeli with the tight-knit Sephardi community, Mizrahi’s tailor father helped him buy his first sewing machine. At 13, he made his first garment: a wool skirt for his mother to wear for the High Holidays, and he went on to study performing arts and design. His career took off in the 1980s, coinciding with the rise of supermodels such as Naomi Campbell who wore his idiosyncratic designs that blended couture fashion with sportswear.

The exhibition shows his colourful creations alongside fabric swatches and storyboards. A collection of his costume designs includes those for the Magic Flute with the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in 2014. There is also a beautiful video installation made up of clips from television, film and the catwalk. Some commentators have noted that, apart from featuring a belt buckle in the shape of a Star of David and the catwalk. Some commentators have noted that, apart from featuring a belt buckle in the shape of a Star of David and the catwalk. Some commentators have noted that, apart from featuring a belt buckle in the shape of a Star of David and the catwalk. Some commentators have noted that, apart from featuring a belt buckle in the shape of a Star of David and the catwalk.