

As a Middle Eastern feminist scholar who is invested in the lives of Muslim women and their activism, I have my concerns about the exclusivity of inviting only Muslim-identified women to rethink Islamic texts. Although I understand the author's concern about Islamophobia, Muslim women's lives in the United States, and the pressure they receive from both the public and academic sphere, I am also apprehensive of the lives of "non-Muslim-identified" women outside Europe and North America. Many women who do not identify as practicing Muslims, may endure the same tensions emanating from a dominant Islamic religious sphere in a range of Muslim-majority global contexts. Therefore, I wish for a more inclusive invitation to rethink the Islamic *sunna*, one extended to both those who identify as practicing Muslims and those who do not. My final concern returns to the definition of Muslim-identified women solely through the lens of their religious beliefs. Despite all the right intentions, overlooking the intersectionality of different social influences that construct Muslim womanhood fails to help the reader understand the reinterpretations these women offer and what their notions of Islamic justice can add to debates concerning global human values or democratic human rights.

Despite these concerns, Barazangi offers an invaluable take on Islamic feminism. I recommend this book for graduate and undergraduate level gender studies courses including transnational feminism, Islamic feminism, special topics about Muslim women, or in general women's studies classes that seek an opportunity to offer an internal view of Muslim women's navigation of the modern world. ✂

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**ISSA J. BOULLATA**, *True Arab Love* (Westmount, Quebec: Linda Leith Publishing, 2016). Pp. 87. 12.95 paper. ISBN: 9781988130088.

**Issa J. Boullata's** *True Arab Love* is a re-publication, for American audiences, of a collection of short stories published in 2007 by Banipal Books (London) under the title *A Retired Gentleman*. It follows a 2016 translation of the entire collection into French by Joanna Gruda under the title *Amours Arabes*. Boullata, who retired as Professor of Arabic Literature from McGill University in Montreal in 2004, has actively pursued a rich parallel career as a creative writer alongside academic contributions to his chosen field. Notably, his short stories and the fine Arabic novel *'Ā'id*

*ilā Quds* (Return to Jerusalem, 1998), which, it is hoped, will soon find a translator and be published in English, indicate his devotion to the literary arts.

This English re-appearance of his short story collection is a welcome event as it has allowed the author to re-arrange this set of eight short stories to highlight more clearly their shared themes, especially those that form the core of the book. This core explores the subtleties of love as an emotion sometimes verging on obsession or addiction, as well as what might happen when love is frustrated. The truth of love (and desire) has been a perennial concern of Arab writers, from pre-Islamic times when the signature form of Arabic poetry, the *qasidah*, usually began with a *nasib*, a lament by the poet mourning the unfortunate end of an intense love affair with a woman of his tribe. This scenario gives rise to a recognition that Martha Nussbaum addresses in another context (Plato's *Symposium*): "there are certain sorts of beauty and value that are inseparable from vulnerability to loss, and . . . self-sufficiency is not an appropriate end for an ethical theory to aim at" (*Love's Knowledge*, 122). Many of the most affecting poems in the inventory of Arabic love literature (*ghazal*) focus, either decisively or more hesitantly, on the inseparability of love and loss.

Professor Boullata has brought into modern times this tradition of elegiac meditation on the nature of love, and how it may—often in ways hidden to those experiencing it—drive the course of entire lives. Probably the clearest example of this is the sixth story in the current collection, entitled "True Love, Mad Love." It is preceded by "All is Vanity," an exploration in excruciating detail of how love can degenerate into a solipsistic quest for self-sufficiency and, in the furtherance of that quest, harm those caught inadvertently in its upheavals. The sixth story is followed in turn by two tales of characters whose loves are not consummated in an expected way: "A Retired Gentleman" and "Oh Saleema." In the former, the overpowering nostalgia of the protagonists, William Shibli and Margaret Lutfi, for the love they shared in youth is brought to an uplifting resolution through their shared regard and love for Lena, Margaret's daughter by another man. This shared regard enables them to overcome the tragedy of their separation. "Oh, Saleema" has a less inspirational denouement, where the protagonist most likely dies without ever reuniting with the love of his youth, who disappeared in the chaos of the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948.

"True Love, Mad Love" acts as the intellectual bridge that gives background and meaning to what comes before and after. In many ways, it appears to echo, perhaps by chance, a poem by an Arab American modernist poet,

Samuel Hazo, mentioned in Boullata's piece (55). Hazo's "The Origins of Western Love" appeared in the collection *As They Said* in 1999. In this lyric, Hazo differentiates the Western literary love tradition from that of "the Arabs of Andalus." He finds the latter far more delicately focused on the emotional interplay of "love and passion," while the former originated in "coupling on impulse" and ignored any possibility of intersubjective communication or growth shared by the lovers. He concludes: "The Arabs / thought the why unsayable and sang / the beauties of the where and when. / [The Latin poet] Catullus settled for the how."<sup>1</sup> "True Love, Mad Love" builds out from that point by exploring the subtleties of what the concept "true Arab love" might mean and how one might say the why of it.

The narrator conveys the contents of his friend Jim's "last letter" by Nadia after Jim's suicide in San Francisco (53), which took place more than a year after he had broken off his love affair with Nadia. Jim writes in his letter that he had proposed a meeting with Nadia in Boston before a lecture on Arab American poets (including Hazo) he had been invited to give at Columbia University. She had replied that she did not have enough time to see him right then and that they should "see each other later" (61). Jim takes this as a complete rejection of their relationship and condemns Nadia for her "very American," transactional, idea of love that is based on the convenience of those involved. He offers up a very different definition of love: "Love is the balm that soothes our concerns and worries, that allays our fears and uncertainties, that heals our wounds, that erases our loneliness in this world, that unites us and makes us able to face life, and teaches us to give and give and give. In love, we don't lose when we give, nor do we gain when we take. In true love, there is giving all the time. Taking is never thought of, the lover takes what the beloved freely gives as a recognition of their love" (60-61). This kind of love, which Jim characterizes as "eternal," can only exist in a framework of reciprocity between two autonomous actors and must be constantly nourished. How easily that reciprocity can be thwarted can be seen in the other stories that surround "True Love, Mad Love." In the story, Boullata—like Hazo—recognizes the tendency of the love relationship to become an abstraction (a finite act) rather than an enduring and regenerative experience, but—unlike Hazo—he confronts the unstable

<sup>1</sup>This statement is an accurate representation of literary history. It was the Arab who originated poetry concerned with "courtly" or romantic love, while ancient poets—like Catullus or Ovid—were more concerned with recording the mechanics of seduction and not its emotional resonance.

nature of love's emotional involvement more directly and with greater nuance.

Boullata brilliantly captures the impasse between Jim and Nadia by his use of the epistolary—notoriously one-sided—form in “True Love, Mad Love,” where it works to call into question Jim’s repeated assertion that he understands (and should therefore control) the discourse of love better than his partner Nadia. Elsewhere, Boullata also makes use of techniques that stand out best in the short story form—like an attention to dialogue and character development, and a de-emphasis on narrative detail—directly in the furtherance of the subjective emotional impact of his tales. For example, the first story of the collection, “Without a Court Trial,” uses dialogue extensively to heighten the suspense and sense of dread that two friends feel when they are summarily arrested and sent to a desert prison in the middle of the night. As the situation becomes more and more mysterious, it is related through more leisurely expository descriptions of their surroundings. But when they are suddenly released in the morning—as the result of a political coup in the capital—the abrupt return to dialogue that explains nothing “Come on. Get out, all of you. You’re free. What are you waiting for?” (6) underscores the suddenness and uncertainty of their change in fortune. Similarly, the stories that follow employ dialogue very strategically to emphasize a sense of uncertainty, and the secrecy and deception that must undergird any construction of self. We all lie to ourselves as much as others, and language both supports us in those lies and can reveal those lies to others. This is as much a theme of this collection as the exploration of the meaning of love, and Professor Boullata takes his readers on a fascinating and technically assured journey in both cases. ✨

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**GLEN W. BOWERSOCK**, *The Crucible of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017). Pp. 220. \$25.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780674057760.

Reading through the introductory chapters in *The Crucible of Islam* brought to mind numerous educational experiences of past decades. One was my introduction to Mas’udi’s *Muruj al-Dhahab* (*Meadows of Gold*) in a class with Tarif Khalidi at the American University of Beirut; another was being