



Mansour's Eyes

Ryad Girod

Chris Clarke, Translator

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Ryad Girod's haunting novel, *Mansour's Eyes*, is threaded with Middle Eastern cultural and geopolitical sagas.

Hussein was an anguished observer on the day his friend, Mansour, was led through the streets and decapitated in the main square of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He returns to the moment often, looking into his friend's eyes and feeling the fear and sadness of his impending death. The few days and hours before that moment are reconstructed: in which Mansour was deemed terminally ill. In which Hussein fell in love with a married woman, who only desired Mansour. In which Hussein became jealous.

Mansour's connection to an ancestor—the Emir Abdelkader, a military and political leader in Algeria's struggle against French colonization—is also a point of focus. There are fluid transitions between the book's thoughtful, dreamlike sections, its drama between Mansour and Hussein, its accounts of Abdelkader's life, and its coverage of a Sufi mystic, Mansur Al-Hallaj. Glancing references to Arab history arise.

Hussein drifts between the past and the present, and the novel is lyrical and dizzying around him. Like the sand from the desert where Mansour goes to think, his stream of consciousness thoughts shift between cultural locations. A misunderstanding during Mansour's heresy trial mirrors moments of Abdelkader's life; and Hussein offers a defense of his friend drawn straight from the trial of Mansur Al-Hallaj. These parallels culminate in non-parallel endings, which draw clear, complex connections and suggest that the post-Arab Spring world is distinct from the past. It's a satisfying culmination of the book's many threads.

Mansour's Eyes is an emotional historical novel in which the modern world is shown to have influenced Middle Eastern identities.

LAURA LEAVITT (July / August 2020)

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