



Memories from the East: Pearls and Tears

Abdulla Kazim

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A heartbreaking coming-of-age story set against the backdrop of China, Abdulla Kazim's *Memories from the East* explores a traumatized man's psyche as he prepares to commit suicide at the age of twenty-nine. Gerald Arsov watched as his father murdered his mother with a knife, carving her heart out of her body. This childhood memory imprints on Gerald, leading him to make unorthodox decisions that will change the way he lives throughout his young adult years.

Sexually active to the point of promiscuous, he engages in casual liaisons with numerous women, taking comfort in physical affection and short-term bonds. These interludes are his inner motivation and purpose, evident in the double entendres, even symbolism, in countless scenes. "I moved my face down and knelt on the ground. I gently caressed her thighs and opened them wide, and the secret of the moment was there. I started it there and ended it all there."

Intelligent and artistic, Gerald feels every pain and every pleasure more acutely than most. Though adopted by his American aunt and uncle and sent to the US after his father was incarcerated, he returns to China to study, then travels to other parts of the Eastern world in his personal quest to complete his existence in less than three decades.

Built on an intense, emotion-stirring concept, this powerful novel is interesting but lacks a natural progression of events. The tragedy is imposed upon the plot, and the reasons for Gerald's planned suicide remain foggy. Though literary greats such as Shakespeare have used contrived situations merely to advance a drama, the overall effect in this heartfelt work is one of futility and self-annihilation rather than exploration and self-discovery.

Lyrical, yet often graphic and explicit, this unusual book is written in the first person, allowing a candid glimpse of Gerald's psychological turmoil. The emotion is especially powerful as he revisits the scene of his father's horrific crime years later: "The smell caught me—that of dry blood. There was blood still on the floor, and the marble surface of the table was almost fully covered with it."

Though the story receives a high mark for genuine frankness and down-to-earth directness, words are sometimes awkwardly used, and the novel needs more editorial attention. Improper phrasing disturbs the flow of reading at certain moments, which will likely cause hesitation and confusion in the reader.

A native of the United Arab Emirates, the author is a programmer and holds a bachelor's degree in business information technology. He lives in Dubai.

Written in the tradition of the German bildungsroman, Kazim's literary debut will capture an audience looking for a unique, albeit downbeat, twist on a man's agony-driven progression to adulthood and the premature end of his life.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 5, 2012)

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