

The Arab King of My Heart and Soul

Yuriko Terasaka

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This philosophical and winding work explores the nature of love in a time of technology.

Yuriko Terasaka's *The Arab King of My Heart and Soul* blurs genre and narrative conventions to tell an Aristotelian love story for the social media age.

In rambling pastiche, an unnamed female narrator probes the nature of love through technology—a place where two hearts may beat as one, but bodies aren't at the heart of the matter. As she embraces the old idea that people are merely ghosts in the shell, she discovers a new paradise of Internet connection with Mashalany.

The Japanese narrator is thrown for a loop when she meets Mashalany, an Arab businessman, on a social media platform. They're separated by cultures and continents, but she's engulfed by a persistent sense of connection. She investigates their relationship through cross-cultural analysis, theories of love, interpersonal relationship models, and first-person narratives of their long-distance exchange.

As their relationship unfolds, the narrator draws greater distinctions between love and the body. Despite, or perhaps because of, all that separates them, the narrator decides physical, romantic love is a degradation of the true, spiritual love available to herself and Mashalany through technology.

The book posits that Aristotle's true love is found in technology's pure communion. The curated self is the best self; through technology, disembodied spirits are finally available for love's highest form of connection.

This volume is more of a treatise on the nature of love than it is a narrative. The relationship between the narrator and Mashalany is used as a proof text for the author's extended, nonlinear exploration. Using a structure more familiar in Japanese literature, the book switches tones and styles within and across chapters in order to approach its theme from different viewpoints.

First-, second-, and third-person voices are all used as the author switches between cross-cultural analysis, argument, exposition, and narrative. In this circular prose, interpretative work is required. A plot or thesis is not given; they must be discovered.

Because the nature of love is the text's core theme, its content often becomes abstract as it grapples with the metaphysical, addressing concepts such as embodiment, emotion, and souls. This bent toward the philosophical veils the direct interactions between the narrator and Mashalany in mystical, even esoteric, language.

In these moments, the narrator's heavy reliance on summary often devolves into aphorisms and koans. These linguistic paradoxes, if meditated on, can force sudden intuitive enlightenment, but they leave gaps in the storytelling.

The book is strongest in its cross-cultural analysis, where description anchors the prose. Terasaka's contrastive analysis of the narrator and Mashalany yields surprising insight into what draws them together.

Serendipitous connections—like the parallels between *bushido* traditions and Islamic culture, or Japanese folklore about the peach boy and the fact that Mashalany's nickname means “peach”—give a sense that these unusual lovers may actually be as fated as the narrator believes them to be.

The Arab King of My Heart and Soul is a philosophical work of apologetics for social media and the kinds of relationships available through technology.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (February 3, 2017)

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