



Franck Salameh

The Other Middle East

An Anthology of Modern
Levantine Literature

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*An Anthology of
Modern Levantine Literature*

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The Other Middle East

To my Levantine great-grandmother,
who lived in five cultures and wielded five languages when most
children of her generation across the Mediterranean could barely
manage one; to a dignified literate lettered woman traveling in an age
of literacy restricted to men; to an exquisite *Sitt*—a Grande Dame—
who always asked me for “something to read” even as she already had
a book in hand, and many more at hand; to my anthropomorphic
Levant, an affectionate matriarch who in her elegant, reticent wisdom
changed my life, whispering gently, and seldom in words, *Tolle lege!*

To *téta* Mathilde

In memoriam

(1894–1974)

Un jour tout sera bien, voilà notre espérance.

Tout est bien aujourd'hui, voilà l'illusion.

—VOLTAIRE (1694–1778)

Acknowledgments

Lebanese-American philosopher and fellow Bostonian Kahlil Gibran once said about his epochal *The Prophet* that it was a book that had always lived with and within him; that it had been part of his very being, accompanying him in his exile from the snowcapped highlands of his native Mount Lebanon to the cold slushy Tremont Street estuaries of his adoptive home in the South End of Boston. Gibran claimed to have lived, *truly* lived, *The Prophet* before condensing it in print. I lack the immodesty of those children of my race who delight in comparing themselves to Gibran, but I must admit that I still take great pride and pleasure in the fact that I, like him, am Lebanese by birth and Bostonian by choice.

Yet, I must also admit that like Gibran's *The Prophet*, the present anthology has in fact been with me for a very long time, tucked away in the confines of frayed old memories, alongside *other* artifacts from home, living and breathing and wreathing within me for many decades now, probably since that sad balmy July morning in 1981 when I bid a last farewell to the land of my birth, to my beloved Levant. And so, here I am today, thirty-six years later, letting go again of a sun-drenched part of my being, a steep towering white-green mountain wading its feet deeply into the blue Mediterranean below; a living age-old Levantine legend getting ossified—memorialized—in print. And though it is bittersweet to let go of a part of one's being in this way, I am grateful to

so many who accompanied me on this journey, egging me on, interrogating me, motivating me to question myself, my worldviews, my most intimately held assumptions. In this, I have been assisted by many who deserve recognition for the compilation, research, translation, and writing of this anthology.

A great debt of gratitude goes to my departmental colleagues at Boston College; children of an ecumenical, cosmopolitan, polyglot universe that placed a very high premium on excellence and curiosity and argumentation and diversity of perspectives; who provided the ideal academic home where several years of teaching a survey course in modern Middle Eastern literature contributed to the birth of this volume. My former department chairs Cynthia Simmons, Maxim Shrayer, and Michael Connolly deserve special thanks, first of all, for bringing me to Boston College more than a decade ago, and for their unyielding support and encouragement and trust in subsequent years. Even as I was running out of steam at times, often on the verge of giving up, *they* never gave up.

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showed and the support that he always lent; a man who lives by the etymology of his name *without* even noticing. *Atef* means “compassionate” in Arabic, with Aramaic semantic connotations of “armor,” “shield,” “bulwark,” and “protector”; and *Ghobrial* is the Hebrew rendition of a “Man of God.” And so, this compassionate “Man of God” graciously read various drafts of several of my renditions of Arabic and French texts, offering a wide range of thoughtful commentaries and constructive suggestions for which I am grateful.

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Phoenician” (Franck Salameh Copyright © 2015) all used by permission of Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.

In Beirut, I am grateful for the loyalty, generosity, and complicity of my dear friends (*mes frères de cœur*) David and Hiram Corm of the Éditions de la Revue Phénicienne, who spread their kindness and spared neither resource nor time putting at my disposal a wealth of archives, advice, and personal contacts as I excavated and translated Charles Corm’s works. My stay in Beirut was short—and even were it not, it is way too short—but always long-savored and can never be forgotten when Davy and Rami are in it. I should also mention that without their devotion, I would not have been able to identify some of the more elusive copyright owners of a good portion of the works featured in this volume. Chadia Tuéni of Dar al-nahar and Marwan Hamadé of the Fondation Nadia Tuéni deserve heartfelt thanks, as does Omar Nizar Kabbani, heir and representative of the Nizar Qabani Estate, who graciously granted me rights to classics of his father’s corpus. Abdo Wazen of *Al-Hayat*, and Michael Young of the Beirut *Daily Star* also deserve special recognition—and more—for all the efforts that they furnished on my behalf with regard to various “orphaned” works with seemingly no copyright owners. I am likewise grateful to Sami Naufal, Emile Tyan, Najla Reaidy, and Pascale Kahwagi of Hachette-Antoine Beirut for the rights to Anis Freyha’s work, for the elegance and enthusiasm with which they answered my queries, and for something else that I can only describe as Levantine—and from their purview, *Lebanese*—hospitality.

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At Yale University Press, wise, skilled, proactive—and most of all, patient—editors made this volume what it is today. Eric Brandt, now assistant director and editor in chief at the University of Virginia Press, took a personal interest in this book project while he was still senior editor at Yale, and while the book was still in its early stages. I am grateful to Eric for having lent his support to this project from its inception, passing it on to the able hands of Laura Davulis, and later to Sarah Miller and Ash Lago, who made it what it is today in its final iteration. I would also like to extend a special thanks to my production editor, Ann-Marie Imbornoni, and my copy editor, Andrew Frisardi, for the thoughtful, meticulous work they expended on this volume. Likewise I should mention with particular appreciation the (sometimes ruthless) anonymous reviewers, who were subjected to various versions of this manuscript over the past four years, and whose cavils and gavels made this final product less imperfect than it might have otherwise remained.

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Note on Translation and Transliteration

Spellings of non-Western place names and proper nouns were employed in conformance with common usage in various dialectal forms of Arabic, and in keeping with local and phonological peculiarities. This was done even in places where other authors and translators might have adhered to standards of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). For instance, I use Charles Corm, not Shaarl al-Qurm, and Ashrafiyyé, not Ashrafiyyah, because those are the spelling and phonological norms in Lebanon. Emphases, random punctuations, erratic ellipses, brackets, and other seemingly arbitrary diacritic symbols in Adonis's and Qabbani's works are reproduced as they have occurred in the original Arabic texts (ellipses for where I have left out passages of the authors' texts are in square brackets, while the authors' own ellipses are not). These "visual effects" were some of the many ways in which, Adonis for instance, defied the norms and orthodoxies of his time, plying his Arabic language in both form and content to reflect the fragmentation of Arab culture and the Arab self; textual and linguistic fragmentation, to which he added visual fragmentation emulating the social, cultural, and political mutilation of the Arabs so to speak. Qabbani did likewise at times, albeit not with the same frequency and capriciousness as Adonis. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from French, Arabic, dialectal languages, and Hebrew originals are my own.

