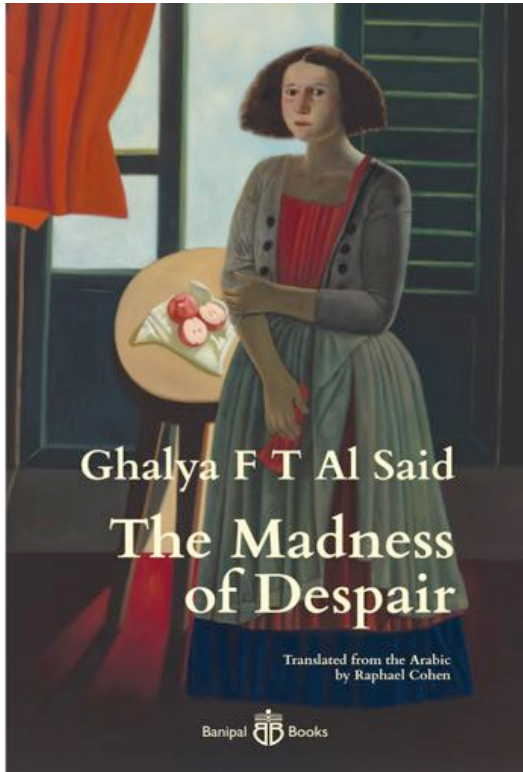


The Madness of Despair

by Ghalya F T Al Said



Ghalya F T Al Said

- First novel in English translation for Omani novelist
- Psychological drama of cultural displacement and social alienation
- An Arab woman in London's Shepherd's Bush rebels against the constraints of her arranged marriage
- Fast-moving narrative lays bare the complexities of identity, exile and belonging
- Unexpected attention from a wealthy doctor drives Maliha's ambitions in unforeseen ways
- Tragedy and comedy in this triangle of love and strife

The Madness of Despair tells the story of Maliha, who is living in London with her husband Nafie after an arranged marriage in their distant Arab homeland. The couple become good friends with Doctor Nadim, a fellow exile, but in the twists and turns of the friendship, the men's nostalgia for their old lives – and old ways of living – come into conflict with Maliha's ambition to live and love freely and make something of her new life now she's settled in London. Though ready to throw off the constraints of her disastrous marriage at the slightest turn, Maliha is ill-prepared for the fire of emotions that overcomes her, leading to unforeseen consequences for all three. It is a powerful narrative that reveals just how much psychological suffering and cultural displacement can upset the most ordinary of aspirations for life and love.

“A talented and inventive storyteller, with a well developed sense of tragedy and comedy”

Susannah Tarbush

“*The Madness of Despair* depicts the tragedy of the Middle East, which will remain without solution until Arabs can live in freedom and dignity in their own lands rather than turning to life in exile. “

Al-Jarida, Kuwait

“*The Madness of Despair* is primarily a love story where love becomes the mirror of longing for home, and love for a person mixes with love for a nation . . . the author has fluently and elegantly succeeded in portraying the tempestuous conflict submerging her characters.”

Katia al-Tawil



Ghalya F T Al Said is a novelist from Oman who studied in both Oman and the UK, and has a PhD in International Relations from the University of Warwick. She has published poems, short stories and six novels. Her novels focus on immigrants in foreign, usually Western, settings and their attempts to cope and adapt to conflicting concepts of belief and culture.

The Madness of Despair is her first novel to have been translated into English from its original Arabic and is one of four set in the UK. Her other novels include *Days in Heaven* (2005), *Sabira and Asila* (2007), *Scattered Years* (2008), *The Tedium of Time* (2015 and 2017) and *District of the Blind* (2019).

She has opened a traditional Museum in Oman and plans to open a second one on culturally related themes.



Raphael Cohen is a professional translator and lexicographer who studied Arabic and Hebrew at Oxford University and the University of Chicago. His translations include novels by George Yarak, Eslam Mosbah, Ahlem Mosteghanemi, Mohamed Salmawy and Mona Prince.



Front cover painting is by the Iraqi artist **Afifa Aleiby**

FROM THE BOOK

Standing facing Dr Nadim, it became apparent to Maliha that London contained another kind of success she had known nothing about. This was success unmarred by the hardship and suffering of those struggling to make a living. His success differed from that of the shop owners who worked tirelessly all day without getting bored. She watched the commerce in the shops like it was theatre. The main act involved earning money.

In London there were different kinds of success: the Doctor had achieved his desires and kept his hands clean and not soiled with blood, unlike her neighbour the butcher, even though both the doctor's and the butcher's trade involved blood.

The clean-cut appearance of Dr Nadim reminded her of the many times she had wished to make something of her life, enough to change her day-to-day life which was full of hassles. Her life here in London with her husband Nafie was a continuation of the reality she had lived with her family in the past.

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