

Fragments of something akin to love: or the emergence of something in between

Creative Work

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Abstract Can I invite you – the reader – to dwell in fragments of something akin to love emerging in spaces in between? Through intimate fears of being a monstrous Orientalist, emergent friendships in Amman, and the beauty of a Jordanian grandmother and her grandchild, this imagistic piece is an invitation to dwell in what emerges in experiences of fragments of something akin to love. Experiences that might at first glance seem separate or incongruent, but through that very incommensurability give way to a particular kind of loving relation that would not be possible otherwise. Through an imagistic approach to writing about these particular experiences and situations, I invite you to dwell on what it means to write phenomenologically and ethnographically about love conditioned by always being in between.

Résumé Puis-je vous inviter, lecteur-ric-e-x, à contempler les fragments de quelque chose s'apparentant à un amour émergeant dans les espaces de l'entre-deux ? Par la peur intime d'être la monstrueuse orientaliste, par des amitiés naissantes à Amman, par la beauté d'une grand-mère jordanienne et de son petit-enfant, cette pièce imagée est une invitation à contempler ce qui émerge dans les expériences fragmentées de quelque chose qui s'apparente à l'amour. Des expériences qui peuvent à première vue sembler distinctes ou même incongrues, mais qui, par leur incommensurabilité même, donnent lieu à un type particulier de relation amoureuse qui serait impossible autrement. En faisant mienne une approche imagée de l'écriture sur ces expériences et situations particulières, je vous invite à réfléchir à ce que signifie l'écriture phénoménologique et ethnographique d'un l'amour conditionné par le fait d'être toujours entre-deux.

Keywords fragments; in between; beauty; imagistic anthropology; phenomenology; city; love?

What does an Orientalist look like?
Is it tall, small, fat, pink, sweaty, gross?
Is it bejeweled, beautiful, dangerous?
Does it smell? Does it light in the dark?
Is it full of lies? Transparent?
What does an Orientalist look like?

In a bar somewhere in Amman:

NN: "So, what do you work with?"

M: "I'm an anthropologist..."

NN: "Politician?"

M: "No, no, anthropologist..."

O: "She's an anthropologist, she's observing!"

Grandmother was the beauty of the village. I look at a photograph from the 1950's, and, judging from the pencil skirt outfits, she and her sister, bowed heads, are engaged in a very formal ritual. She declined him twice before accepting the marriage proposal, her grandchild tells me several times.

I return to a scene:

We sit in the living room, and she lights a cigarette and asks me "how are you?" I respond "mniha, hamdlillah, inti kifik ya teta?" (I am fine, thank God, how are you grandmother?).

I look at all the family photographs surrounding us on the walls, and she laughs a little at something I try to say. I want to say many things. But I don't say much.

Is the grandchild the beauty of a village of four million people today? I ponder, looking at the photograph.

Behind the desk, I find the English translation of Yasmine Hamdan's voice of longing: "Shine on, silver moon. Stars prancing around you in swoon. I long for your cool warmth. Your fire banished sleep from my eyes. Hums and murmurs. Such a teaser. Such a pleaser." (Hamdan 2013)

Reconciliatory notes

There is so much beauty around 5 pm when the sun is on its way down. The hills are bathed in a golden light, and it feels as if a calm is descending on the city even though the roads are still full of cars. It is the moment in between the dominance of either sun or moon. A moment where both seem to be present, sometimes even visibly so, in the sky. I glance out over the city's seemingly endless rows of houses and buildings, and there is no other place to be in the world than right there at that moment. I walk past a crumbling concrete wall decorated with street art made by someone I know, almost losing my

balance as I trip on the gaps in the pavement. Yet, my attention is pulled outwards and towards the atmosphere of a whole city that breathes out after another warm day of hustle and bustle. I am on my way to meet someone. Or maybe I am just passing time alone, greeting the street cats and the nearly blind, elderly man in the vegetable shop close to the mosque. I could be on my way to meet friends and go for a car ride outside the city, to the soft, green hills bordering the Valley. We might sit there, listening to the voice of some female pop singer I do not know and whose lyrics I understand very little, overlooking the vast landscape. We might have a conversation about something huge and difficult. Or about something trivial. Like what to eat for late lunch, or who knows what about whom. Or I might be listening to a discussion about something I have no role in but an analytical one. It does not matter much. It also does not necessarily matter if I am there, if I am writing about it, or if I am daydreaming while walking the empty streets of a small provincial town in Denmark. It is those atmospheres that I dream of. Of being there.

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References

Hamdan, Yasmine. 2013. "Samar". <https://yasminehamdan.com/en/#/#lyrics>. English translation of Arabic lyrics.