



Leg over Leg: Volumes One and Two (Library of Arabic Literature)

Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq

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Leg over Leg recounts the life, from birth to middle age, of “the Fariyaq,” alter ego of Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, a pivotal figure in the intellectual and literary history of the modern Arab world. The always edifying and often hilarious adventures of the Fariyaq, as he moves from his native Lebanon to Egypt, Malta, Tunis, England, and France, provide the author with grist for wide-ranging discussions of the intellectual and social issues of his time, including the ignorance and corruption of the Lebanese religious and secular establishments, freedom of conscience, women’s rights, sexual relationships between men and women, the manners and customs of Europeans and Middle Easterners, and the differences between contemporary European and Arabic literatures, all the while celebrating the genius and beauty of the classical Arabic language.

Volumes One and Two follow the hapless Fariyaq through his youth and early education, his misadventures among the monks of Mount Lebanon, his flight to the Egypt of Muhammad 'Ali, and his subsequent employment with the first Arabic daily newspaper—during which time he suffers a number of diseases that parallel his progress in the sciences of Arabic grammar, and engages in amusing digressions on the table manners of the Druze, young love, snow, and the scandals of the early papacy. This first book also sees the list—of locations in Hell, types of medieval glue, instruments of torture, stars and pre-Islamic idols—come into its own as a signature device of the work.

Akin to Sterne and Rabelais in his satirical outlook and technical inventiveness, al-Shidyaq produced in *Leg Over Leg* a work that is unique and unclassifiable. It was initially widely condemned for its attacks on authority, its religious skepticism, and its “obscenity,” and later editions were often abridged. This is the first complete English translation of this groundbreaking work.

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