



# **What Makes a Man?: Sex Talk in Beirut and Berlin (Modern Middle East Literature in Translation)**

*Rashid al-Daif, Joachim Helfer*

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In 2003, Lebanese writer Rashid al-Daif spent several weeks in Germany as part of the "West-East Divan" program, a cultural exchange effort meant to improve mutual awareness of German and Middle Eastern cultures. He was paired with German author Joachim Helfer, who then returned the visit to al-Daif in Lebanon. Following their time together, al-Daif published in Arabic a literary reportage of his encounter with Helfer in which he focuses on the German writer's homosexuality. His frank observations have been variously read as trenchant, naïve, or offensive. In response, Helfer provided an equally frank point-by-point riposte to al-Daif's text. Together these writers offer a rare exploration of attitudes toward sex, love, and gender across cultural lines. By stretching the limits of both fiction and essay, they highlight the importance of literary sensitivity in understanding the Other.

Rashid al-Daif's "novelized biography" and Joachim Helfer's commentary appear for the first time in English translation in *What Makes a Man? Sex Talk in Beirut and Berlin*. Also included in this volume are essays by specialists in Arabic and German literature that shed light on the discourse around sex between these two authors from different cultural contexts.

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