The Sheikh’s Detective

By A. Alwan
Translated by Timothy Reece

Publication year: 2012
Price: £6.99
ISBN: 9781908509000
Format/extent: 182 pp Paperback

The protagonists of this novel are a Muslim Arab wealthy man (the Sheikh), who’s visiting Brighton in search of Julian Smith; the detective he hired back home (via the Internet) to find his teenage son Nasser, and an English postman who volunteered to help the Sheikh in this issue. Both struggle with their own confused inner lives in the sleepy town that seems only disturbed by the squawks of the seagulls and the waves of tourists on the beach of Brighton. The novel, however, provides great deal of understanding of humans’ emotions and conditions, with some very memorable scenes of lovemaking and manslaughter.

‘In just one paragraph, Alwan controversially proposes that the entire understanding of miracles, and indeed religion, is based on myth and fallacy. A reader with significant knowledge of Islam would grasp this reference with ease. However, the same may not be said for a non-Muslim background. This example alone demonstrates my belief that translation is not merely a conduit of language, but of ideas and culture—and with that becomes an art form’

The translator

A. Alwan was born in 1941. After completing the high school in Baghdad, he left Iraq for good to work as a freelance journalist and researcher. He lived in Beirut through the Lebanese civil war before moving to Cairo, Khartoum, Morocco, Rome, and London. He finally settled in Leeds in West Yorkshire where he dedicated his life to writing.

Alwan’s work reflects the notion that there are two sides to truth, yet both are built on illusion.