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## **At the Café and The Talisman** Stories by Mohammed Dib Translated by C. Dickson

Reflecting distinct and important stages in the career of the preeminent Algerian writer Mohammed Dib, *At the Café* and *The Talisman* brings together two collections that embroider on themes relating to the Algerian War for Independence (1954–1962). *At the Café*, published in 1955, is mostly realistic in style and illustrates particularly well Dib’s uncanny talent for storytelling. *The Talisman*, published eleven years later, reflects Dib’s growing penchant for relating his perception of the magical or mystical qualities underlying everyday reality.

When he wrote *At the Café*, Dib felt it was his duty to witness or testify on behalf of the downtrodden of Algeria under French colonial rule. Three stories in this collection—“Little Cousin,” “A Fine Wedding,” and “The Long Wait”—poignantly describe the rampant poverty, hunger, sickness, and despair that prevailed under French rule.

In *The Talisman*, Dib no longer feels the need to testify. Although colonialism and the brutality of war are still central threads, his treatment of them in this collection is more scathingly critical. The underlying themes in this collection take up, among other things, an obsession with the experience of death, a fascination with madness, the decrypting of symbols, the quest for a primordial language, and the possibilities of spiritual transcendence.

**Mohammed Dib** (1920-2003), poet, writer, and journalist, was the author of more than thirty novels and considered one of the “founding fathers” among Algerian francophone writers. **C. Dickson** is translator of *Desert*, *Wandering Star*, and *The Round* by J.M.G. Le Clézio as well as *Devil’s Dance* and *Macadam Dreams* by Gisèle Pineau, among other works. **Mildred Mortimer** is Professor of French Emerita at the University of Colorado and author of several works on the literature of the Maghreb.

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