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Then We Were One: Fragments of Two Lives, by Fred A. Reed. Talonbooks, 2011. 304pp., $19.95 ISBN-13: 9780889226678.

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Montreal writer and scholar Fred A. Reed has made a mark as a journalist reporting from Iran, the Middle East and the Balkans, as an award-winning literary translator from French and Greek into English, and as a specialist on the politics and religion of the Middle East. In this work, Reed, approaching his seventies, turns his attention to a memoir of his remarkable life. Through a fragmented yet largely chronologically arranged narrative, intertwined with reminiscences of the life of his brother with whom Reed was obviously very close, readers are treated to a story of massive geographical and ideological shifts—from white, middle-class Catholic Pasadena—through tumultuous involvement in dodging the American draft and adherence to secular Marxism while living in Greece and Canada, and visiting Iran, Turkey and Syria—finally to Montreal and conversion to Islam influenced by the Nur movement founded by the Turkish sage Bediüzzaman Said Nursi.

If a central thread is to be distinguished in this narrative, it is that of rebellious iconoclasm: the confrontation and smashing of various idols, culminating in surrender to "the centrality of mercy that Islam ascribes again and again to God" (286). The title—*Then We Were One*—gestures, of course, to a related thread: Reed`s journey of coming to terms with the suicidal death of his brother, crushed, he believes, by the American system promulgating the Vietnam War.

Some of the most profound meditations in the book describe the intense anger ignited in the author on a personal level by his brother's suicide, and on a more general level by the "contagion of the American state" (137) creating enemies in order to fulfill its manifest destiny and sending its sons out as apprentice killers in order to maintain upper-class prosperity and propriety. The narrative relates the author's gradual resolution of the rupture caused by the war and his brother's death through a slow but inexorable movement away from historical determinism to an acceptance of Divine Agency. The works of Nikos Kazantzakis leads him to Greece. In Iran, he encounters a society built on premises vastly different from Western secular individualism and consumerism. In Turkey he is drawn to the thought and followers of Said Nursi, which profoundly challenges his longstanding secular Marxist belief in

retributive social justice. And in Syria, researching a book on iconoclasm, he perceives how Islam and Christianity had at one time in the past drawn very close together, until the Christian iconoclasts were defeated. He participates in the fast of Ramadan and finds, upon his return to Montreal, compelled to fast again when Ramadan comes. The narrative ends with his formal conversion to Islam.

Fred Reed has certainly experienced a notable life, the narration of which incisively critiques the presumptuous stereotypes of a clash of civilizations between the Eurowest and Islam. Readers of his other works will no doubt enjoy the access this book gives to the background and context of his journalism, translations, and scholarship. Even those not particularly interested in the Middle East or Islam will appreciate the telling of a tragic family saga. While necessarily selective—I, for one, would have liked to have heard more about his spouse Ingeborg and the family he started with her—the book succeeds in its stated goal of telling the tale of the survivor. And whether or not one accepts the author's conviction that his life was in some hidden way determined from the beginning, one can certainly resonate with his clarion call to "never bow before the apparent invincibility and omniscience of the state" (285).