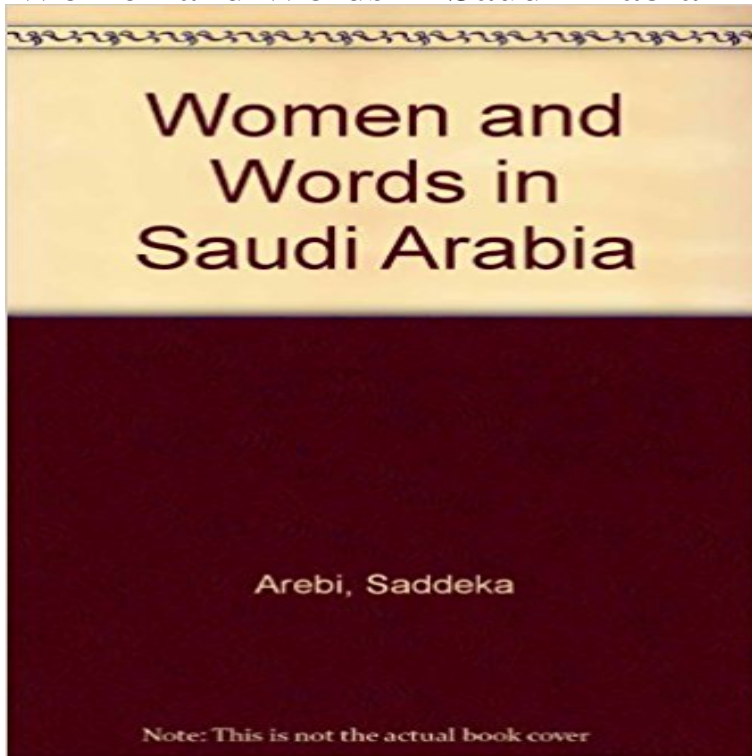


Women and Words in Saudi Arabia



This study explores how contemporary Saudi women writers use their writings as a way to gain control over the rules of cultural discourse in their society. The author examines the work of nine influential women writers and presents excerpts of their writings which appear here for the first time in English. On the basis of interviews with the writers and textual analyses of their works, Arebi establishes that despite religious, cultural and political constraints, they continue to contribute to the definition and interpretation of religion, tradition, and history. Arebi shows how in doing so, they pose a strong challenge to the powerful ideological forces in their society. Yet she argues that despite this challenge to their local discourses of power, they do not necessarily conform to Western feminists conceptions of resistance or to the nature of patriarchy. Saudi women writers, through a unique and culturally specific interplay of poetics and politics in their writings, have chosen to carve out a discourse of their own, adopting a form of resistance that is based more on a dialectic of protest and affirmation than on clear-cut opposition. Arebi's ethnographic and literary evidence demonstrates how this chosen form of resistance has enabled them to create a place for women in the intellectual life of their society and, more importantly, to effect a fundamental transformation in the rules of cultural discourse.

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