



The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

The 2021 Prize – The Shortlist

The Banipal Trust for Arab Literature is pleased to announce the shortlist of the 2021 prize. Each year, the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize provides a welcome opportunity to explore and discuss the enormous repertoire of literary works that vividly represent the creativity of writers across the various regions of the Arabic-speaking world, and to evaluate the relative merits of translations of a sample of that creativity that are published for the English-language readership.

This year, as in previous years, while a variety of literary genres have been represented in the submissions, it is the novel that predominates (as a survey of previous winners of the prize makes clear). In such a context, says Chair of Judges Roger Allen, one might suggest that, with the complexities of contemporary life in question – in many, if not most, of the regions – the novel's prevalence may perhaps be viewed in the light of Lionel Trilling's notion that the novel is "an especially useful agent of the moral imagination . . . the literary form which most directly reveals to us the complexity, the difficulty, and the interest of life in society" (*The Liberal Imagination*).

As an initial phase in this year's evaluation process, each member of the judging panel was asked to select from the 16 entries a longlist that would then be considered for the short list. There was a remarkable degree of agreement among the four judges regarding the potential shortlist, in that their agreed longlist of twelve titles was easily reduced to six, and, after some brief discussion of the prize's criteria, to the five titles that are now discussed below.

The judges in this 16th year of the Prize are:

Roger Allen (Chair), Professor Emeritus of Arabic & Comparative Literature, University of Pennsylvania • Rosemarie Hudson, Founder Publisher, HopeRoad Publishing • Ronak Hosni, Professor of Arabic and Translation Studies at the American University of Sharjah • Caroline McCormick, Director, Achatés

The shortlisted works (in alphabetical order of translator's family name) are:

***Voices of the Lost* by Hoda Barakat (Lebanon)**

translated by Marilyn Booth

Publisher: Oneworld

***The Girl with the Braided Hair* by Rasha Adly (Egypt)**

translated by **Sarah Enany**

Publisher: Hoopoe Fiction

***A Bed for the King's Daughter* by Shahla Ujayli (Syria)**

translated by **Sawad Hussain**

Publisher: Center for Middle Eastern Studies/University of Texas Press

***The Frightened Ones* by Dima Wannous (Syria)**

translated by **Elisabeth Jaquette**

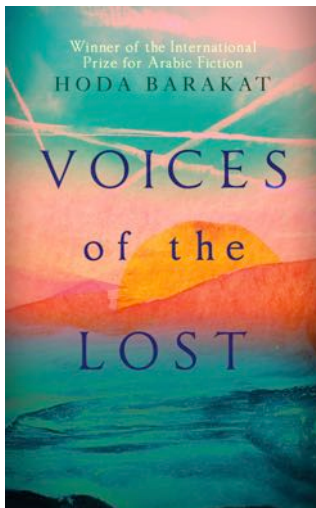
Publisher: Harvill Secker

***God99* by Hassan Blasim**

translated by **Jonathan Wright**

Publisher: Comma Press

THE JUDGES' STATEMENT



“A novel of voices and letters, full of the uncertainties, ambiguities, and rootlessness of exile”

MARILYN BOOTH

shortlisted for her translation of

***Voices of the Lost* by Hoda Barakat (Lebanon)**

Published by Oneworld Publications, February, 2021

ISBN 9781786077226. Pbk. 192 pages. £12.99.

ISBN 9781786077233. eBook/Kindle. £6.99

Winner of the 2019 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), Hoda Barakat’s novel, originally entitled *Night Post* and superbly rendered into English by Marilyn Booth as *Voices of the Lost*, comprises a series of lost letters written by immigrants and displaced individuals from different unnamed Middle Eastern countries. The letters, which have never made it to the intended recipients, depict the final voices, inner thoughts, confessions, guilt, and justifications of their tormented authors. The narrative manages to convey an uncanny atmosphere of placelessness, uncertainty, and lack of identity, all of which emerge from the very spontaneity of the one-sided conversation, including implied questioning from the person purportedly listening. This unique experiment in modern Arabic fiction provides yet another example of the many forms in which the alienation of exile finds cogent expression in fiction, here made fully accessible to readers of English by this excellent translation.

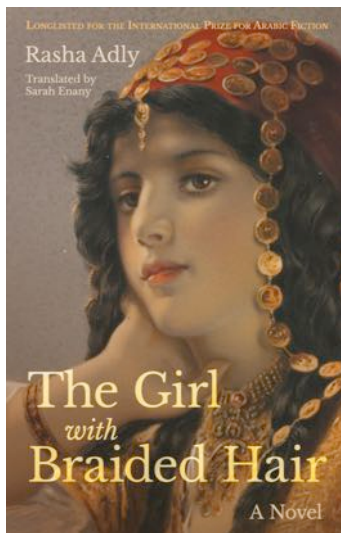


Marilyn Booth is the Khalid bin Abdullah Al Saud Professor for the Study of the Contemporary Arab World at the University of Oxford's Oriental Institute, based at Magdalen College. She grew up in the United States but spent a year in Beirut, Lebanon at the age of twelve, which convinced her that Arabic would be part of her future. She has translated 18 full-length works from the Arabic. In 2019, she was the co-winner of the Man Booker International Prize, as translator of Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies*.



Hoda Barakat was born in Beirut in 1952. She studied French Literature at the Lebanese University and moved to Paris with her family in 1989. She has published five novels and two plays. Her novels have been translated into several languages and have received numerous prestigious prize nominations, including the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature for *The Tiller of Waters* (2000). In 2015, she was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize. She currently lives in France.

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“A complex work of historical fiction in which the young Zeinab attracts the attention of Napoleon himself”

SARAH ENANY

shortlisted for her translation of

***The Girl with the Braided Hair* by Rasha Adly (Egypt)**

Published by Hoopoe Fiction (imprint of AUC Press), November 2020.

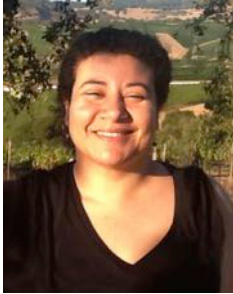
ISBN 9789774169878. Pbk. 324 pages. £14.18.

eBook/Kindle. £10.62

Carefully crafted within two time frames – 2012 and 1798 – Rasha Adly's captivating and beautifully written novel offers a fascinating historical account of Napoleon's time in Egypt. The reader learns a good deal about what is happening on the French campaign through the diaries of Bonaparte's artist and writer in residence, Alton German. Meanwhile, research being conducted in the modern time period of the novel reveals that the artist was once in love with a beautiful

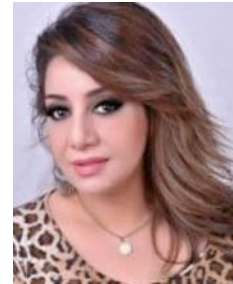
Egyptian girl, whose image he immortalized in an enigmatic painting that now sits in a museum.

Dexterously combining history, art, passion, and politics, the novel manages to present to the reader, in the words of one of the judges, a multi-textured story of love, war, and the ruthlessness and privileges of the invader. Sarah Enany's subtle and beautifully crafted translation is a wonderful vehicle through which to introduce readers to such a significant addition to the tradition of the Egyptian and Arabic novel.



Sarah Enany is a literary translator, and is an Assistant Professor in the Department English Language and Literature at Cairo University.

Rasha Adly is an Egyptian writer, born in Cairo in 1972. She is a researcher and freelance lecturer in the history of art, and Cairo correspondent for the Emirates *Culture* magazine. She is the author of eight novels of which *The Girl with Braided Hair* (2017) was longlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2018.



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“A highly experimental collection of short stories, with a surrealist tinge”

SAWAD HUSSAIN

shortlisted for her translation of

***A Bed for the King's Daughter* by Shahla Ujayli (Syria)**

Publisher: Center for Middle Eastern Studies/Univ. Texas Press, January 2021

ISBN 978-1-4773-2228-4. Pbk. 72 pages. £11.99 / \$16

Many of the stories contained in Shahla Ujayli's remarkable collection, *A Bed for the King's Daughter*, read almost like parables. Composed in a crisp style appropriate to their generic purposes, some of them belong to the category of “short short-stories,” and convey to the reader a sense of surrealism with their frequent instances of insight and poetic beauty. With little or no connection to either time or space, the stories in this collection, skilfully translated by Sawad Hussain into an English prose that is well suited to the generic purpose of the

original text, will leave the reader impressed with the experimental spirit that the author has brought to this project.



Sawad Hussain is a translator and litterateur. She is winner of the 2019 ArabLit Short Story Translation Prize and two English PEN Translates awards. She holds an MA in Modern Arabic Literature from SOAS, London. A contributor to journals such as *ArabLit* and *Asymptote*, she was co-editor of the Arabic-English portion of the award-winning Oxford Arabic Dictionary (2014). Her recent translations include *Passage to the Plaza* by Sahar Khalifa (shortlisted for the 2020 Palestine Book Awards).



Shahla Ujayli is a Syrian writer, born in 1976. She holds a doctorate in Modern Arabic Literature and Cultural Studies from Aleppo University and teaches Modern Arabic Literature and Aesthetics at the American University in Madaba, Jordan. She is the author of four novels, with the second one, *A Sky Close to Our House* (2015) shortlisted for the 2016 International Prize for Arabic Fiction and later published in English. *A Bed for the King's Daughter* is her second short story collection and won the 2017 Al-Multaqa Prize for the Arabic Short Story. Her short story, *A Dead Hand*, translated by Ayane Ezaki, appeared in *Banipal 58* (Spring 2017).

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“A novel within a novel that is a searing indictment of the Syrian regime”

ELISABETH JAQUETTE

shortlisted for her translation of

***The Frightened Ones* by Dima Wannous (Syria)**

Published by Harvill Secker, April 2020

ISBN 9780525655138 \$25.95. 256 pages. Hbk. \$25.95.
Pbk, £12.99. ISBN 9780525655145 eBook. £4.99

In her novel, *The Frightened Ones*, Dima Wannous presents her readers with a searing indictment of the Syrian regime during the al-Assad period. Couched in the experimental form of a novel within a novel, the narrative provides chilling and powerful accounts of the lives of ordinary Syrians living in constant fear: the result of decades of oppression, despotism, and tyranny. Set in present-day Syria after the 2011 revolution, the novel masterfully

embodies the psychology of fear among the various characters who, in spite of their different generations and intellectual backgrounds, are traumatized by their experiences, as the constant fear of persecution, interrogation and insecurity that does not fade away after the war ends. The fluid style of the original is well captured in Elisabeth Jaquette’s excellent English version.

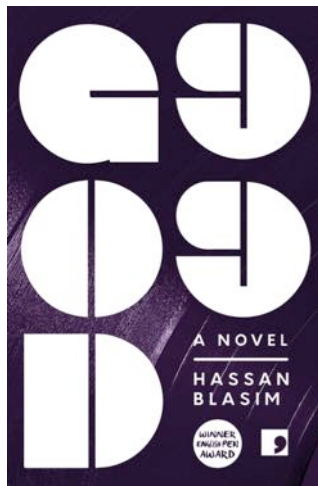


Elisabeth Jaquette is a translator from Arabic, whose work includes Basma Abdel Aziz’s *The Queue* (shortlisted for the TA First Translation Prize), Rania Mamoun’s *Thirteen Months of Sunrise*, and Adania Shibli’s *Minor Detail*. She is Executive Director of the American Literary Translators Association.



Dima Wannous was born in 1982. She is a Syrian writer and translator who studied French literature at Damascus University and the Sorbonne. She is the author of a short story collection, *Details* (2007), and two novels, *The Chair* (2008) and *The Frightened Ones* (2017), which was shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction. She was named as one of the ‘Beirut 39’: one of the group of 39 best Arab writers under the age of 40 chosen by the Hay Festival in 2009..

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“A novel of and in exile, whose narrator discusses his life with Emil Cioran, the Romanian nihilist philosopher”

JONATHAN WRIGHT

shortlisted for his translation of

***God99* by Hassan Blasim**

Published by Comma Press, November 2020

ISBN 9781905583775. Pbk. £9.99. eBook. £5.99.

The Iraqi-born writer, Hassan Blasim, writes from and about the condition of exile, with all its concomitant issues of acculturation and alienation. His provocative narrative, *God99*, subtitled “Emil Cioran’s e-mails,” emerges as part fiction and part autobiography. The narrative consists of a collection of stories based on interviews of numerous Iraqis by the protagonist Hassan Buma, an Iraqi veterinarian living in Finland (like the author of the book). These interviews reveal the impact of the horror of the sectarian conflict in Iraq. The stories are complex, intertwining numerous accounts of tortured souls in a journey of silent death. The author’s distinctive style uses various rhetorical devices and combines reality, fiction, terror and humour to create a truly unique narrative.

Jonathan Wright's translation succeeds admirably in conveying into a readable English form the often confrontational complexities of the original text (published in Italy as a further reflection of exile).



Jonathan Wright is a British literary translator who has translated more than 20 contemporary Arabic novels and short-story collections into English since 2008, including three winners of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction. He has won the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize twice and also been shortlisted for the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize in [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2020](#). On 10 November 2021 he delivered the prize's [2021 Annual Lecture](#), entitled 'Change and Continuity in Contemporary Arabic Fiction', via a Zoom Webinar hosted by the British Library.



Hassan Blasim is an Iraqi-born film director and writer. He settled in Finland in 2004 after years of travelling through Europe as a refugee. His debut collection *The Madman of Freedom Square* (also translated by Jonathan Wright) was published by Comma Press in 2009 and was longlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2010. His second collection, *The Iraqi Christ*, won the 2014 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, the first Arabic title and the first short story collection ever to win the award. Hassan's work has been translated into over 20 languages.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

The prize is an annual award of £3,000, made to the translator(s) of a published translation in English of a full-length imaginative and creative Arabic work of literary merit published after, or during, the year 1967 and first published in English translation in the year prior to the award. The prize aims to raise the profile of contemporary Arabic literature as well as honouring the important role of individual translators in bringing the work of established and emerging Arab writers to the attention of the wider world.

It was the first prize in the world for published Arabic literary translation into English and was established by Banipal, the magazine of modern Arab literature in English translation, and the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature. The inaugural prize was awarded on 9 October 2006 and won by Humphrey Davies, the highly respected literary translator whose death from cancer on 12 November 2021 is deeply mourned.

The prize is administered by the Society of Authors in the United Kingdom, alongside the other UK prizes for literary translation, from languages that include Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Spanish and Swedish. The prizes are awarded annually at a ceremony hosted by the Society.

The prize is wholly sponsored by Omar Saif Ghobash and his family in memory of his father, the late Saif Ghobash, a man passionate about Arabic literature and other literatures of the world.

In 2015, to mark the tenth year of the prize, the family generously extended their sponsorship to the establishment of an annual lecture on literary translation. The sixth annual lecture took place on [10 November 2021](#), delivered by Jonathan Wright, who has won the prize twice and is this year one of our shortlisted translators.

With the lecture, the Banipal Trust looks forward to increasing support for the reading of literature from the Arab world in English translation, and to working with publishers, translators and booksellers to encourage and promote both the wider translation and wider availability of contemporary works of literature by Arab authors.

The 2021 Winner will be announced by the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature on 12 January 2022. The Award Ceremony, which includes all the translation prizes, and is hosted on Zoom by the Society of Authors, will take place on 10 February 2022, with a Banipal celebration being held, also online, the following week (details to be confirmed).

The deadline for prize entries and publication of works each year is 31 March. For further history of the prize, more information about entries, judges, rules, and any other details, please go to: <http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/>

For all information about the Annual Lecture see this link:
<https://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/>

CONTACT

To contact the Prize or the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature directly, email the Trust's administrator on admin@banipaltrust.org.uk