



The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

The 2022 Prize – The Shortlist

The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize is pleased to announce the shortlist of the 2022 Prize with a full report from the judges Charis Olszok (Chair), Susheila Nasta, Katharine Halls and Becki Maddock.

This year, the prize received seventeen submissions, most of them novels, from across the Arab world. These reflect the great diversity of writing practices today, from lengthy historical novels, rich in material detail, to satires of recent history (noticeably the political intrigues of student movements), to gripping romances, and works of structural experimentation that ambitiously revisit events from the Palestinian *nakba* to the aftermath of the Arab Spring. From satirical short stories to poetry that stretches the limits of language and imagery, the list's strength is in its creative breadth, and consistent quality.

The judges were initially asked to submit a list of their preferences for a longlist. This list, of twelve titles, was discussed in a meeting to ascertain a joint shortlist and winner. The length and complexity of this discussion reflected the incredible and varied strengths of the works submitted, which proved hard to narrow down. Judges were torn between the ambition of the original work, the accuracy and flair of the translation, and the range of literary genres and styles with which they were presented. While the works proved hard to narrow down, the judges consistently agreed on the outstanding strengths of three works, selected for the shortlist, which offers an exciting snapshot of the generically and stylistically diverse longlist, and one in which translation quality is at the very forefront.

Prof. Susheila Nasta commented that, "At its most powerful literature should act as an imaginative passport into other worlds, a conduit to take us inside the lives of others, inviting us for a moment to stay and be part of an unknown world. Words transport as do good translations. At their best translations also take us elsewhere, offering readers stories in cultural landscapes they would not otherwise encounter. The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation makes this journey possible."

The shortlisted works are:

***The Men Who Swallowed the Sun* by Hamdi Abu Golayyel (Egypt)**

Translated by Humphrey Davies

Publisher: Hoopoe Fiction (an imprint of AUC Press)

***Hot Maroc* by Yassin Adnan (Morocco)**

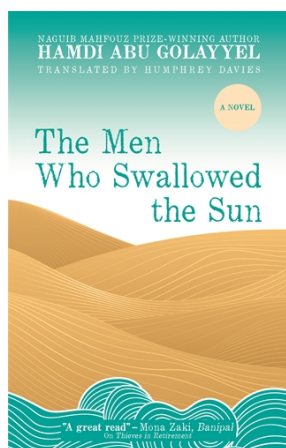
Translated by Alexander E. Elinson

Publisher: Syracuse University Press

***Slipping* by Mohamed Kheir (Egypt)**

Translated by Robin Moger

Publisher: Two Lines Press



The Men Who Swallowed the Sun

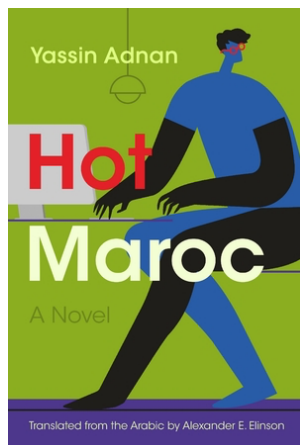
Hoopoe Fiction, imprint of AUC Press (1 Mar. 2022)
Pbk: ISBN 9781649030948 • 216 pp • £11.99 / \$18.95
Hbk: ISBN 9781649031990 • 216 pp • £43.80 / \$52.99
eBook: ISBN 9780815655398 • £10.66 / \$17.84 |

Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *The Men Who Swallowed the Sun* is a harsh, gritty tale of migration in pursuit of a better life, switching between registers of Arabic through the intimate and irreverent voice of its narrator, as we move from Egypt's Western Desert to Sabha in the South of Libya, across the Mediterranean to Italy. The novel has overtones of the Arabic oral epic and of the picaresque, through which it traces marginal, forgotten, and uncomfortable histories with sly wit. The richness of the language stretches from the nuances of dialect, proverbs, and colloquialisms, to clever wordplay within Modern Standard Arabic. Humphrey Davies handles this richness with aplomb, conveying the narrator's chattiness and scattered thoughts, alongside moments of fraught action, and shifts to historical and personal memories. It is a magnificent achievement to have brought this novel to English with such flair. The cultural specificities and idiosyncrasies of the original are conveyed, while the translation remains a gripping and vivid read thanks to Davies' profound knowledge of Arabic, and creative talent in finding solutions to the most demanding challenges.

"*The Men Who Swallowed the Sun* is a phenomenal translation of a unique and exciting novel about a young Bedouin from Egypt who migrates to Libya under Gaddafi, and then onwards to Italy, hoping to make big bucks, have a good time, and avoid getting sent back to Egypt. The dense, stream-of-consciousness narration of its unlikeable but undeniably charismatic protagonist drags the reader immediately into the gritty surroundings that form the backdrop of this picaresque quest, and Humphrey Davies's rendering impressively recreates the original's effect. It was clearly a challenging task, for example, to tackle the hero's Bedouin dialect and the jargon associated with each more or less criminal waystation on his madcap journey, and to accurately capture the book's wide-ranging geographical, historical and cultural references. Judged on its technical merits, this translation is a feat of research, accuracy and creativity; judged on its literary merits, it is an unusual and exhilarating book which will certainly enrich the Anglophone literary landscape" (Katharine Halls, Prize Judge, 2022).

Hamdi Abu Golayyel, born in Fayoum, Egypt, in 1967, is a writer and a journalist. He is the author of numerous short story collections and novels, including *Thieves in Retirement* and *A Dog with No Tail*, which was awarded the 2018 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature. He is editor-in-chief of the Popular Studies series, which specializes in folklore research, and writes for Arabic news outlets, such as *al-Ittihad* and *al-Safir*.

Humphrey Davies (1947–2021) translated some thirty book-length works from Arabic, including *The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa Al Aswany, and was a two-time winner of the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation.



Hot Maroc

Syracuse University Press (30 May 2021)

Pbk: ISBN 9780815611356 • 424 pp • £23.95 / \$29.95

eBook: ISBN 9780815655398 • £22.75 / \$29.95 |

Yassin Adnan's *Hot Maroc* is a vivid, satirical, and compelling panorama of Marrakesh's changing landscape, its student movements, political intrigue, and move into internet culture, through the perspective of Rahhal, the "squirrel", who stumbles his way through society, before becoming an undercover digital sensation. Weaving vivid character portraits, and lively social worlds with black humour, the novel grips the reader from first to last. Alexander Elinson's deft translation is highly enjoyable, conveying the original's light tone, wit, and underlying darkness.

"Yassin Adnan's amusing satire is an ambitious and wide-ranging novel. It has been skilfully translated by Alexander Elinson, who has produced a very readable novel in English, while also retaining a little of the Arabic style and flavour. Language is a topic on various levels within Adnan's novel, which employs different registers of Arabic including colloquial Moroccan Darija alongside standard Arabic and classical Arabic, as studied by the protagonist.

"Through the life of the novel's anti-hero, Rahhal, Adnan presents acute observations of human character and political shenanigans. Rahhal is simple, awkward and funny but also dangerous. But, like everyone else, he is just trying to survive. An original element of the comedy lies in the way Rahhal (The Squirrel) likens people's characteristics to those of animals. He is married to a Hedgehog, his professor is an Elephant, and his university comrades include a Cow, a Lizard and some rats.

"The novel is a commentary on changing times in modern Morocco, chronicling the rise of the internet and the influence of media and the internet on society. In today's world of fake news, the contrast between reality and people's online personas and the manipulation of these by Rahhal and others seems particularly pertinent" (Becki Maddock, Prize Judge, 2022).

Yassin Adnan is a Moroccan writer, editor, and journalist. He is the editor of *Marrakech Noir* and the author of four books of poetry and three short story collections. Since 2006, he has researched and presented his weekly cultural TV program *Masharef* (Thresholds) on Morocco's Channel One, and currently hosts the cultural *Bayt Yassin* (Yassin's House) on Egypt's Al-Ghad TV. *Hot Maroc* is his first novel.

Alexander E. Elinson is a scholar and translator. He teaches Arabic Language and Literature at Hunter College/CUNY and his research interests cut across the Middle East and North Africa, including Arabic and Hebrew literature from the Andalusi to the contemporary period. His current research is on language change and the use of Moroccan Arabic in writing. His previous translations include Youssef Fadel's novels *A Shimmering Red Fish Swims with Me* – shortlisted for the 2020 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize – and *A Beautiful White Cat Walks with Me*, as well as Allal Bourqia's short story "A Noisy Disappearance in an Ill-Reputed Alley" in *Marrakech Noir*.



Slipping

Two Lines Press (8 June, 2021)

Pbk: ISBN 9781949641165 • 187 pp • £14.63 / \$16.95

eBook • £8.95 / \$9/49

In *Slipping*, a journalist, Seif, is taken on a surreal, disturbing, yet incandescent tour of Egypt to witness events and sights magical and impossible. In the wake of the Arab Spring, the journey shifts from exterior to interior, exploring Seif's past; his relationships, disappointments, and traumas. The result is a ghostly tour, shifting between life and death, and reality and imagination. Kheir's first novel to be translated into English, *Slipping* provides a stunning introduction for Anglophone readers to this poet, short story writer, and novelist. Robin Moger's translation captures the sense of movement and electric aliveness of the original. Each image of this enigmatic, vivid, and captivating novel shimmers in English as it does in Arabic, through Moger's rendering of Kheir's economic and poetic brilliance. The clamour of the city resounds alongside the surreal quiet, as the novel slips between genres and voices, between absurdity, dystopia, and the sublime. Moger captures this slippage, alongside the melancholy of the original, and the moments of sharp, sweet humour.

"A subtle, evocative, and moving portrait of Cairo and Alexandria post-revolution and the psychological aftermath of the Arab Spring. Like the two main characters, Seif and Bahr, a struggling journalist and former exile, we are thrown into an almost apocalyptic world rendered deliberately unstable and disorientating. On the one hand, it is a threatening landscape of broken promises and shattered dreams; on the other the worlds of its two protagonists literally slip seamlessly between reality, memory, myth, and dream. An impressive novel, all the more forceful as it does not directly engage with the pain of the political context that is its subject but instead portrays the strength of human resilience in the face of trauma and the transformative power of the imagination" (Susheila Nasta, Prize Judge, 2022).

Mohamed Kheir is a novelist, poet, short story writer, journalist, and lyricist. His short story collections *Remsh Al Ein* (2016) and *Afarit Al Radio* (2011) both received The Sawiris Cultural Award, and *Leil Khargi* (2001) was awarded the Egyptian Ministry of Culture Award for poetry. *Slipping* (*Eflat Al Asabea*, Kotob Khan Publishing House, 2018; Two Lines Press, 2021) is his second novel and his first to be translated into English. He lives in Egypt.

Robin Moger is an award-winning translator of contemporary Arabic prose and poetry into English, currently based in Cape Town, South Africa. He won the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize in 2017 for his translation of *The Book of Safety* by Yasser Abdel Hafez (Hoopoe Fiction 2017). His translations of fiction and prose works include *The Book of Sleep* by Haytham El Wardany (Seagull Books, 2020), Iman Mersal's *How To Mend: Motherhood and its Ghosts* (Kayfa ta, 2018), Yasser Abdellatif's *The Law of Inheritance* (Seagull Books, 2018), *All The Battles* by Maan Abu Taleb (Hoopoe Fiction, 2017), Nael Eltoukhy's *The Women of Karantina* (AUC Press) and Youssef Rakha's *The Crocodiles* (7 Stories Press, 2014).

The Judging Panel

Charis Olszok (Chair of the Judging Panel) is Associate Professor of Modern Arabic Literature at the University of Cambridge, and a Fellow of Newnham College. Her first monograph, *The Libyan Novel: Humans, Animals and the Poetics of Vulnerability* came out in 2020 (EUP). Her current work focuses on the intersection of fantastic and uncanny poetics, on the one hand, and expressions of an environmental and energy (un)conscious, on the other, in the Arabic novel. Charis is co-editor of the journal *Middle Eastern Literatures*. She has also translated numerous works of modern Arabic literature into English, including *African Titanics* by Abu Bakr Khaal (Darf Publishers, 2014), *Ebola '76* by Amir Tag Elsir (co-translation with Emily Danby, Darf Publishers 2015) and *Goat Mountain* by Habib Selmi (Banipal Books, 2020).

Katharine Halls is an Arabic-to-English translator from Cardiff, Wales. She was awarded a 2021 PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grant for her translation of Haytham El-Wardany's *Things That Can't Be Fixed* and her translation, with Adam Talib, of Raja Alem's *The Dove's Necklace* (Overlook Duckworth, 2016) received the 2017 Sheikh Hamad Award for Translation and was shortlisted for the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize. Her translations for the stage have been performed at the Royal Court and the Edinburgh Festival, and shorter texts have appeared in *Asymptote*, *Africa Is a Country*, *The Common*, *Arts of the Working Class*, *World Literature Today*, *stadtsprachen*, *Words Without Borders*, *Newfound*, *Adda*, *Critical Muslim*, *Perpetual Postponement*, and various anthologies. Her translation of Ahmed Naji's prison memoir *Rotten Evidence* is forthcoming from McSweeney's.

Becki Maddock is a toponymist, linguist, translator and editor. She has a BA (Hons) in Arabic and Spanish from Exeter University and an MA in Near & Middle East Studies from SOAS, University of London. Her translations of Arabic short stories have been published in several magazines and *Baghdad Noir*, an anthology of Iraqi literature. Becki is a trustee of The Banipal Trust for Arab Literature and her book reviews and translations have been regularly published by *Banipal* magazine of modern Arab literature. She also runs the Banipal Book Club. Becki researches and advises on geographical names, transliteration systems and international standards within the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). She is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Susheila Nasta MBE is Founder of *Wasafiri*, the magazine of international contemporary writing which she launched in 1984 and led as Editor-in-Chief till 2019. She has judged several literary prizes including the SI Leeds award, the OCM BOCAS Prize for Caribbean Literature, and the 2021 David Cohen prize, a biennial award offered for a lifetime's work in any genre. She is currently Professor Emerita in Modern and Contemporary Literatures at Queen Mary College and the Open University. She has published widely on contemporary Caribbean, South Asian and Black British writing and is committed to public engagement. Over the past thirty years, she has directed a number of projects, including most recently *India in Britain*, a touring exhibition highlighting South Asian contributions to the making of Britain from 1850 to the present. She received an MBE in 2011, and in 2019 she received the Royal Society of Literature's distinguished Benson Medal, for a lifetime's achievement; and in 2020, she received an Honorary Fellowship for her contribution to English Studies from the English Association. She currently sits on the Council of the RSL.

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 work 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. The prize is administered by the Society of Authors in the United Kingdom, alongside the other prizes for literary translation from languages that include Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, 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 awarding prizes for contemporary Arabic literature translated into English, the sponsors Omar Ghobash and his family generously extended their sponsorship to the establishment of an annual lecture on literary translation. The inaugural lecture took place on 14 October 2016 at the British Library Conference Centre in London, and was given by author, translator and essayist Anton Shammas. The second lecture, by the historian and novelist Robert Irwin, was on 7 November 2017, also at the British Library. The third, on 9 November 2018 in the British Library, was given by Syrian poet and philosopher Adonis, and the fourth, on 7 November 2019 also at the British Library, was given by the internationally acclaimed Lebanese novelist and playwright Hanan al-Shaykh, followed by two years of online lectures during the Covid-19 pandemic, given by Liana Badr (2020) and Jonathan Wright (2021). The 2022 lecture was delivered in person at the British Library by Hartmut Fähndrich. 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 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/> and <https://www2.societyofauthors.org/prizes/translation-prizes/arabic-saif-ghobash-banipal-prize/>

For all information about the Annual Lecture see this link:

<https://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/>

CONTACT

To interview any of the shortlisted translators or to request photographs or any further information, please email the Banipal Trust's administrator on admin@banipaltrust.org.uk