

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT



Announcing the joint winners of the 2013 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

Jonathan Wright and William Maynard Hutchins

For the first time the judges have selected two outright winning translators, instead of the usual winner and runner-up. Two enticing and finely translated novels, each in their very different way, captured the judges' attention and passion, leading to the decision to share the prize this year.

The prize is shared between:

Jonathan Wright for his translation of *Azazeel* by Youssef Ziedan, published by Atlantic Books.

William Maynard Hutchins for his translation of *A Land Without Jasmine* by Wajdi al-Ahdal, published by Garnet Publishing.

The judging panel comprised renowned translator, twice winner and twice runner-up of the prize Humphrey Davies, playwright Hassan Abdulrazzak and authors Rajeev Balasubramanyam and Meike Ziervogel. They met in December 2013 to select the winning titles from the 21 entries under the chairmanship of prize administrator Paula Johnson of the Society of Authors.

The Judges' Announcement

THE WINNERS

JONATHAN WRIGHT

for his translation of *Azazeel* by Youssef Ziedan

“*Azazeel* – a masterful achievement, deftly capturing the feeling of the original”

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Azazeel is an enthralling book. The author, and translator, have evoked, and re-evoked, a time, a region, and people that come alive on the page despite our distance from them. The conflicts of the day between tolerance and anathematization – so reminiscent of those of our own time – are seamlessly embodied in the events. The landscapes appear before us with palpable and luminous physicality and the protagonist’s strengths and weaknesses, naiveties and intuitive insights, hesitations and impetuositities combine a character as lifelike and as seemingly familiar as the subject of a Fayoum portrait. The translation is notable for its delicacy and well-judged restraint and deftly captures the feeling of the original.”

The book’s great strength lies in its strangeness, a product of the state of mind of its narrator as he struggles with demonic possession and spiritual angst. In vivid, evocative prose, the author plunges us into fifth century Egypt, rendered three-dimensional and immediate in vivid, evocative prose. Ziedan has given us a story that works seamlessly on so many different levels; historical, theological, spiritual, and as a feverishly absorbing confession. A masterful achievement.

A beautifully crafted and evocative tale. Rich in description of the arid Syrian landscape and seeped in early history, *Azazeel* has been flawlessly translated making this an easily accessible story.

WILLIAM MAYNARD HUTCHINS

for his translation of *A Land Without Jasmine* by Wajdi al-Ahdal

“*A Land Without Jasmine* – A gripping page-turner from a gifted and original storyteller, superbly translated”

This novel deals with many social and political issues such as the sexual repression of males in a conservative society and the corruption of public institutions yet it does so in the guise of a thriller that keeps the reader enthralled. The story is told by several characters whose accounts do not often tally with one another, leaving room for the readers to synthesise their own version of the truth. Altogether a gripping page-turner from a talented writer, superbly translated by William Maynard Hutchins.

It is a novel which succeeds in addressing issues of sexual oppression and repression without sacrificing narrative tension. Through its use of multiple perspectives we are given a revealing insight into society, reminding us that no event, or place, has an objective existence or truth. Wajdi al-Ahdal is a gifted and original storyteller.

A Land Without Jasmine gives fascinating insight on life in Yemen, with a thriller-like plot that keeps the reader turning the page. In sparse, lucid prose with a tight narrative structure, the author paints a riveting portrait of sexual confusion, frustration and shame. The translation succeeded in creating an enjoyable English read and at the same time preserving the soul of the original.

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Wednesday 12 February

The Award Ceremony of Translation Prizes from Arabic, Dutch, French, German, Hebrew and Spanish

6.30pm
Europe House, 32 Smith Square, London SW1P 3EU

Introduced by Paula Johnson, Prize Administrator Society of Authors

Prizes awarded by Sir Peter Stothard, editor of the TLS

plus

Readings from the winning translations

followed by

Poet and translator Dr Ian Patterson and author Adam Mars-Jones
in conversation on aspects of literary translation

The event is hosted by the Society of Authors and the TLS

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Thursday 13 February

Roundtable on Literary Translation Arabic to English

Introduced by the prizewinners

Jonathan Wright and William Maynard Hutchins

Chair: Professor Yasir Suleiman

2-4.30pm
Meetings Room, Arab British Centre
1 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE

The Roundtable is free to attend, but prior registration is necessary.
To register, please email Clare@banipal.co.uk

Hosted by the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature

Thursday 13 February

Arabic Literature in English:

An evening with prizewinning translators Jonathan Wright & William M Hutchins
and their novels *Azazel* and *A Land Without Jasmine*

Introduced by Paul Starkey

With readings from the novels

7.00pm
The Gallery, Foyle's Bookshop

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113-119 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0EB

Followed by a reception

Copies of *Azazeel* and *A Land Without Jasmine* will be on sale

This is a free event, but please do reserve your place
by emailing paola@banipal.co.uk

Doors open 6.30pm

Hosted by Foyle's and the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Azazeel is published worldwide by Atlantic Books.

UK edition: ISBN 978-1848874299;

International edition: ISBN 978-1848874282.

The Arabic original *Azazeel* won the 2009 International Prize for Arabic Fiction.

JONATHAN WRIGHT

Jonathan Wright studied Arabic, Turkish and Islamic History at St. John's College, Oxford University. Between 1980 and 2009 he worked for Reuters news agency in countries across the Arab world including Tunisia, Oman, Lebanon and Egypt. He has also worked as lead writer in the Washington DC Reuters bureau as well as chief sub-editor of the World Desk in London. Short-term assignments for Reuters have included coverage of Yemen during the 1994 civil war, 1980s Algeria, Palestinian elections and Saudi Arabia during the 1991 Gulf War,

Between 2008 and 2011 he was the managing editor of *Arab Media and Society*, an online academic journal run by the AUC (American University in Cairo). He has contributed to a number of recent academic gatherings on the subject of the Arab uprisings and Egyptian revolution.

He has translated a number of novels from Arabic to English: Khaled el-Khamissi's *Taxi* (Aflame Books, 2008, and Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing); Hassan Blasim's short story collection *The Madman of Freedom Square* (Comma Press, 2009); *The State of Egypt*, a collection of essays and articles by Alaa el-Aswany (AUC Press, 2011); *Judgement Day* by Rasha al-Ameer (AUC Press, 2012); *Life on Hold* by Fahd al-Atiq (AUC Press, 2012); the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prizewinning *Azazeel* by Youssef Ziedan (Atlantic Books, 2012); *The Iraqi Christ* by Hassan Blasim (Comma Press, 2013); *Whatever Happened to the Egyptian Revolution* by Galal Amin (AUC Press, 2013); and *Sleepwalkers* by Said Makkawi (to be published by Dar el-Shorouk).

Two of his most recent translations will be published in 2014: Bahaa Abdelmegid's *Temple Bar* (AUC Press) and *Land of No Rain* by Amjad Nasser (Bloomsbury Qatar

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Foundation Publishing).

Jonathan Wright currently lives in London.

YOUSSEF ZIEDAN

Youssef Ziedan was born in Suhag, Egypt. He is Professor of Islamic Philosophy and History of the Sciences, and Director of the Centre for Manuscripts and of the Museum of Manuscripts at the Library of Alexandria. In addition to his novels, *Zill al-Afa* (The Serpent's Shadow) and *Azazeel* (*Azazeel*), he has written works on literary criticism and edited texts of Sufi literature in verse and prose. As a well-known researcher on Arab cultural heritage he has published fifty-four books.

Azazeel, Ziedan's second novel, won the 2009 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (the "Arabic Booker") and draws on his deep interest in ancient manuscripts and scrolls.

A Land Without Jasmine, ISBN: 9781859643105, is published by Garnet Publishing.

WILLIAM MAYNARD HUTCHINS

William Maynard Hutchins is a professor in the Philosophy & Religion Department of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, USA. He began learning Arabic while teaching at the Gerard School for Boys in Sidon, Lebanon. He studied at Berea, Yale and the University of Chicago, and began translating Arabic literature during graduate school, starting with some of the epistles of al-Jahiz (Peter Lang). During his time teaching at the University of Ghana in Legon he began translating the plays of Tawfiq al-Hakim, and later published a two-volume collection (published by Three Continents Press). He was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts grant for Literary Translation in 2005-6 for his translation of *The Seven Veils of Seth* by the Libyan Tuareg author Ibrahim al-Koni (Garnet Publishing) and a second one in 2012 for *New Waw*, also by al-Koni (Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas, January 2014).

His translations of Arabic novels include *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, *Sugar Street*, and *Cairo Modern* by Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz (Anchor Books); *Basrayatha: Portrait of a City* by Muhammad Khudayyir (Verso, 2007); *The Last of the Angels* (Free Press, 2007), *Cell Block 5* (Arabia Books, 2008) and *The Traveler and the Innkeeper* (AUC Press, 2011) all by Fadhil al-Azzawi; *Return to Dar al-Basha* by Hassan Nasr (Syracuse University Press); *Anubis* (AUC Press, 2005) and *The Puppet* (Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas, 2010) both by Ibrahim al-Koni. His recent translations are *The Diesel* by Thani al-Suwaidi (ANTIBOOKCLUB, 2012), a revision of his translation of *Return of the Spirit* by Tawfiq al-Hakim (Lynne Rienner Publishers), *The Grub Hunter* by Amir Tag Elsir (Pearson African Writers Series, 2012), and his 2013 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prizewinning translation of *A Land Without Jasmine* by Wajdi al-Ahdal (Garnet Publishing, 2012).

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His translations have appeared on wordswithoutborders.org and brooklynrail.org and in Banipal Magazine of Modern Arab Literature.

WAJDI AL-AHDAL

Wajdi al-Ahdal is a Yemeni novelist, short story writer and playwright, famous for his controversial works, some of which have been banned in Yemen. At one point he was forced to leave Yemen for a period of time. He has won a number of Yemeni literary prizes and has published four collections of short stories, four novels, a play and a film screenplay. He was selected as one of the “Beirut39”, the Hay Festival project to promote the 39 best young Arab authors under the age of 40. He has attended writing workshops in both the USA and the UAE. One of his novels, as yet not translated, *Mountainous Boats (Qawabib Jabailyyah)*, was reviewed in Banipal 19.

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The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation is an annual prize of £3,000, awarded to the translator(s) of a published translation in English of a full-length imaginative and creative Arabic work of literary merit first published in English translation in the year prior to the award. From the inaugural prize in 2006 until 2013 the cut-off date for the original Arabic editions was 35 years prior to entry to the prize. From the 2014 prize, starting this year, the cut-off date of the original Arabic has been increased to during or after 1967, a year widely recognised as a “watershed” year for Arabic literature. Entries are judged by a panel of four distinguished authors, critics and literary experts, two of whom read and consider both the Arabic original and the English translation.

The prize is administered by the Society of Authors in the UK, as are other prizes for literary translation into English from European languages. The Award Ceremony is hosted by the Society of Authors and the Times Literary Supplement and supported by Arts Council England. The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize entries can have been published anywhere in the world but must be available for purchase in the United Kingdom, either via a distributor or online.

The prize, the first worldwide for a published work of English literary translation from Arabic, was established in 2005 by Banipal, the magazine of modern Arab literature in English translation, and the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature. It 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.

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If you require digital images of Jonathan Wright and William M Hutchins, the front cover images of *Azazeel* and *A Land Without Jasmine*, or logo of the Prize, please email margaret@banipal.co.uk

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Both Jonathan Wright and William M Hutchins will be available for interview 12 February before the award ceremony.

To attend the Award Ceremony on 12 February, please apply to Paula Johnson at the Society of Authors (PJohnson@societyofauthors.org) for a Press Pass.

For more information about the Roundtable at 2.00pm on 13 February, and to register a place, please email margaret@banipal.co.uk

To attend An Evening with the Prizewinning Translators and Reception at 7.00pm on 13 February, please email margaret@banipal.co.uk

For further history of the prize, more information about the judges, the rules, and details of the winning books, please go to <http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/>

To arrange an interview with Jonathan Wright and/or William M Hutchins, or for any other information, please contact the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature at:

1 Gough Square, London EC4A 3DE
Tel: +44 (0)20 7832 1350

Or email the Trust's administrator Margaret Obank on info@banipaltrust.org.uk or margaret@banipal.co.uk