



The 2014 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

The 2014 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation is awarded to **Sinan Antoon** for the translation of his own novel *The Corpse Washer*, published by Yale University Press.

Paula Haydar is highly commended for her translation of *June Rain* by **Jabbour Douaihy**, published by Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing.

The judging panel comprised literary translator and joint winner of the 2013 Prize Jonathan Wright, translator and writer Lulu Norman, broadcaster and writer Paul Blezard, and Banipal editor and trustee Samuel Shimon. They met in December 2014 to select the winner from the 17 entries, under the chairmanship of Paula Johnson of the Society of Authors.

The Judges' Announcement

THE WINNER

SINAN ANTOON

for the translation of his own novel *The Corpse Washer*

“A poetic and profound story that resonates with human pathos”

Heart-warming and horrifying, sad and sensuous in equal measure, *The Corpse Washer* is the moving story of Jawad, a young Iraqi whose family washes and prepares bodies for burial, and of the fracturing effects of war, occupation and civil strife – on Jawad, his family, friends and their country. The subject matter is often grim, as befits the tragedies that Iraq has suffered for over three decades, but the meticulous portrayal of the corpse-washing rituals, Jawad's ambivalent feelings about his work and the other world of his nightly dreams, show a gentler, more human side to a world of violence and brutality.

Thoughtful, precise and consistent in voice and mood, Sinan Antoon comes close, in this translation of his own novel, to the ideal in literary translation – the invisibility of the translator. His fluent and forthright language matches the style and rhythm of his own original Arabic and the unadorned, sometimes affectless tone reflects the hollowness of life as the onslaught of war brings an onslaught of bodies for the corpse washers of Baghdad. The novel ends with Jawad sitting under the pomegranate tree that grows from the water he uses to wash the corpses. A rich, profound insight into an Iraq we hear very little of, this is a

story that resonates with human pathos and bears every hallmark of becoming a modern classic.

On being given news of the award, Yale University Press Director John Donatich said:

*“We are very pleased to see Sinan Antoon win this prestigious – and deserved award. **The Corpse Washer** is an uniquely powerful narrative of the damning effects of war on the aspirations of real human lives. The novel is also notable for having been translated into English by its author, a challenge that is wonderfully met. We hope the award will help bring the book to the attention of new readers who want a viscerally powerful portrait of life in contemporary Iraq.”*

As both translator and author of the novel, Sinan Antoon reacted to the news by saying:

“Writing is never easy and when one writes about death and catastrophe the task becomes even more visceral. The joy of finishing this novel in its Arabic original was followed, as usual, by postpartum pain. I had lived in and with its characters for more than two years and was left bereft of their presence. Translating the novel was the only way to return and inhabit those beings and places once more and to relive their pain and pleasure. It was challenging on many a level, and masochistic at times, but it had its advantages as well. The author and the translator inhabited the same person and could communicate very well most of the time. The novel speaks another language and the text has an afterlife in new readers.”

He added: *“Translation is a vital act and is underappreciated, especially from languages of the Global South. It is an honour and a pleasure to be awarded this prestigious prize. Both author and translator are delighted.”*

HIGHLY COMMENDED

PAULA HAYDAR

for her translation of *June Rain* by Jabbour Douaihy

“An astonishing translation which exactly captures the novel’s tone and heft”

The judges very highly commended the masterly translation by Paula Haydar of *June Rain* by Lebanese author Jabbour Douaihy. This complex story explores the effects – at once cohesive and corrosive – of family and clan loyalties in a mountain village in northern Lebanon, taking as starting-point a massacre in 1957 and its repercussions throughout the community. Eliyya Kfoury returns there after decades living in the United States to search for the truth behind the murder of his father, which took place before he was born.

Lyrical and at times wistful, Douaihy’s novel, part tragedy, part ‘whodunnit’, is rendered through a kaleidoscope of superb stories and characters. Using multiple points of view, the shifting of time and a cast of beautifully drawn characters, his affectionate, at times humorous, conjuring of Lebanese village life makes *June Rain* a very rich and rewarding read. Paula Haydar’s astonishing translation exactly captures the tone and heft of an extraordinary novel that tells us so much about sectarianism and its heartbreaking legacies.

Head of English Publishing at Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing Thalia Suzuma commented:

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT, EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON GMT, 19 JANUARY 2015

“Translation excellence is at the very heart of BQFP’s mission, and we are delighted that translator Paula Haydar has been recognised by the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize. We are very proud to work with translators and writers of her and Jabbour Douaihy’s calibre.”

*** The Events ***

Tuesday 24 February

Sinan Antoon talks with Paul Blezard
6.30pm WATERSTONE’S PICCADILLY
203/206 Piccadilly, London W1J 9HD
with Reading and Q&A. Reception.

- This is a free event, but please reserve your place by emailing piccadilly@waterstones.com

Wednesday 25 February

**The Award Ceremony of Translation Prizes
from Arabic, French, German, Greek, Spanish and Swedish**

6.15pm for 6.30pm, Europe House,
32 Smith Square, London SW1P 3EU

Introduced by Paula Johnson, Prize Administrator, the Society of Authors
Prizes presented by Sir Peter Stothard, editor TLS, with readings by the winning translators followed by author and critic Philip Hensher talking about “Wonderful Translations”

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

The award ceremony is hosted by the Society of Authors and the TLS

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Corpse Washer is published by Yale University Press
UK edition: ISBN 9780300205640
International edition: ISBN 9780300190601

The Corpse Washer was also winner of the 2014 Arab American Book Award in the fiction category, given by the Arab American National Museum, and longlisted for the 2014 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize.

June Rain is published by Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing.
ISBN 9789992142783

SINAN ANTOON

Sinan Antoon is a poet, novelist and translator, born and brought up in Baghdad. He earned a BA in English from Baghdad University. He left Iraq after the Gulf War in 1991 and

continued his studies in the US, where he earned an MA from Georgetown and a PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from Harvard in 2006.

Antoon has published two collections of poetry in Arabic; *Mawshur Muballal bil-Hurub* (Cairo, 2003) and *Laylun Wahidun fi Kull al-Mudun* (One Night in All Cities) (Dar al-Jamal, 2010), and one in English; *The Baghdad Blues* (Harbor Mountain Press, 2006). His first novel *Ijaam* (2003), was published in English translation as *Ijaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* (City Lights, 2006) as well as in Norwegian, German, Portuguese, and Italian editions. His second novel *Wahdaha Shajarat al-Rumman* (The Pomegranate Alone) was translated by himself and published as *The Corpse Washer* (Yale University Press, 2013) which has won the 2014 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, the 2014 Arab American Book Award of the Arab American National Museum (fiction category), and was longlisted for the 2014 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize. Translations in French, Turkish, Polish, and Malayalam are forthcoming. His third novel, *Ya Maryam* (Dar al-Jamal, 2012) was shortlisted for the 2013 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (The Arabic Booker) and was translated to Spanish and published as *Fragments de Bagdad* (Turner Libros, 2014).

His translation of Mahmoud Darwish's last prose book *In the Presence of Absence*, (Archipelago, 2011) won the 2012 National Translation Award given by the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA). His co-translation (with Peter Money) of a selection of Saadi Youssef's late poetry, *Nostalgia, My Enemy*, was published by Graywolf in November 2012.

His essays have appeared in major Arabic newspapers and journals as well as *The Nation*, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, *Middle East Report*, and *New York Times* among others. His scholarly works include essays on contemporary Arab poetry and politics, and Iraqi history, as well as *The Poetics of the Obscene: Ibn al-Hajjaj and Sukhf* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013). He is a member of the Editorial Review Board of the *Arab Studies Journal* and an associate professor at the Gallatin School, New York University, as well as co-founder of *Jadaliyya* and co-editor of its culture page. You can follow him on Twitter: @sinanantoon.

PAULA HAYDAR

Paula Haydar holds degrees from the University of Massachusetts and an MFA degree in Literary Translation from the University of Arkansas, where she currently teaches Arabic and is pursuing a PhD in comparative literature. She has translated five novels by contemporary Lebanese novelists: three by Elias Khoury – *Gates of the City* and *The Journey of little Gandhi* (University of Minnesota Press), and *The Kingdom of Strangers* (University of Arkansas Press), the latter winning the 1996 Arkansas Arabic Manuscript Translation Award, and two by Rashid al-Daif, *This Side of Innocence* and *Learning English* (Interlink). She has also translated two works by Palestinian authors – Sahar Khalifeh's *The End of Spring* (Interlink, 2008) and Adania Shibli's *Touch* (Clockroot, 2014), the latter longlisted for the 2011 Best Translated Book Awards at the University of Rochester's Three Percent.com. In addition Haydar has translated a number of short stories and poems that have appeared in international and national journals, holds a BSc in Physics and has taught both Physics and Arabic in the USA and the Middle East.

JABBOUR DOUAIHY

Jabbour Douaihy is a novelist and Professor of French Literature at the University of Lebanon. He was born in Zgharta, northern Lebanon, in 1949. To date, he has published seven works of fiction, including *Autumn Equinox* (Arkansas University Press, 2001) as well as short stories and children's books. The Arabic original of *June Rain* (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2014) was shortlisted for the inaugural International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2008. His latest novel, *American Neighbourhoods*, has been longlisted for the 2015 IPAF prize.

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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 and general interest, published in the original Arabic after, or during, the year 1967 – a year widely recognised as a ‘watershed’ year for Arabic literature, and first published in English translation in the year prior to the award. 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 Sinan Antoon and Paula Haydar, the front cover images of *The Corpse Washer* and *June Rain*, or logo of the Prize, please contact margaret@banipal.co.uk
- To attend the event at Waterstone's Piccadilly, please email margaret@banipal.co.uk
- To attend the Award Ceremony on Wednesday 25 February, please apply to Paula Johnson at the Society of Authors (Pjohnson@societyofauthors.org) for a Press Pass.
- To arrange an interview with Sinan Antoon or for any other information, please email Margaret Obank on info@banipaltrust.org.uk or margaret@banipal.co.uk, or contact the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature at:

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