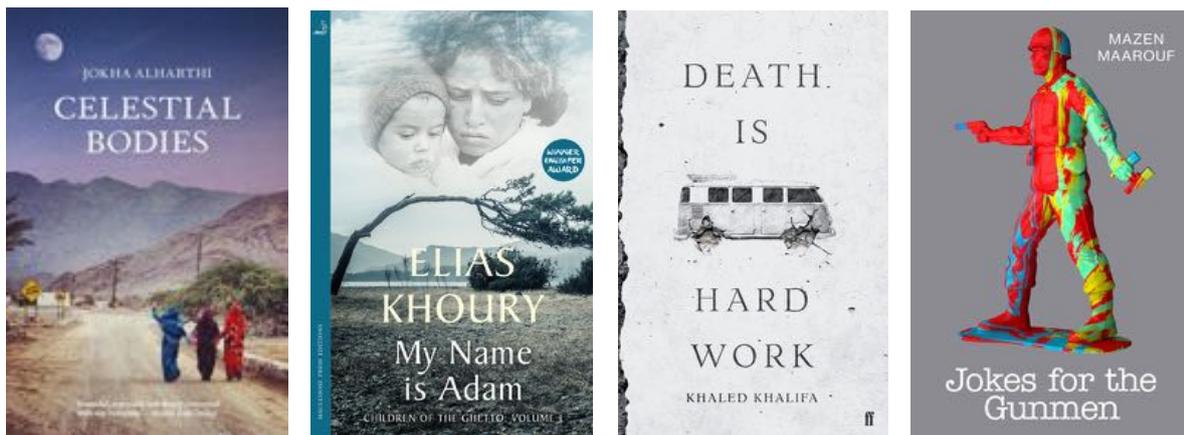


The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

The 2019 Prize – The Shortlist

The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize is thrilled to announce the shortlist of the 2019 Prize. The four shortlisted works are translated by two former winners of the prize, **Humphrey Davies** and **Jonathan Wright**, a previously shortlisted translator, **Leri Price**, and award-winning translator **Marilyn Booth**.

The judges were privileged to read this year's 17 entries, and noticed the enriching diversity of styles, themes and genres. Although three of the shortlisted titles deal with civil unrest and conflict, each is distinguished by place, time and literary narrative. The four books deal with issues of belonging, social change and the absurdity of war and existence. From urban metropolises like Beirut, New York and Damascus to small villages, these titles capture our imaginations and open a window into the ordinary lives of its characters with extraordinary sensitivity and nuanced and vivid translations. The shortlisted works are:



Celestial Bodies by Jokha Alharthi (Oman)
translated by **Marilyn Booth** (Sandstone Press)

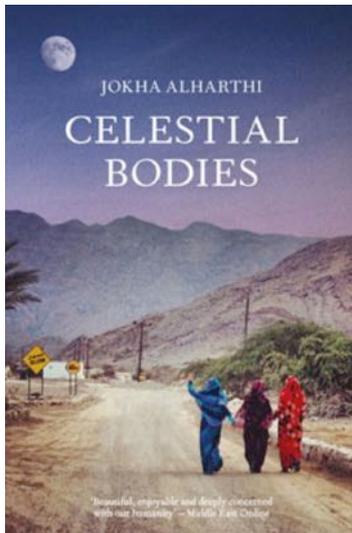
My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto, Volume 1 – Elias Khoury (Lebanon)
translated by **Humphrey Davies** (MacLehose Press)

Death is Hard Work by Khaled Khalifa (Syria)
translated by **Leri Price** (Faber & Faber)

Jokes for the Gunmen by Mazen Maarouf (Palestine)
translated by **Jonathan Wright** (Granta Books)

The judging panel comprises fiction writer and publishing editor Ghazi Gheblawi (Chair); poet, novelist and publisher Jan Fortune; university lecturer and translator Abla Oudeh; and writer, critic and former deputy director of English PEN Catherine Taylor.

THE JUDGES' COMMENTS



Marilyn Booth

shortlisted for her translation of
Celestial Bodies by Jokha Alharthi

Published by Sandstone Press, UK, 2018
ISBN: 978-1912240166, paperback, 2018, 256 pages,
£8.99

The US edition is published by Catapult, 2019, ISBN:
9781948226943,
paperback, 256 pages, #16.95

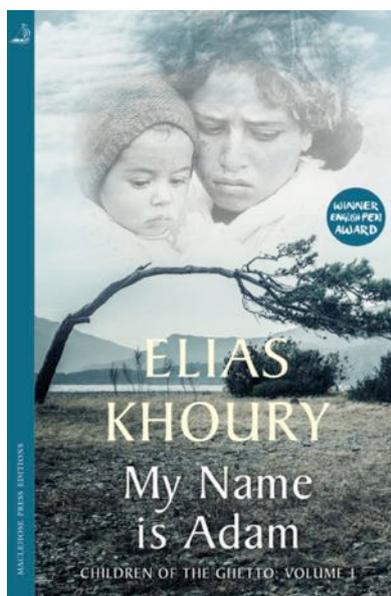
Jokha Alharthi's complex and ambitious multi-generational novel builds a rare picture of social change in Oman after its modern economic transformation, through the microcosm of a small village. Marilyn Booth is to be applauded for her vivid, nuanced, and compelling translation of *Celestial Bodies*. She succeeds in bringing to life the complicated relationship of three sisters as they come of age and witness the cultural and social evolution of the world around them through their family's past stories and dramas. The elegant and rich translation captures the fine details in the lives of women who are caught between expectations and aspirations in a rapidly changing world. The fluent and honed prose makes this an insightful novel that manages to approach sensitive topics like slavery and role of women in Oman through the past decades with profound artistry and poignancy.

- **Marilyn Booth** is the Khalid bin Abdullah Al Saud Professor of the Study of the Contemporary Arab World at the University of Oxford, Faculty of Oriental Studies. She has a DPhil in the modern history of the Middle East and modern Arabic literature from the University of Oxford, and was in 2009–2014 the Iraq Professor of Arabic Studies at Edinburgh University, and held a one year post as Senior Humanities Research Fellow at New York University, Abu Dhabi. Booth has translated more than a dozen novels, short story collections and memoirs from Arabic: her translation of Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies* became, in May 2019, the

first novel translated from Arabic to win the Man Booker International Prize, shared equally between author and translator. Her previous translations include two novels by Lebanese writer Hassan Daoud – *The Penguin’s Song* (City Lights, 2015) and *No Road to Paradise* (Hoopoe Fiction, 2017). Other authors she has translated include Hoda Barakat, Somaya Ramadan, Ibtihal Salem, Nawal El Saadawi, Sahar Tawfiq and Latifa al-Zayyat. Booth’s strong interest in Arab women’s writing is reflected by her most recent book: *Classes of Ladies of Cloistered Spaces: Writing Feminist History through Biography in Fin-de-siècle Egypt* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015). She is editor of, and contributor to, *Migrating Texts: Circulating Translations around the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Edinburgh, 2019).

• **Jokha Alharthi** was born in Oman in 1978 and was awarded a PhD in Classical Arabic Poetry by the University of Edinburgh in 2010. She teaches Arabic at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, Oman. Alharthi has written three novels, two collections of short fiction and a children’s book, and is the first Omani female author to have been translated from Arabic to English. She has been shortlisted for the Shaikh Zayed Award for Young Writers and she won the 2010 Best Omani Novel Award for her novel *Sayyidat al-Qamar* (literally ‘Ladies of the Moon’), which was excerpted in *Banipal 40* in 2011. In May this year Marilyn Booth’s translation of this same novel under the title *Celestial Bodies* won the Man Booker International Prize, shared equally between author and translator. Alharthi’s short stories have been published in English translation, and in translation to German, Italian, Korean, and Serbian.

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Humphrey Davies

shortlisted for his translation of
My Name is Adam: Children of the Ghetto,
Volume 1, by Elias Khoury

Published by MacLehose Press, London, October 2018
ISBN: 9780857057501, paperback, 448 pages, £16.99

The US edition is published under the title *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam* by Archipelago Books, USA, June 2019

ISBN: 9781939810137, paperback, 400 pages, \$20.00

A middle-aged Israeli man, Adam Dannoun, living in New York discovers the truth about his origins and past that shatters all facts about his life and identity. In this epic and extraordinary novel of intertextuality and metafiction we enter a world of academic scholarship, human tragedy and the consequences of historical

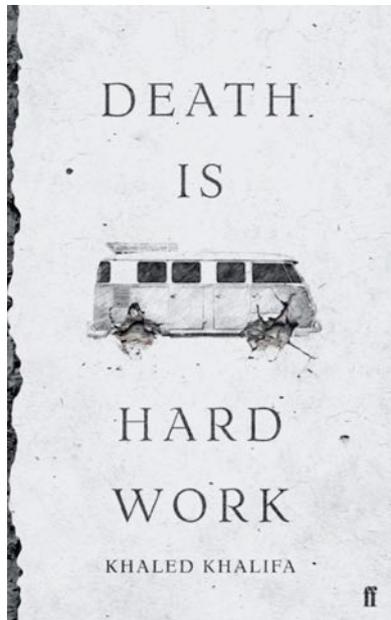
catastrophes that are still resonating to our present time. With intricate and engaging translation by Humphrey Davies this first volume of *Children of the Ghetto* covers many aspects of classical and modern Arabic culture and its prose and poetry, drama and tragedy. With its use of a 'found notebook' to convey a history of silence lit by bravery, ingenuity and resolve the novel takes us on a journey of self-atonement and discovery from Lydda in 1948 to modern day New York. The novel is translated with remarkable skill and attention that movingly conveys the pain and joy of existence in every astonishing sentence.

• **Elias Khoury** was born in Beirut in 1948 and is a prominent novelist, academic, journalist and public intellectual. He worked as an assistant editor on Palestinian Affairs magazine (1975-1997) and was editor of the cultural section of *As-Safir* newspaper (1981-1991), *Al-Karmel* magazine (1981-83) and the literary supplement of *An-Nahar* newspaper (1992-2008). Since 2001, he has edited Palestinian Studies magazine. He has been a visiting professor at Columbia University, New York (1980-82), global distinguished professor at the University of New York (2001-2014) and visiting professor at the Lebanese American University (2015). Khoury is the author of 13 novels, four volumes of literary criticism and three plays. His translated novels include *Little Mountain* (1977), *White Masks* (1981), *The Journey of Little Gandhi* (1989), *Gate of the Sun* (1998) and *Yalo* (2002). His novel *Sinalcol* (2012) was longlisted for the 2013 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), with Humphrey Davies's translation under the title *The Broken Mirrors: Sinalcol* (MacLehose Press) published in 2015. *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam* (2016) was shortlisted for 2017 International Prize for Arabic Fiction. (In the UK edition the two parts of the title are reversed.)

• **Humphrey Davies** studied Arabic at Cambridge, University, achieving a First, and at the American University in Cairo. He completed his PhD at the University of California, Berkeley. He worked in publishing in the Middle East and, in Cairo, on the Hinds and Badawi *Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic*. He then worked for non-governmental community development and funding organizations, before turning to literary translation, with his first translation, a short story, being published in *Banipal* magazine in 2000. He translated an early Naguib Mahfouz novel (*Thebes at War*, 2003) for the American University in Cairo Press, and has continued translating for them, with Alaa Al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building* (2004), Ahmed Alaidy's *Being Abbas el Abd* (September 2006), and Gamal al-Ghitani's *Pyramid Texts*. His translation of Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun*, published in the UK by Harvill Secker and in the USA by Archipelago Press, won the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize in its inaugural year, 2006. He won the 2010 Prize for his translation of Khoury's novel *Yalo* (MacLehose Press). In that year he was also a runner-up for his translation of *Sunset Oasis* (Spectre) by Egyptian author Bahaa Taher, whose Arabic original had won the inaugural IPAF in 2008. In 2012 Davies was runner-up in the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for his translation of *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* by Palestinian writer Mourid Barghouti. He translated Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's four

volumes of *Leg Over Leg*, published in 2014 and 2015, for the Library of Arabic Literature (NYU Press). The translation of *Leg Over Leg* was shortlisted for the American Literary Translators Association's National Translation Award in 2016.

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Leri Price

shortlisted for her translation of
Death is Hard Work by Khaled Khalifa

Published by Faber & Faber, London, 2019
ISBN: 9780571346042, paperback, 192 pages,
£12.99

The US edition is published by Farrar, Straus and
Giroux (a division of Macmillan), 2019
ISBN: 9780374135737, hardback, 192 pages, \$25.00

Leri Price's subtle translation of *Death is Hard Work* is both sharp and unobtrusive while maintaining the vividness and intense style of this compelling work. The novel is a strong depiction of the crisis in Syria, through the quest of three siblings to honour the last wishes of their deceased father to be buried in his home village, situated across war and torment. What ensues is a dangerous road journey that deftly mirrors the conflict outside their minibus that brings out the dysfunctional relationship of the family. Khalifa's novel is a metaphorical and condensed narrative of the tragic war in Syria. Layered and absurd, it captures in pitch-perfect prose a sense of claustrophobia and unravelling that infects both family and Syria.

- **Khaled Khalifa** is a Syrian novelist, screenwriter and poet who has resolutely remained living in Damascus despite the civil war, now in its ninth year. Khalifa was born in a village near Aleppo, Syria, in 1964, the fifth child of a family of thirteen siblings. He has a BA in Law from Aleppo University, and was a founding editor of the literary magazine *Alif*. His first novel *Haris al-Khadi'a* (The Guard of Deception) appeared in 1993, followed in 2000 by *Dafatir al-Qurbat* (The Gypsies' Notebooks). His 2006 third novel, *Madih al-Karahiya*, was the first to be translated into English, by Leri Price, under the title *In Praise of Hatred* (Doubleday, 2012). The Arabic original was shortlisted for the inaugural IPAF in 2008 and Price's translation was longlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (IPAF) in 2013. Price then translated Khalifa's 2013 novel *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* (Hoopoe

Fiction, 2016), and it was shortlisted for the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize in 2017. The Arabic original won the AUC Press's Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 2013 and was shortlisted for the 2014 IPAF. Khalifa's 2016 novel *Death is Hard Work* appeared in Price's English translation in 2019 and was a finalist for the 2019 US National Book Award for Translated Fiction. Khalifa's latest novel is *No One Prayed over their Graves*, published this year by Lebanese publisher Naufal, Hachette-Antoine, and in Egypt by Dar Al-Ain. In addition to his novels, Khalifa has written numerous scripts for TV dramas and films, several of which have won awards.

• **Leri Price** graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 2010 with First Class Honours in Arabic, including a distinction in spoken Arabic. She won the Carole Hillenbrand Prize for her Undergraduate Dissertation, entitled "What is the role of the translator in challenging Western cultural hegemony in Arabic-English literary translation?" She obtained a Master's in Public Policy from York University in 2018. Price has been a self-employed translator since 2010 and is particularly known for her translations of the three novels by Syrian author Khaled Khalifa to have appeared so far in English translation. Price's translation of Khalifa's 2006 novel *In Praise of Hatred*, the Arabic original of which was shortlisted for the inaugural 2008 IPAF, was published by Doubleday in 2012. Her translation of his 2013 novel *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* (Hoopoe, 2016) was shortlisted in 2017 for both the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize and the National Translation Award of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA). It was one of the Financial Times' "Best Books of 2016: Fiction in Translation".

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Jonathan Wright

shortlisted for his translation of
Jokes for the Gunmen by Mazen Maarouf
(Palestine)

Published by Granta Books, London, 2019
ISBN: 978-1846276675, paperback, 176 pages,
£10.99

In this evocative collection of short stories set during the Lebanese civil war in the 1980s we encounter characters that cling to life on the margins of conflict and daily strife. Mazen Maarouf's deceptively simple, savage collection

mixes the domestic and the horrific to achieve a level of absurdity that reflects the insanities of conflict through the eyes of its main young characters, who search for a meaning of the collapsing world around them. Jonathan Wright's perfectly seamless

and bold translation of *Jokes for the Gunmen* manages to portray the satirical nature of Maarouf's post-modern style, which is masterful and deadly, deadpan and sardonic. The translation renders Maarouf's language in an elegant and engaging prose which maintains the fine line between reality and the fantastical world of the characters.

• **Mazen Maarouf** is a Palestinian-Icelandic writer, poet, translator and journalist who was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in January 1978 and now lives between Beirut and the Icelandic capital Reykjavik. He has published three poetry collections – *The Camera Doesn't Capture Birds*, *Our Grief Resembles Bread*, and *An Angel Suspended on the Clothesline* – and two short story collections, *Jokes for the Gunmen* and *The Rats that Lick a Karate Champion's Ears*. *Jokes for the Gunmen* won the 2016 inaugural Kuwait-based Al-Multaqa Prize for the Arabic Short Story and in 2019 Jonathan Wright's translation of the collection was longlisted for the Man Booker International Prize. Maarouf's short story "Boxes" was published in the anthology *Beirut Noir* (Akashic Noir, 2016) translated by Michelle Hartman, and his long short story "The Curse of the Mud Ball Kid" appeared in the anthology *Palestine +100: Stories from a Century After the Nakba* (Comma Press, 2019) in translation by Wright. Maarouf's writing has been translated into several languages. On the journalistic side, in 2008 Maarouf started contributing to *An-Nahar* newspaper in Beirut as a literary and theatre critic, and he has since then written for many Arabic publications. He is at present working on a novel.

• **Jonathan Wright** is a London-based British journalist and literary translator who was born in Andover, UK, in 1953. A graduate in Arabic, Turkish, and Islamic History from St John's College, Oxford University, he joined Reuters news agency in 1980 as a correspondent, and was based in the Middle East for most of three decades. He served as Reuters' Cairo bureau chief, lived and worked throughout the region, including in Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Tunisia and the Gulf. From 1998 to 2003, he was based in Washington, DC, covering U.S. foreign policy for Reuters. For two years until the autumn of 2011 Wright was editor of the *Arab Media & Society Journal*, published by the Kamal Adham Center for Journalism Training and Research at the American University in Cairo. Wright embarked on a career in Arabic literary translation in 2008 when his translation of *Taxi* by the Egyptian writer Khaled al-Khamissi was published by Aflame. Wright won the 2013 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for his translation of *Azazeel* (Atlantic Books) by Egyptian author Youssef Ziedan, and went on to win the 2016 Prize for the translation of *The Bamboo Stalk* (Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing – BQFP, now HBKU Press) by Kuwaiti author Saud Alsanousi. He was commended for the 2015 Prize for his translation of the late Jordanian writer Amjad Nasser's novel *Land of No Rain* (BQFP), and was shortlisted for the 2018 Prize for his translation of Iraqi author Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* published by Oneworld Publications in the UK, and Penguin Books in the USA. In 2014 his translation of Iraqi writer

Hassan Blasim's short-story collection *The Iraqi Christ* (Comma Press) won the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, shared between author and translator.

ABOUT THE JUDGES

GHAZI GHEBLAWI (chair of judges) was born in Tripoli, Libya, where he studied medicine, and published his first works of fiction. He is the author of two collections of short stories in Arabic and has published various literary works in English in several publications in the UK. He runs and hosts Imtidad Cultural Blog & Podcast, which focuses on literature and arts in Britain and the Arab world. He lives in the UK, where he practised as a physician for a number of years. In 2017 he was a judge of the Caine Prize for African Writing. He is currently a senior editor at Darf Publishers, an independent publishing house based in London, and is a trustee of The Banipal Trust for Arab Literature.

JAN FORTUNE grew up in Teesside and read Theology at Cambridge, later completing a doctorate in Feminist Theology. She has worked as a teacher, charity director, parish priest and educational consultant and founded Cinnamon Press, an independent literary press, in 2005. In addition to running the publishing house with her husband and son, Jan writes novels, poetry and nonfiction titles. She also runs the site, *Becoming a Different Story*, which provides resources and courses for writers. Jan has led many creative writing courses in the UK, Spain and France and has mentored writers who have gone on to publication. Jan loves books that are engaged, raise questions, take risks with form, voice or subject or that push the boundaries of mainstream writing. She lives in a tiny village in North Wales.

ABLA OUDEH is a lecturer in Arabic studies at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, teaching Arabic language and translation, and organising the Institute's annual Alexandria Poetry Recitation Prize. She has previously taught translation studies at the University of Edinburgh, and has an MA in Translation and Linguistics (University of Bath, 1992). She has several published translations from English into Arabic including: *Taste of Thyme, Culinary Cultures of the Middle East* by R. Tapper and S. Zubaida, 2009 (awarded best translation 2010 by the University of Philadelphia, Amman, Jordan); *Leila Khaled: Icon of Palestinian Liberation* by Sarah Irving, 2013; *Malignant Sadness: The Anatomy of Depression* by Lewis Wolpert, 2014; and *Stranger Magic, Charmed States & the Arabian Nights* by Marina Warner, 2016.

CATHERINE TAYLOR was born in Waikato, New Zealand, and grew up in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. She studied English and Philosophy at Cardiff University, and Publishing at the London College of Printing (now London College of Communication). She has been an editorial researcher for the British Library, and was books category manager for Amazon.co.uk before moving to The Folio Society, becoming its managing editor, and later publisher, helping to establish the Folio

Prize (now the Rathbones-Folio Prize.) From 2013-2016 she was deputy director of literature and freedom of expression charity English PEN. As a freelance critic, she contributes regularly to the *Guardian Review* (for which she wrote a monthly debut fiction column 2007-2012), *New Statesman*, *FT Life & Arts*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Economist*, and *Irish Times*. She has been a judge for a number of literary awards, including the Jewish Quarterly-Wingate Prize, European Union Prize for Literature, the Harvill Secker Young Translator's Prize, the Guardian First Book Award, the British Book Awards, and most recently the Republic of Consciousness Prize for Small Presses.

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 Saif Ghobash Banipal 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 a prize for contemporary Arabic literature translated into English, the sponsor Omar Ghobash and his family generously extended their sponsorship to the establishment of an annual lecture on literary translation. The four lectures to date have been held in London at the British Library's Knowledge Centre. The inaugural one on 14 October 2016 was given by author, translator and essayist Anton Shammas on "Blind Spots: A Millennium of Arabic in translation – from Ibn Al-Haytham to William Faulkner via *Don Quixote*", the second, by the historian and novelist Robert Irwin on 7 November 2017 was on "*The Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salib: "The most important Arabic novel of the 20th Century", the third on 9 November 2018 by Syrian poet and philosopher Adonis was entitled "Translation, a Second Act of Creation" and on 7 November this year the Lebanese novelist and playwright Hanan al-Shaykh spoke on

“My travels through Cultures, Languages and Writing – From Abu Nuwas to Bint Al-Shaykh”. With the Lecture, the Banipal Trust looks forward to increasing support for reading 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 to these links: <http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/award2019.cfm>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/judges/>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/rules/>
<https://www.facebook.com/SaifGhobashBanipalPrize/>

The winner will be announced on 8 January, on the websites and by email. The Award Ceremony, hosted by the Society of Authors who administer the translation prizes in the UK, is on Wednesday 12 February 2020, with the Banipal Winner Celebration on the following day, 13 February. As yet there is no information about venues, only the dates are confirmed. We will keep you informed as to all developments.

As yet, there is no award made to shortlisted translators, neither is there funding to bring them to the Award Ceremony or to our own Celebration. Instead, we make as many posts etc. as we can, and encourage others to do so, too, on the internet and social media to help spread the word about the shortlisted works.

For information about the Annual Lecture see these links:
<https://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2019.cfm>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2018.cfm>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2017.cfm>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2016.cfm>

CONTACT

To contact the Prize or the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature directly, email the Trust’s administrator Margaret Obank on info@banipaltrust.org.uk