

Celebrating 20 years of awards with the 2025 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation



**Announcing MARILYN BOOTH the 2025 winner
for her translation of *Honey Hunger* by Zahran Alqasmi**

**“Beautiful evocative prose! A masterclass in
poetic translation! A stunning rendition of a
masterful work of Arabic literature!”**

The 2025 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation is awarded to Marilyn Booth for her translation of *Honey Hunger* by Zahran Alqasmi, published in 2025 by Hoopoe, an imprint of the American University in Cairo Press. Following the shortlist of six works that was announced on 1 December 2025, the judges have named Marilyn Booth as the winner of the 2025 prize, to be awarded by the Society of Authors on 10 February 2026.

From the 2025 prize, a runner-up to the winner is chosen by the judging panel, with an award of £1,000 generously supported by the Ghobash family. Kay Heikkinen’s translation of Radwa Ashour’s trilogy, *Granada: The Complete Trilogy*, published by Hoopoe Fiction, an imprint of the AUC press, in 2024, was named as the runner-up.

The judging panel of four comprised **Professor Tina Phillips** (Chair), scholar and translator of modern Arabic literature; **Dr Susan F. Frenk**, Principal of St Aidan’s College, Durham University; **Nashwa Nasreldin**, writer, editor and literary translator; and **Boyd Tonkin** Hon. FRSL, journalist, writer and former Literary Editor at *The Independent*.

THE JUDGES’ REPORT

Of the six shortlisted works, the two front runners were Zahran Alqasmi’s *Honey Hunger*, translated by Marilyn Booth, and Radwa Ashour’s *Granada: The Complete Trilogy*, translated by Kay Heikkinen. These two novels are very different in nature and weighing up the judging criteria against them was tricky (but fun!). *Honey Hunger* is a poetic eco-novel from the Gulf while *Granada: The Complete Trilogy* is an extended historical saga set in the Reconquista

period in Muslim Spain. As such the two posed different tests for their translators, with the challenge of *Honey Hunger* lying in recreating the lyricism of the original and bringing the remote landscapes of Oman home to the Anglophone reader, and the challenge for *Granada: The Complete Trilogy* lying more in the vastness of the project and multitude of languages, voices and registers in the text.

Marilyn Booth and Kay Heikkinen, both highly experienced translators, rose to the occasion and the resulting works are fine examples of standalone fiction. Furthermore, they are testimony not only to the skill of the translators and artistry of the original texts, but to modern Arabic literary translation as a field, which has developed from a side-show to academic scholarship on modern Arabic literature into a mature field of artistic production, aided in no small part by the work of Banipal and the support and recognition of the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize over the last twenty years.

In the end, the judges selected *Honey Hunger* as the winner due to its exquisite language and style in translation and on account of the significance of the themes explored in the novel (love, addiction, environment), and the fresh perspective the Omani voice and setting brings to bear on them.

Nashwa Nasreldin commented that: *Honey Hunger* translated by Marilyn Booth ‘is more than a story; it’s a quiet, evocative song, a lyric lament – and celebration – a product of the deeply attentive approach by both author and translator to their work.’

Boyd Tonkin stated that: ‘Lyrical and poetic, translated with a flare and care to match its precise art, *Honey Hunger* brings remote places, and almost-hidden lives, intimately close.’

Susan Frenk wrote: ‘Intensely poetic, yet profoundly rooted, *Honey Hunger* reveals the layers of contemporary Oman through voices that are too often unheard.’

Tina Phillips added: ‘Marilyn Booth’s translation is a masterclass in poetic translation which remains remarkably true to the original and seamlessly transports the reader to distant mountain landscapes of Oman’.

ABOUT THE WINNING TRANSLATOR

Marilyn Booth is an acclaimed US translator of Arabic literature into English. She translated Jokha Alharthi’s *Celestial Bodies*, which was the first Arab novel to win the International Booker Prize in 2019, also Alharthi’s *Bitter Orange Tree* and *Silken Gazelles*; Hassan Daoud’s *The Penguin’s Song* and *No Road to Paradise*, and Hoda Barakat’s *Voices of the Lost*, *Disciples of Passion* and *The Tiller of Waters*. Her other translations include Elias Khoury’s *As Though She Were Sleeping*, *Girls of Riyadh* by Rajaa Alsanea, Hamdi Abu Golayyel’s *Thieves in Retirement*, Alia Mamdouh’s *The Loved Ones*, Ibtihal Salem’s *Children of the Waters*, Somaya Ramadan’s *Leaves of Narcissus: A Modern Arabic Novel*, Nawal El Saadawi’s *The Circling Song* and *Memoirs from the Women’s Prison* and Latifa al-Zayyat’s *The Open Door*.

She is professor emerita at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and Magdalen College, Oxford University, and has also taught at Brown University, American University of Cairo and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her research publications focus on Arabophone women’s writing and the ideology of gender debates in the nineteenth century, most recently *The Career and Communities of Zaynab Fawwaz: Feminist Thinking in Fin-de-*

siècle Egypt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE WINNING WORK

Zahran Alqasmi is a poet and novelist, born in the Sultanate of Oman in 1974. He is also a medical doctor, with a specialisation in infectious diseases, and keeps bees. *Honey Hunger* is his third of four published novels and his first in English translation. In 2023 he won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) for his novel *The Water Diviner*. He has also published ten poetry collections and a collection of short stories.

ABOUT THE WINNING WORK

Honey Hunger by Zahran Alqasmi

Published by [Hoopoe Fiction, an imprint of AUC Press](#), 4 February 2025

Pbk ISBN: 9781649033901. £14.99, \$18.95 • E-ISBN: 9781549033925. £13.31, \$17.99

See <https://uk.bookshop.org/shop/SaifGhobashBanipalPrize>

<https://uk.bookshop.org/p/books/honey-hunger-a-novel-zahran-alqasmi/7792457?aid=15469&ean=9781649033901&>

Zahran Alqasmi's *Honey Hunger* takes you to the remote highland landscapes of Oman and the story of Azzan, a beekeeper who retreats into the mountains to rebuild his life and hives. As Azzan becomes immersed in nature and beekeeping, he forms bonds with fellow honey hunters and a lyrical story of loss, addiction, resilience, healing and the fragile balance of human and nature unfolds. This novel is exceptional not only for its beautiful evocative prose but for its exploration of the taboo topic of addiction in rural Oman and for its vital ecological theme.

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JUDGES' COMMENTS ON THE RUNNER-UP TRANSLATION

Of the runner-up, *Granada: The Complete Trilogy*, Nashwa Nasreldin commented: 'This translation, bringing us the entire trilogy into English for the first time, earns its own accolades as a stunning rendition of a masterful work of Arabic literature.'

Tina Phillips noted: 'The long-awaited full translation of Radwa Ashour's trilogy does not disappoint. An immense task, Heikkinen does a magnificent job of recreating the multitude of voices, registers and quotations in *Granada*.'

Susan Frenk said: 'A magnificent tapestry, a throng of voices, bringing to life the violent dismantling of Al Andalus.'

Boyd Tonkin added: 'Artfully designed, and powerfully translated, the family saga in the heart of Ashour's trilogy grips and moves.'

ABOUT THE RUNNER-UP TRANSLATOR

Kay Heikkinen is a translator and academic who has translated two novels by the Palestinian author Huzama Habayeb – *Velvet* (Hoopoe Fiction, 2019), for which she was awarded the 2020 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize, and *Before the Queen Falls Asleep* (MacLehose Press) which was shortlisted for the 2024 prize. She has translated Naguib Mahfouz’s *In the Time of Love* (AUC Press, 2010) and Radwa Ashour’s *The Woman from Tantoura* (AUC Press, 2019). She holds a PhD from Harvard University, and was previously Ibn Rushd Lecturer of Arabic at the University of Chicago.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE RUNNER-UP BOOK

Radwa Ashour (1946–2014) is a highly acclaimed Egyptian writer and scholar. She is the author of more than fifteen works of fiction, memoirs and criticism, including *Siraaj* (translated by Barbara Romaine, Univ Texas Press, 2007), *Granada* (translated by William Granara, AUC Press, 2008), *Blue Lorries* (translated by Barbara Romaine, Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2014), and *The Woman from Tantoura* (translated by Kay Keikkinen, AUC Press, 2014) and was a recipient of the Constantine Cavafy Prize for Literature and the prestigious Owais Prize for Fiction.

ABOUT THE RUNNER-UP BOOK

Granada: The Complete Trilogy by Radwa Ashour

Published by [Hoopoe Fiction, an imprint of AUC Press](#), 5 November, 2024

Pbk ISBN: 9781649033765. £14.99, \$19.95 • E-ISBN 9781649033789. £8.99, \$18.99

See <https://uk.bookshop.org/shop/SaifGhobashBanipalPrize>

<https://uk.bookshop.org/p/books/granada-the-complete-trilogy-radwa-ashour/7740575?aid=15469&ean=9781649033765&>

When the first part of this trilogy was published in Arabic in 1994, it won the Book of the Year prize at the Cairo International Book Fair. The following year, the entire trilogy won first prize for the best book by an Arab woman writer. It chronicles the destruction of Moorish Spain following the conquest of Granada by Spain’s catholic monarchs in 1492, and tells the story of the Muslims who remained in Andalusia, who struggled to maintain faith and hope in a possible future. It narrates a community’s effort to comprehend what has happened to them, and of their valiant but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to resist the destruction of their identity.

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THE AWARD CEREMONY – 10 February 2026

The Translation Prizes Award Ceremony, hosted by the Society of Authors, the administrator of the prize, will take place on 10 February 2026, 18.15–20.45 GMT at the British Library and online. See this link for more: <https://societyofauthors.org/event/the-2025-society-of-authors-translation-prizes/>.

The following prizes will be awarded: the first John Calder Translation Prize (any language), the TA First Translation Prize (debut translation from any language), the Premio Valle Inclán (Spanish), the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize (Arabic), the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation Translation Prize (Japanese), the Scott Moncrieff Prize (French), The Goethe-Institut Award for New Translation (German), the Schlegel-Tieck Prize (German), and the Bernard Shaw Prize (Swedish).

Click for link to the Shortlists: <https://societyofauthors.org/2025/12/01/announcing-the-translation-prizes-2025-shortlists/>

A CELEBRATION OF ARABIC LITERARY TRANSLATION – 13 February 2026 **The Annual Lecture and the Winner of the 2025 Prize**

On Friday 13 February 2026, from 6.00pm GMT, at the SOAS Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature will co-host with SOAS University of London *A Celebration of Arabic Literary Translation* at which the winning translator Marilyn Booth will be in conversation with the chair of the judging panel Professor Tina Phillips. Boyd Tonkin, former Literary Editor at *The Independent* and re-founder of the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, will give the Annual Lecture on the subject: *Republic of letters or global bazaar: literary translation in the new millennium*. The event will be in-person and online, followed by a Q&A and a reception.

All welcome to this free event

Links to register for either in-person or online attendance will be available at

<https://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2025.cfm>

and <https://www.soas.ac.uk/about/events>

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- For digital images of winning translator Marilyn Booth, author Zahran Alqasmi, the front cover of *Honey Hunger*, the runner-up translator Kay Heikkinen, author Radwa Ashour, front cover of *Granada: The Complete Trilogy*, plus the Prize logo and the Society of Authors' logo, click on this link: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wKsgBVGnmbAcsAhNYvGA-pcm4ccgxRew?usp=sharing>
- To arrange an interview with Marilyn Booth, or for any other information, email admin@banipaltrust.org.uk.
- The Society of Authors' special celebration of the newly established annual John Calder Prize for translations of full-length ambitious, groundbreaking works of literary merit and general interest from any language into English, takes place [27-30 January 2026](#) and includes: *How I Write – in conversation with Katharine Halls*, the winner of the 2024 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize, on 29 January. See this link: <https://societyofauthors.org/event/john-calder-week-how-i-translate-in-conversation-with-katharine-halls/>

ABOUT THE SAIF GHOBASH BANIPAL PRIZE FOR ARABIC LITERARY TRANSLATION

The prize is an annual award with a prize fund, from 2025, of £4,000, made to the translators of published translations in English of full-length imaginative and creative Arabic works of literary merit published after, or during, the year 1967 and first published in English translation in the year prior to the award. It was the first prize in the world dedicated to awarding a published literary translation from Arabic to English. The 2025 prize is the twentieth year of the judging panels reading the entries, discussing and selecting the winners. Between 2006 and 2025, a total of 72 judges have joined the panels, and shortlisted 61 works – including commended, runners-up, and winners. There have been a total of twenty-two winners (with

joint winners in 2013 and 2022). The 2025 prize also announces an annual runner-up in addition to the winner. The winner will receive £3,000 and the runner-up £1,000.

The 2025 prize is the twentieth year of raising the profile of contemporary Arabic literature by honouring the skill of individual translators in bringing the published work of established and emerging Arab writers to the attention of the wider world. The prize 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 to the late Humphrey Davies for *Gate of the Sun* by the late Elias Khoury.

Entries are judged by a panel of four distinguished literary translators, 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 United Kingdom, alongside the other UK prizes for literary translation, from languages that include Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Spanish, and Swedish, as well as the recently established John Calder Translation Prize from any language into English, and the Translators' Association prize for a debut translation from any language. The prizes are awarded annually at a ceremony hosted by the Society of Authors.

The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize is wholly sponsored by the Saif Ghobash family in memory of their husband and father, the [late Saif Ghobash](#) (21 October 1932–25 October 1977), a man passionate about Arabic literature and other literatures of the world.

The deadline for both entries and publication of works each year is 31 March.

THE SAIF GHOBASH BANIPAL PRIZE ANNUAL LECTURE

In 2015, to mark the tenth year of awarding prizes for contemporary Arabic literature translated into English, the Ghobash family generously extended their sponsorship to the establishment of an annual lecture to discuss any aspect of the subject of Arabic literature and its 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.

Each year's lecture can be followed online on the Banipal Trust's website at: <https://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/>.

Boyd Tonkin, former Literary Editor at *The Independent* and re-founder of the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, will give the 2025 Lecture at the SOAS Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre on Friday, 13 February 2026.

MORE LINKS

<https://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/> • <https://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/rules/>
<https://societyofauthors.org/Prizes/Translation-Prizes>
<https://societyofauthors.org/Prizes/Translation-Prizes/Saif-Ghobash-Banipal>

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