



**ROBIN MOGER**  
**is the winner of the 2017 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize**  
**for Arabic Literary Translation**

**“An alluring translation that captures beautifully  
the nuances of the Arabic original”**

The 2017 Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation is awarded to Robin Moger for his translation of the novel *The Book of Safety* by Yasser Abdel Hafez, published by Hoopoe Fiction. After four novels made the first shortlist of the prize, announced on 1 December 2017, the judges are unanimous in naming Robin Moger as the winner of the £3,000 prize, to be awarded on 1 March 2018.

The four-member judging panel comprised the writer and literary figure Dr Alastair Niven (Chair), author and editor Peter Kalu, Professor of Arabic at SOAS Wen-chin Ouyang, and poet and journalist Salam Sarhan.

**THE JUDGES' REPORT**

**THE WINNER: Robin Moger for *The Book of Safety* by Yasser Abdel Hafez**

“Robin Moger has created an alluring translation of *The Book of Safety* by Egyptian author and journalist Yasser Abdel Hafez that captures beautifully the moods, paces, rhythms and nuances of the Arabic original and, ruthlessly but lovingly, lures us into the conflicting, conspiratorial, and violent world that it draws. Moger makes us believe this is our world, the very world we live in, and we care about the characters and their shenanigans, look out for whispers that will give their secrets away, and cannot wait until we know their fate. Moger is a relatively new voice in Arabic literary translation and the full force of his talent is certain to be felt in the years to come. His work will make a tremendous impact on how Arabic literature is received in English translation.”

The judges considered *The Book of Safety* an exceptional novel for its adventurousness and its delight in the very act of writing. It is graphic writing of the first order, they commented, with its principal characters moving convincingly through a Cairo where there is much mistrust, but also energy and endless curiosity, while humour, sadness and wisdom abound. They concluded that through the enthralling energy and flexibility of Robin Moger’s translation they have encountered an author of truly original talent.

All four judges of the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize this year felt privileged by their task. Choosing a shortlist was challenge enough, but then pinpointing the winner was very hard. Their deliberations were lengthy and frank, but their choice of the overall winner was unanimous.

### **GENERAL COMMENT BY THE JUDGES**

The judges felt encouraged by the range of topics explored by the entries and by the geographical spread of works from many parts of the Arabic-speaking world. Inevitably almost all engaged with the existing contemporary traumas and divisions. Violence, civic disruption, the curtailment of freedom for women and homosexuals, class divides, diaspora and exile, alienation within families and dislocation within communities within the range of the works are balanced, however, by a great deal of humour, by romantic sensitivity, and above all by a tremendous humanity shining through almost all the fiction entries. Implicitly and specifically the judges were often reminded that Arab storytelling today is part of an ancient tradition, with the best entries – and especially the winning novel – exploring the very form of fiction itself through ambitious new possibilities in narrative techniques.

At the helm of selection and translation is an emerging generation of talented translators who are intimately engaged with the most immediate political, cultural and literary issues in the Arab world and diaspora today. Their passion brings the turbulence and tumult in the Arab experience, fully and poetically, to the rest of the world, and at the same time showcases the new original Arab voices and their revolutionary political and literary sensibilities. Their craft of translation more than matches the craft of writing in the original works. The best translators pay equal attention to lucid characterization, clear plot line, and the depth of feeling conveyed in the poetics of language. The best translations, especially the winning novel, deliver on all these.

The judges reported that they found their experience of reading for the prize utterly rewarding and are confident that quality Arabic literature, matched by subtle translation, is alive and well, with the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize doing a sterling job in drawing it to the attention of a wider readership.

### **ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR**

**Robin Moger** is a translator of contemporary Arabic prose and poetry, currently living in Cape Town, South Africa.

He has translated several Arabic novels into English, including *All the Battles* by Maan Abu Talib (Hoopoe Fiction, 2017), *The Book of Safety* by Yasser Abdel Hafez (Hoopoe Fiction, 2016, shortlisted for and now the winner of the 2017 Saif Ghobash Banipal Translation Prize) and *Otared* by Mohammad Rabie (Hoopoe Fiction, 2016, also entered for the 2017 Saif Ghobash Banipal Translation Prize), Youssef Rakha's *The Crocodiles* (Seven Stories Press, 2014) and Egyptian author Nael Eltoukhy's novel *Women of Karantina* (AUC Press, 2014). He was one of the translators for *Writing Revolution: The Voices from Tunis to Damascus* (I B Tauris, 2013) which won the 2013 English PEN Award for outstanding writing in translation.

His translations of Yasser Abdellatif's *The Law of Inheritance* and Iman Mersal's *How To Mend: Motherhood and its Ghosts* are due to be published in 2018.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Yasser Abdel Hafez** is an Egyptian novelist and journalist, born in Cairo in 1969. He graduated in law from Ain Shams University, Cairo. He started work as a journalist when he was 18, and has worked with Cairo's *Akhbar al-Adab* weekly literary journal since it started. His first novel *On the Occasion of Life*, published in 2005, was excerpted in *Banipal 25 – New Writing in Egypt*, in Spring 2006. His second, *Kitab al-Aman*, now in this winning English translation *The Book of Safety*, was published in 2013.

## ABOUT THE BOOK

*The Book of Safety* by Yasser Abdel Hafez (Hoopoe Fiction)

“The central protagonist, Khaled Mamoun, is employed to transcribe testimonies in the Palace of Confessions, a state run, shadowy organisation, where he meets Mustafa Ismail, a gifted thief-cum-University professor whose talent for breaking into the homes of the rich, famous, connected and powerful allows him ample opportunity to blackmail them. From this modest opening we are treated to a surgical analysis of moral descent as Khaled is drawn into Mustafa's obsession for perfection in the business of theft and his book ‘The Book of Safety’ described as ‘the ultimate guide to successful thievery.’” From the review of *The Book of Safety* by Paul Blezard published in *Banipal 60*. To read the full review online go to: [http://www.banipal.co.uk/book\\_reviews/144/the-book-of-safety/](http://www.banipal.co.uk/book_reviews/144/the-book-of-safety/)

## PUBLISHER'S REACTION

**Nigel Fletcher-Jones, Director, AUC Press, Cairo**, commented: “Over many years, Banipal has been an indispensable support for AUC Press' fiction publishing, creating a solid voice for Arab writers and showcasing a myriad of talent and ideas that surpass the stereotypical representation of our region. I am delighted that this year's award goes to Robin Moger, one of Hoopoe's most talented translators.”

## TRANSLATION PRIZES AWARD CEREMONY



The Society of Authors  
**Translation Prizes**  
The Knowledge Centre, The British Library  
**1 March 2018**  
6.30-8.30pm

Please join us to celebrate 2017's most exceptional works of literary translation.

Featuring the inaugural  
TA First Translation Prize

RSVP  
events@societyofauthors.org



PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT, EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 NOON GMT, 10 JANUARY 2017

The ceremony will award prizes, all administered by the Society of Authors,  
for translation from French, Arabic, Spanish, Dutch, German,  
and the inaugural Translators' Association First Translation Prize

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

- If you require digital images of Robin Moger and Yasser Abdel Hafez, the front cover image of *The Book of Safety*, or the logo of the Prize, please contact [margaret@banipal.co.uk](mailto:margaret@banipal.co.uk)
- To attend the Award Ceremony on Wednesday 1 March 2018 at the British Library please apply to Paula Johnson at the Society of Authors ([Pjohnson@societyofauthors.org](mailto:Pjohnson@societyofauthors.org)) for a Press Pass.
- To arrange an interview with Robin Moger or for any other information, please email Margaret Obank on [info@banipaltrust.org.uk](mailto:info@banipaltrust.org.uk) or [margaret@banipal.co.uk](mailto:margaret@banipal.co.uk).