

PRESS RELEASE



THE SAIF GHOBASH – BANIPAL PRIZE FOR ARABIC LITERARY TRANSLATION

The 2007 award for Arabic Literary Translation has been awarded to Farouk Mustafa (pen-name Farouk Abdel Wahab) for his translation of Khairy Shalaby's *The Lodging House*, published by the American University in Cairo Press. The judges, the same expert team as the first year, were author Moris Farhi, literary journalist Maya Jaggi, and academic and literary translator from Arabic Roger Allen.

Speaking for the judges, Maya Jaggi states: "Khairy Shalaby's *The Lodging House* is a wise, anarchic, ribald, compassionate compendium of life at its most precarious and most ebullient. Its narrator is a young drop-out expelled from teachers' college for assaulting an instructor who picked on him as "barefoot riffraff", one of a generation of peasants and urban poor rising with the widening of education. His fall deposits him in Wikalat Atiya, once a famed caravanserai outside Alexandria, now a twilight zone in the city of Damanhour. Descending into an underworld of heaving doss houses, hashish dens and Bohemian tea houses, he finds a rogues' gallery of fugitives and addicts fearful of the regime's secret police. Yet as he comes to know its characters – from peddlars and conmen to midwives and matchmakers – he is buoyed by a world of shared feasts and morality tales, seductive and self-reliant women, and landlords who give meddling authorities the run-around.

"Set in the years following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, after political parties have been dissolved by decree, and as suspected members of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood are being rounded up, jailed or executed, the novel hints at the forces feuding in Egyptian society, while illuminating the lives of those whose main goal is simply to survive. In awarding the prize to this novel, which was published in Arabic in 1999 and won the 2003 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature, the judges were recognising the zest of Farouk Abdel Wahab's translation, and his service in bringing Shalaby's novel to the English-speaking world.

"Runner-up Marilyn Booth has rendered Hamdi Abu Golayyel's first novel *Thieves in Retirement* into a supple, subtle English that brilliantly captures the dark ironies and skewering satire of a relatively new voice in Egyptian fiction and Arabic literature. It reads delightfully, as though it were not a translation at all."

And a third work won commendation – the translation by Peter Theroux of Emile Habiby's *Saraya, The Ogre's Daughter*, published by Ibis Editions.

Fellow judge and literary translator Roger Allen comments: "It is not a little ironic that, in a era in which the Western world seems more than ever focused on events taking place in the Middle East and especially the Arabic-speaking world, the opportunities and publication outlets available for making well crafted translations of Arabic literature available are fewer than ever. It is almost as though, in an era where we see a plethora of works on Islam, terrorism, and Middle Eastern economies, literature is not to be considered as a reflection of a nation's/culture's view of the world – indeed, one might suggest, as the most accurate reflection. If the Saif Ghobash–Banipal Prize can serve to highlight the excellence and relevance of the literary works that are available to a readership of English-language texts, then it is providing an invaluable service. It deserves the widest possible support.

"The winner of this year's prize, the novel of Khairy Shalaby, has long been recognized as a great contribution to the Arabic, and specially Egyptian, novel. The portrait that it offers is authentic, affectionate and critical – all of them desirable facets of the novel. The translation is a brilliant exercise in the transfer of both literal meaning and nuance into the context of another language's culture – no

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mean feat. The runner-up is also a truly superb exercise in translation, and the text involved is a wonderful illustration of the sheer sophistication of the contemporary Arabic novel in its exploitation of narrative strategies.”

Saadi Youssef, chair of judges from the Banipal Trust, adds: “Khairy Shalaby's *The Lodging House* is an outspoken message, in defence of the forgotten, the downtrodden and the poorest of the poor. Before Khairy Shalaby nobody dared to give such a statement.”

Moris Farhi writes: “No praise can do justice to the importance of the Banipal Trust – and, indeed, to the Saif Ghobash–Banipal Prize. The Trust stands as a *tariq*, a shining star and messenger, for introducing Arab literature – as great a literature as any in the world – to the Anglophone readership. If it can be said that the Word, whether in prose or poetry, is an unending source of enrichment, then Arab literature ranks as an Aladdin’s cave of infinite proportions. The energy in the works submitted for the Saif Ghobash–Banipal Prize this year was overpowering, and none more so than Khairy Shalaby’s *The Lodging House*, the winner of the prize. Being one of the judges was an honour and a great joy.”

The Saif Ghobash–Banipal Prize is administered by the Society of Authors in the UK, together with a number of well-established UK prizes for literary translation into English from European languages, such as the prestigious Scott Moncrieff Prize for translation from French. All seven prizes awarded this year will be presented on 8 November at London’s South Bank Centre following the 2007 Sebald Lecture on the Art of Literary Translation. The event is hosted by the British Centre for Literary Translation and Arts Council England in association with the Society of Authors, and supported by the *Times Literary Supplement*.

The Saif Ghobash–Banipal annual prize of £2,000 is awarded to the translator of a published translation in English of a full-length imaginative and creative Arabic work of literary merit published in the thirty-five years prior to submission of the translation and first published in English translation in the year prior to the award. Entries can have been published anywhere in the world but must be available for purchase in the United Kingdom, either via a distributor or on-line. The prize is the first specifically for a published work of English literary translation from Arabic.

The Prize was established by *Banipal*, the magazine of modern Arab literature in English translation, and the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature, which was founded in 2004 to support and celebrate the publication of Arab authors in English translation and the production of live literature events in the UK with Arab authors.

6pm, Thursday 8 November
South Bank Centre, London SE1

Readings by the translators from the prize-winning translations

7.45 pm, Thursday 8 November
The Purcell Room, South Bank Centre, London SE1

The 2007 Sebald Lecture on the Art of Literary Translation

Stranger Magic: True Stories and Translated Selves

Given by Marina Warner

Presentation of the Translation Prizes

by Sir Peter Stothard, Editor, *Times Literary Supplement*

This prize was established in 2005 by *Banipal*, the magazine of modern Arab literature in English translation, and the Banipal Trust for Arab Literature, and is now sponsored by Omar Saif Ghobash 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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