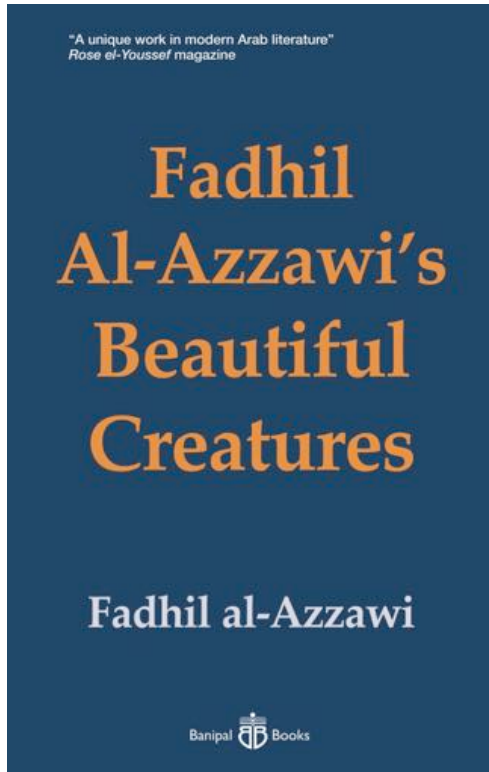


# Fadhil Al-Azzawi's Beautiful Creatures

by **Fadhil al-Azzawi**



*Fadhil al-Azzawi* photo © Samuel Shimon

**"Fadhil Al-Azzawi's Beautiful Creatures is a unique work in modern Arab literature"**  
**Ahmed Abdel Muti Hijazi, *Rose el-Youssef* magazine (Cairo, 1969)**

This open work was written in defiance of the "sanctity of genre" and to raise the question of freedom of expression in writing. First published in Arabic in 1969 to great acclaim, and never out of print since, it has been variously called a novel or a prose poem, while the author calls it an epic in prose, divided as it is into cantos. In mid-1960s Iraq such an open-ended form, in which different genres could come together and blend into each other, was difficult to even imagine.

For Iraqi writer Fadhil al-Azzawi it was the core of a new vision of life after the country's tough political experiences, especially the bloody coup in Iraq of February 1963, and then the abysmal defeat in the June 1967 Six-Day War. The 78 cantos, narrated by a lonesome traveller with down-to-earth pitch-black humour that is simultaneously surreal, are preceded by an equally surreal and tragi-comic story of how the original book managed to wind its way through the Iraqi censors.

Iraqi art critic and writer Farouk Yousif introduces *Beautiful Creatures* with an overview of al-Azzawi's contribution to Iraqi and Arab modern literature. He explains how al-Azzawi sees poetry as "his special instrument for changing the world", and that when *Beautiful Creatures* was first published in 1969 in Baghdad, because it "evinced a radical individualism in conflict with the rest

of the world the novel understandably generated a good deal of mistrust". Back then Al-Azzawi's cultural style and aesthetic ideals had been seen as "shocking to his contemporaries".

The preface to the original Arabic edition noted: "Everything in this open novel returns to itself and acquires its own particular innocence, even in language, so that the novel becomes a poem, a play, a film, a painting and a piece of music all at once without ever meaning to [. . .] It talks about itself in its own very particular way, where it says nothing specific so that it can say everything."



"Fadhil al-Azzawi is an exceptional poet and writer, for him writing is a holistic experience and modernity a phenomenon, while his texts escape classification. None of the well-known pioneers of Iraq and abroad can compare, he is perhaps closer to Cavafy or Kafka, but always remains Al-Azzawi, unlike anyone else."

**Moncef Ouhaibi, *Nizwa* magazine**

"An Iraqi master poet who opens up all the despair and tenderness of our times."

**Ariel Dorfman on Fadhil al-Azzawi's *The Miracle Maker***

"Fadhil al-Azzawi has amassed an evolving set of lyrical and conceptual tools, accompanied by a canny capacity to reach far into the imagination, snatching revelation from the mouth of horror and despair."

**Khaled Mattawa, poet and translator**

"Fadhil Al-Azzawi is a rare and multi-focal poet; brave, serious, funny, experimental, endlessly inventive and flecked with genius."

**James Byrne, poet and editor**



**Fadhil al-Azzawi** was born in Kirkuk, Iraq, in 1940. He is regarded as one of the innovators of modern Arabic literature and language. His writings blend Arabic literary tradition with western modernism and postmodernism. He has published more than thirty works, including eight novels, 14 collections of poetry and three books of essays, plus many literary translations from German and English into Arabic. Some works have been translated into English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Turkish, Persian, Indonesian, Hebrew and Kurdish. He studied English literature at Baghdad University.

Later in Germany he studied at Leipzig University, earning a PhD in cultural journalism. He edited a number of magazines in Iraq and abroad and founded the literary magazine *Shi'r 69* (Poetry 69). His early works of the 1960s and '70s were received with much critical acclaim and enthusiasm, especially this book which was first published by al-Adaab Press, Najaf, Iraq, in 1969.

He was arrested many times by the country's military regimes for his political and cultural activities and spent three years in jail. He left Iraq in 1977 and since 1983 has lived in Berlin, Germany.

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