



The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation

2017 Prize – The Shortlist

The Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize announces its first shortlist with four works translated by the duo team of **Katharine Halls** and **Adam Talib**, by **Robin Moger**, by **Leri Price** and by **Anna Ziajka Stanton**.

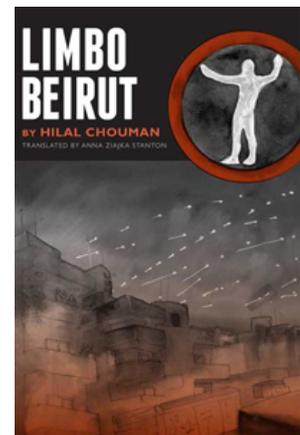
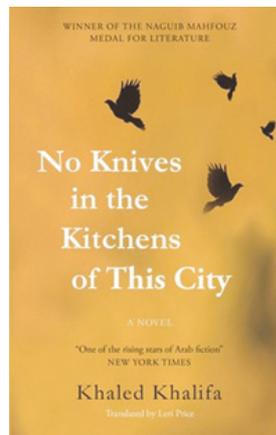
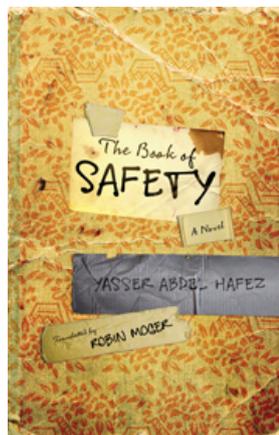
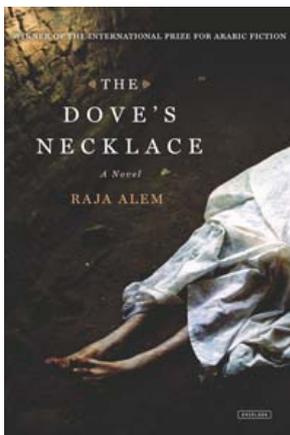
The judges were conscious all the time that the Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize is not just for good fiction and poetry; it also seeks to honour the underestimated art of translation. They have selected four novels for the shortlist from the seventeen eligible entries. All four were translated with respect for nuance, contemporaneity and readability, never betraying the integrity of the original writer but also acknowledging that English-language readers need to feel at ease with what they are reading and not held up by awkward expression or mystifying allusions. The best translations here achieve all this with remarkable skill and tact. The four shortlisted works are:

The Dove's Necklace by Raja Alem (Saudi Arabia),
translated by **Katharine Halls** and **Adam Talib** (Duckworth)

The Book of Safety by Yasser Abdel Hafez (Egypt),
translated by **Robin Moger** (Hoopoe)

No Knives in the Kitchens of This City by Khaled Khalifa (Syria),
translated by **Leri Price** (Hoopoe)

Limbo Beirut by Hilal Chouman (Lebanon),
translated by **Anna Ziajka Stanton** (Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Univ. Texas Press)



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

THE JUDGES' COMMENTS

The Dove's Necklace

by RAJA ALEM

translated by **Katharine Halls** and **Adam Talib**

This labyrinthine novel was recognized by the judges as a virtuoso work of magisterial confidence and technical accomplishment. For most readers it will reveal aspects of street life in Mecca of which they will have been completely unaware, far from the popular image of a faith capital entrenched in conservatism. For a start it is a work in which women play a central part. The author tells a multitude of stories with an extraordinary command of atmosphere and pace. On one level the novel takes a popular genre of fiction, the detective investigation, and commands our attention as we follow its ins and outs, but Raja Alem invests the form with new life as she delves into the dark side of the city's alleys and byways.

At times she almost trips over herself in dealing with such a diversity of tales and at moments she hovers close to sexual stereotyping, but there is no doubting that hers is a major story-telling talent and that *The Dove's Necklace* is a master work. It has been expertly and vividly translated by **Katharine Halls** and **Adam Talib**.

The Book of Safety

by Yasser Abdel Hafez (Egypt),

translated by **Robin Moger**

Robin Moger skilfully translates this gripping story that cleverly shakes the fixed standards of morality of a traditional society. He reproduces *The Book of Safety* in a beautiful language, retaining all its magnificent dark philosophy, with the engaging character of Mustafa taking thievery to a sophisticated and new existential level. There are many sublime pieces of writing such as can only be found in great books. The translation reflects the eloquent use of language of the original. It flows very well and reads organically as though not a translated work.

This is a creatively adventurous novel which engages with the very nature of fiction. At a time when people are questioning the concept of truth, *The Book of Safety* looks at contrasts between appearance and reality, the real and the imagined. It is a work ambitious in scope and brilliant in execution. In both its original Arabic and Moger's translation, it shows a formidable sense of respect for the art of storytelling and complements this with a writing technique that entices the reader.

No Knives in the Kitchens of This City

by Khaled Khalifa (Syria),

translated by **Leri Price**

Hauntingly elegiac, **Leri Price's** translation of Khaled Khalifa's heart-breaking homage to individuals who must manage and survive power and oppression is a triumph. The cast of misfits, the unhappily divorced mother, the unlucky-in-love uncle Nizar, and the sexually irrepressible sister Sawsan, come to life on the pages.

We eagerly and with trepidation follow their misadventures in love across a broad historical and geographical canvas, over the thirty years of Hafez al-Assad's rule (1971-2000), in Syria and the Middle East. We live their highs and lows against a backdrop of music and song, and Khalifa's

nuanced exposition of power and the machinery of tyranny hiding beneath masculinist social logic, structure, and conduct. *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* is a timely and painful reminder of the tragedy unfolding before our very eyes that is Syria today.

Limbo Beirut

by Hilal Chouman (Lebanon),
translated by **Anna Ziajka Stanton**

Limbo Beirut is a set of five inter-colliding stories that collectively evoke the Lebanon of 2008. The prose style is smooth and fluid – easy flowing sentence structures engagingly convey a sense of the emotional and intellectual lives of the characters, against the backdrop of the May 2008 sectarian clashes in Beirut. The psychological portraits that **Hilal Chouman** paints are convincing and compelling. The characters tend to be in their 20s and 30s, and the perennial difficult decisions this age group faces regarding close intimate relationships, the tensions in expectations versus desire, and the difficulty of evolving a culture of effective communication in a relationship are all brilliantly shown; Chouman is particularly good at the trauma of break-ups (see the fifth story “The Decisive Moment”), and how the characters’ feelings for one another change from encounter to encounter.

There is that truism that we are all the main characters in the drama of our own lives. Chouman shows this: a minor character in one story reappears as the central character in another. What we learn about them in their new, more central role, causes us to revise the perceptions of them we gained from the initial introduction. It is an excellent storytelling manoeuvre, pulled off with aplomb. Chouman is a highly gifted writer with a style all of his own.

AUTHOR AND TRANSLATOR BIOGRAPHIES AND PUBLICATION DETAILS

The Dove’s Necklace

by Raja Alem
translated by Katharine Halls and Adam Talib

• Published by Duckworth, UK, and Overlook, USA, June 2016. ISBN: 9780715645864
Hardback, 544 pages, £16.20.

Raja Alem is an award-winning author from Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, who grew up in Mecca. In 2011 she was joint winner of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction for this shortlisted novel, *The Dove’s Necklace*. In 2014 she was awarded the LiBeraturpreis of the Frankfurt Book Fair for its German translation *Das Halsband der Tauben*. She has published ten novels, two plays, biographies, short stories, essays, and works for children and has received many awards, including UNESCO’s Arab Woman’s Creative Writing award, 2005. She has some works published in English, Spanish and French, including *My Thousand & One Nights: A Novel of Mecca* (2007) and *Fatma, A Novel of Arabia* (2003).

Katharine Halls is a freelance Arabic-to-English translator, translating short stories, scripts, plays (notably *Goats* at the Royal Court Theatre), and non-fiction, including with Adam Talib, the novel *The Dove’s Necklace* by Raja Alem. She has a BA in Arabic and Hebrew from the University of Oxford, and an MA in translation & interpreting from the University of Manchester.

Adam Talib teaches Arabic literature at Durham University. He has translated four novels of contemporary Arabic literature, including *The Dove's Necklace*, with Katharine Halls (Duckworth/Overlook 2016), *Sarmada* by Fadi Azzam (longlisted for 2012 IPAF, Swallow Editions (UK) and Interlink (US) in 2011), *The Hashish Waiter* by the late Khairy Shalaby (The American University in Cairo Press in 2011) and *Cairo Swan Song* by Mekkawi Said (shortlisted for the inaugural IPAF, 2008; AUC Press 2006, 2015). He is on the editorial board of two academic journals.

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The Book of Safety

by Yasser Abdel Hafez (Egypt),
translated by **Robin Moger**

• Published by Hoopoe Fiction (AUC Press), 30 January 2017, ISBN: 978-9774168215, paperback, 248 pages, £9.99.

Yasser Abdel Hafez is a journalist and novelist, and currently works as an editor at the literary magazine *Akhbar al-Adab*. His first novel *On the Occasion of Life* was excerpted in *Banipal 25 – New Writing from Egypt* (2006). He lives in Cairo.

Robin Moger is a translator of contemporary Arabic fiction. Recent translations include *Otared* by Mohammad Rabie (also entered for this year's Saif Ghobash Banipal Prize), *All the Battles* by Maan Abu Talib (2017), Yousef al-Mohaimeed's *Where Pigeons Don't Fly* (2015), Youssef Rakha's *The Crocodiles* (2014), *Women of Karantina* by Nael Eltoukhy (2014), and *Vertigo* by Ahmed Mourad (2011). He lives in Cape Town, South Africa.

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No Knives in the Kitchens of This City

by Khaled Khalifa
translated by **Leri Price**

• Published by Hoopoe Fiction (AUC Press), 15 October 2016, ISBN: 978-9774168212, paperback, 248 pages, \$16.95 / £9.99 / LE120

Khaled Khalifa was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1964. A founding editor of the literary magazine *Alif*, he is the author of four novels, including *In Praise of Hatred*. He has also written numerous scripts for TV dramas and films, several of which have won awards, and screenplays for several feature films. *No Knives in the Kitchens of This City* was awarded the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 2013 and was shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014.

Leri Price graduated from the University of Edinburgh with First Class Honours in Arabic. As well as *No Knives in the Kitchens of this City* by Syrian author Khaled Khalifa she has translated his earlier novel *In Praise of Hatred*, whose Arabic original was shortlisted for the inaugural 2008 International Prize for Arabic Fiction. The Arabic original of *No Knives in the Kitchens of this City* was awarded the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature in 2013 and shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014. Leri Price's English translation was shortlisted for the US 2017 National Translation Awards (NTA) in the

prose category, and was one of the Financial Times' "Best Books of 2016: Fiction in Translation".

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Limbo Beirut

by Hilal Chouman

translated by **Anna Ziajka Stanton**

Published by the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin, USA, 31 August 2016. ISBN: 978-1-4773-1005-2, 220 pages with 85 b&w illustrations, USD 16.00, £12.99.

Hilal Chouman is a writer, journalist and engineer, born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1982. He has a degree in Electronics and Communications Engineering from the Beirut Arab University, an MSc in Satellite Communications from Télécom ParisTech, Paris, and an MSc in Multicast Protocols from the University of Bradford, UK. Since 2006 he has published some works in *Assafir* Lebanese newspaper. *Limbo Beirut* is his third novel and the first to be translated into English.

Anna Ziajka Stanton is an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature and Arabic Literature at The Pennsylvania State University, USA. She received her PhD from the Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

JUDGES' BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Alastair Niven, LVO OBE (Chair of Judges) is a Fellow of Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford, and chair of the Board of Directors of Border Crossings, an international multi-media theatre and arts company, promoting creativity and intercultural dialogue between nations and peoples.

He has been Principal of Cumberland Lodge, a forum for debate and exchange of ideas on social and ethical issues of national and international significance. He was Director of the Africa Centre for several years, Director of Literature for both the Arts Council (1987 to 1997) and the British Council (1997-2001), twice a judge of the Booker Prize (1994 and 2014) and President of English PEN (2003 to 2007).

He has published over 100 articles on aspects of Commonwealth and post-colonial literature and on overseas student affairs. His books include two studies of D H Lawrence and two books on Indian writing, *The Yoke of Pity: A Study in the Fictional Writings of Mulk Raj Anand* and *Truth into Fiction: Raja Rao's 'The Serpent and the Rope'*. He returns to the Saif Ghobash Banipal Judging Panel after serving for the first time on the 2015 panel.

Peter Kalu is a writer and editor with thirty years of experience in independent publishing. He has had nine novels published, ranging from science fiction to romantic comedy, as well as a number of radio and theatre plays. After working as a translator of commercial French into English, he joined new writing development agency Commonword/ Cultureword, becoming Artistic Director in 2008. In this role he convenes the National Black Writers Conference every two years, through which he has been instrumental in advancing new voices originating from the Middle East. Prizes he has won include the BBC Dangerous Comedy Award, Bradford

International Short Play Award, Hepworth & Chadwick Prize and the Marcus Garvey Scholarship Award. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) in 2013.

Wen-chin Ouyang is Professor of Arabic Literature at SOAS, University of London. Born in Taiwan and raised in Libya, she completed her BA in Arabic at Tripoli University and PhD in Middle Eastern Studies at Columbia University in New York City. She is the author of *Literary Criticism in Medieval Arabic-Islamic Culture: The Making of a Tradition* (1997), *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel* (2012) and *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel* (2013). She has also published widely on *The Thousand and One Nights*, often in comparison with classical and modern Arabic narrative traditions, European and Hollywood cinema, magic realism, and Chinese storytelling. She founded and co-edits *Edinburgh Studies in Classical Arabic Literature*, and is also Editor-in-Chief of *Middle Eastern Literatures*. She was a member of the judging panel for the Man Booker International Prize for Fiction 2013-15. A native speaker of Arabic and Chinese, she has been working towards Arabic-Chinese comparative literary and cultural studies, including Silk Road Studies.

Salam Sarhan is a writer and journalist with over 20 years of experience as a television producer and presenter on a number of different stations including BBC, MBC, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya. He is currently business editor of *Al-Arab* daily newspaper and a regular TV commentator on cultural, political, social and financial affairs. He has published three collections of poetry, and numerous articles on culture, literature, politics, business and economics.

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 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 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 prizes for contemporary Arabic literature translated into English, the sponsors Omar Ghobash and his family generously extended their sponsorship to the establishment of an annual lecture on literary translation. The inaugural lecture took place on 14 October 2016 at the British Library Conference Centre in London, given by author, translator and essayist Anton Shammas. The second lecture took place on 7 November 2017,

also at the British Library, given by the historian and novelist Robert Irwin. With the Lecture, the Banipal Trust looks forward to increasingly wider 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 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 these links: <http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/award2017.cfm>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/rules/>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2017.cfm>
<http://www.banipaltrust.org.uk/lecture/lecture2016.cfm>
<https://www.facebook.com/SaifGhobashBanipalPrize/>

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 or margaret@banipal.co.uk