

NO. 72 | SUMMER 2017

# SOURCE

A QUARTERLY  
PUBLICATION  
OF THE ATA'S  
LITERARY  
DIVISION



## ARAB LITERATURE AND ARABIC

TRIBUTE TO NORMAN  
THOMAS DI GIOVANNI



American Translators Association  
*The Voice of Interpreters and Translators*

### FEATURES

- 07** Naguib Mahfouz:  
Cairo, Arabic, and  
World Literature
- 14** Online Resources  
(in English) for  
Arab Literature
- 20** Arabic and the  
Spanish Language
- 25** Tributes to Norman  
Thomas di Giovanni  
(1933-2017) by Andrew  
Graham-Yooll and  
Michele Aynesworth





Louis Comfort Tiffany, *On the Way between Old and New Cairo* (1872)

## IN THIS ISSUE

From the Editors.....	<b>03</b>
Submission Guidelines.....	<b>04</b>
Letter from the LD Administrator.....	<b>05</b>
BTW Cartoons by Tony Beckwith.....	<b>06, 24, 29</b>
Naguib Mahfouz .....	<b>07</b>
<i>By Patrick Saari</i>	
Online Resources and Recommended Reading for Arab Literature .....	<b>14</b>
By the Way: Add Arabic and Simmer for Eight Centuries .....	<b>20</b>
<i>By Tony Beckwith</i>	
Norman di Giovanni, the Master's Translator .....	<b>25</b>
<i>By Andrew Graham-Yooll</i>	
The Varmint and Me: A Remembrance of Norman Thomas di Giovanni.....	<b>27</b>
<i>By Michele Aynesworth</i>	
Credits .....	<b>30</b>

# FROM THE EDITORS

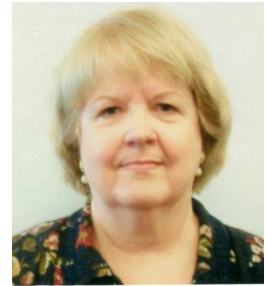
As everyone knows, unfamiliar territory beckons exploration, so last year we at *Source* decided to focus, for the first time, one of our issues on Arab literature and the Arabic language. Patrick Saari had long been an admirer, albeit in English translation, of the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) and had recently read, in French, *The Yacoubian Building* by the Egyptian novelist Alaa Al-Aswany (born 1957), an author spearheading a more recent generation of writers. This admiration inspired Patrick to write an extensive article on Mahfouz, not only a writer whose stature as one of the twentieth century's literary greats is undisputed but also one of those rare persons who were genuinely loved by all who knew and read him.

This section also provides references for online literary resources and recommended readings in English for those interested in delving into the vast world of Arab literature, as well as photos, a painting, a map, and calligraphy. And Tony Beckwith has lent a hand in this undertaking by including his essay on how Arabic permeates the Spanish language as a result of Moorish occupation of a large part of the Iberian peninsula from A.D. 711 to 1492.

This Summer issue is also devoted to the translator and editor Norman Thomas di Giovanni (1933-2017), famous for his collaboration with Jorge Luis Borges and author of a key memoir, *The Lesson of the Master* (2003), chronicling di Giovanni's friendship and work with Borges and providing insights into the complexities of literary translation. The Anglo-Argentine writer and journalist Andrew Graham-Yooll and our Editor-in-Chief Michele Aynesworth have written their personal remembrances.

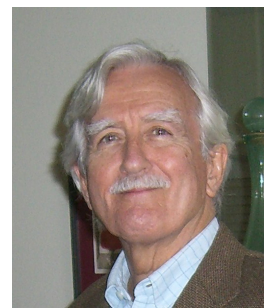
In her letter as LD Administrator, Jesse Tomlinson announces the LD Guest Speaker for this year's ATA annual conference (ATA58) in Washington, D.C., on October 25-28, and welcomes *Source's* new layout and next LD Administrator Paula Arturo.

For *Source's* Fall issue, we look forward to contributions on literary translation from or into Portuguese (deadline for submissions: October 15, see page 4 for submission guidelines).



**Michele Aynesworth**  
*Editor-in-Chief*

Specializes in translating  
Argentine and French authors  
[michele@mckayaynesworth.com](mailto:michele@mckayaynesworth.com)



**Tony Beckwith**  
*Associate Editor*

A native of South America's  
Southern Cone, resides in  
Austin, where he works as  
a writer, translator, poet,  
and cartoonist  
[tony@tonybeckwith.com](mailto:tony@tonybeckwith.com)



**Patrick Saari**  
*Chief Copyeditor*

Born in Pasadena,  
California, now living in Quito,  
Ecuador, writes, translates,  
and interprets in English,  
French, and Spanish  
[patricksaari@netlife.ec](mailto:patricksaari@netlife.ec)

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

As the journal of the ATA's Literary Division, *Source* is both a forum for the discussion of literary translation and a vehicle for LD members and guest contributors to publish their work. Novice translators, as well as those with more experience, are encouraged to submit translations of poetry and prose together with their meditations on the process. We are also constantly on the lookout for submissions from Asia, Africa, and all other less frequently represented cultures.

## TOPIC FOR THE FALL 2017 ISSUE:

- We are now soliciting contributions on literary translation from or into Portuguese for the Fall issue.
- Contributors are asked to follow the format guidelines below.
- ***Submission deadline for the Fall: October 15***

## FORMAT:

- Submit articles up to 1600 words, Word or text file, single-spaced.
- Cambria font, size 12, without indented paragraphs.
- Line breaks between paragraphs but no word breaks.
- Unjustified righthand margin.
- Endnotes please, not footnotes.
- Please include a brief, factual bio and photograph.
- Links and illustrations, etc., are encouraged.
- Submissions may be edited.
- Submissions go to **[michele@mckayaynesworth.com](mailto:michele@mckayaynesworth.com)**

*Source* is published by ATA's Literary Division  
American Translators Association  
225 Reinekers Lane, Suite 590  
Alexandria, VA 22314

All previously unpublished material  
copyright © the respective authors.



# LETTER FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATOR

Dear Literary Division members:

Welcome to our new design for *Source*!

We've been hard at work refreshing the Literary Division's image with a new logo and are now very pleased to put out the first issue of *Source* with its updated look. What do you think? It's always great to receive feedback about what the division is up to, so please, drop me a line and let me know what you think of *Source*'s new look.

We are also pleased to announce that Katrina Dodson will be joining us in Washington at ATA58 this year as the Literary Division's Guest Speaker. Dodson is the translator (from Portuguese) of *The Complete Stories*, by Clarice Lispector (New Directions, 2015), winner of the 2016 PEN Translation Prize, the Lewis Galantière Prize from the American Translators Association, and a Northern California Book Award for translation. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality from the University of California, Berkeley, with a dissertation on Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil. She has written for *Guernica*, *McSweeney's*, and *The Millions*, and her translations have appeared in *Harper's*, *Granta*, *Lapham's Quarterly*, and elsewhere. She is currently adapting her Clarice Lispector translation journal into a book and working on a new translation of the 1928 Brazilian modernist classic, *Macunaíma: the Hero Without a Character*, by Mário de Andrade, for New Directions.

Dodson will give two sessions at the conference this year: Forms of Faithfulness in Literary Translation and Researching Literary Translations.

The After Hours Café will be held Friday, October 27 from 9:00-11:00pm. I'd love to see you there! Bring your original or translated excerpt (original work and readings that are **not** translated into English will be during the last half hour). This is your chance to read something out loud that you've written or translated, so give it a go! We had a number of poetry readings last year that were really lovely—you could be next! Share your work and meet colleagues.

And some news for the future of LitDiv: the division is very happy to announce that Paula Arturo will be our division's next administrator! Paula has been a wonderful assistant administrator and the division is lucky to have her as our next administrator. A very warm welcome to Carolina Cortez who will be supporting Paula as the new assistant administrator.

For now, enjoy this issue on Arabic language and literature.

Jesse



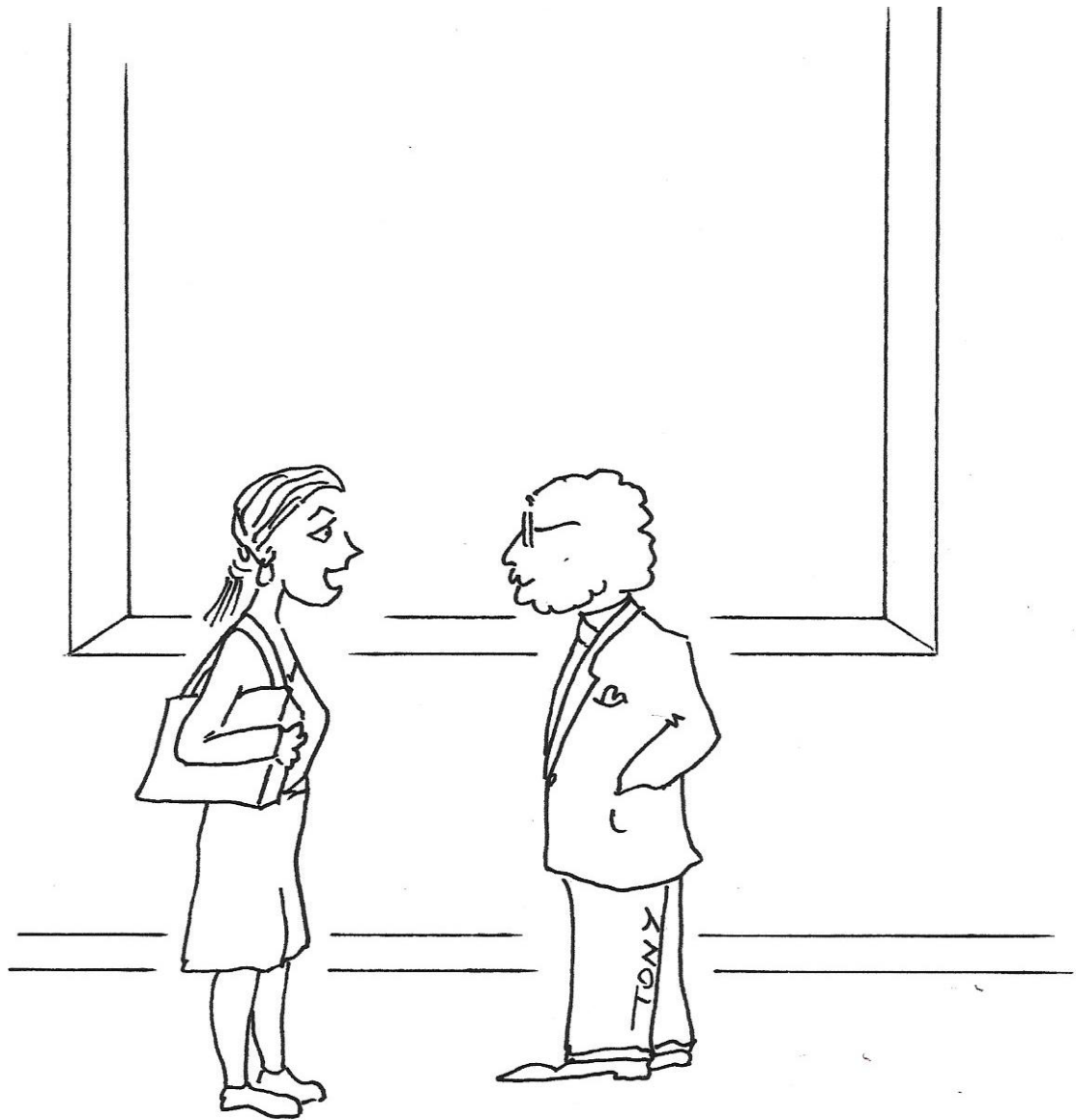
**Jesse Tomlinson**  
*Literary Division*  
**Administrator**

[jesse@tomlinsontranslations.com](mailto:jesse@tomlinsontranslations.com)

Jesse Tomlinson is an interpreter, translator, editor, and voice talent. Originally hailing from Canada, she now lives in Mexico and translates from Spanish into English and interprets in both languages.

Her special interest lies in Mexican culture, the tequila industry, and literature. Her translation *The Consummate Art of Dreaming: The Art of Rocío Caballero*, published by Black Coffee Gallery, was released in November at the Guadalajara International Book Fair.

BTW



*"Why don't I think she's a serious Russian translator?  
Because she said that, if Pushkin came to shove-kin,  
she could translate Tolstoyevsky standing on her head."*





Naguib Mahfouz in his twenties

## NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

By  
Patrick  
Saari

**Naguib Mahfouz** (1911-2006), Egyptian novelist who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, the first Arabic writer to be so honored. Mahfouz was the son of a civil servant and grew up in Cairo's Al-Gamaliya district. He attended the Egyptian University (now Cairo University), where he earned a degree in philosophy in 1934. He then started working in the Egyptian civil service in various positions from 1934 until his retirement in 1971.

Much of the excitement of twentieth-century novels comes from their deliberate efforts to depart from and clash with nineteenth-century realism: the splendid, meticulously told coming-of-age stories, family dramas, and societal sagas of Balzac, Flaubert, and Zola, Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, and Thomas Mann, Pérez-Galdós, and Tolstoy. This, however, never prevented realism from spreading its roots ever deeper and wider. In English, celebrated writers in the realist tradition such as Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer, and Alice Munro come to mind, but a good case in point, outside the English-speaking world, is the Egyptian novelist and short-story writer Naguib Mahfouz.

His decision at the age of 23, in the early 1930s, to devote himself to writing novels was all the more exceptional as poetry had always been and still was the preferred and preeminent form of literary expression in Egypt, as well as the Arab world in general. The novel was forcibly a European idiosyncrasy, disparaged by intellectuals, writers, academics, and the general public. Those who did write novels did so as an entertaining pastime, a side activity to journalism, philosophy, or politics, and chose to write in classical Arabic.

Mahfouz, whose first novels were set in the time of the pharaohs and whose ambition as a young author was to write grand, sweeping epics of Egypt,<sup>1</sup> a bit like Sir Walter Scott had done for England and Scotland, could well have stuck to historical novels or even depictions of local ways of living, something like

*costumbrismo* in Spain and Latin America. But because he lived at a time of rapid, complex, and radical social, cultural, and political change and because he was preternaturally profound and perceptive, he was inevitably drawn to writing about the here and now, people living in Cairo in the twentieth century, the people he had grown up with and knew well.

### Cairo Modern

It comes as no surprise that his first contemporary realist novel was called *Cairo Modern*,<sup>2</sup> a title not only announcing his commitment to writing about what was currently happening in the city of his birth but also taking an ironic swipe at how it was evolving, that is, not very smoothly: first, the shift from the yoke of the Ottoman Empire and British occupation to greater political autonomy and finally independence in 1952 and, second, emergence from a traditional society of rigid hierarchies to one increasingly embracing western notions of individualism, science, and democracy. This was a century-long evolution, marked by the unavoidable clashes between two worldviews that Naguib Mahfouz would become an expert in chronicling, and also criticizing.

*Cairo Modern* is a slim unassuming book (less than 250 pages), set in the early 1930s and probably written in the late 1930s although not published until 1945 by The American University in Cairo Press. The protagonist, Mahgub Abd al-Da'im, is in his

early twenties and has one year to go before graduating from college. He's cynical and sarcastic, intellectual and supercilious, but in a typically sophomoric way. Because he's from a poor peasant family, he has a huge chip on his shoulder and carries his bruised pride like a badge of courage, which makes his ambition for money, women, and power all the more vulnerable to manipulation. There's something of Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov and Balzac's Rastignac about him, but from the very start he's also annoying, unpleasant, even despicable. As the narrative unfolds, at every turn Mahgub willfully makes mistake after mistake, as if in a horror movie where everybody takes the wrong road, opens the wrong door, turns a deaf ear to obvious warnings, and ends up getting slaughtered in the bloodiest of ways.

But when the tight web of corruption, lies, and deceit Mahgub has deliberately engaged in to achieve a bit of status does blow up in his face, so skillfully has the novelist disentangled the many social and psychological strings tugging at Mahgub's heart and soul, shot through with insecurities, that the reader is left unexpectedly heartbroken, caring for the anti-hero as if he were a wayward son or brother who is deeply loved despite his flaws. This is one of the hallmarks of great art. *Cairo Modern*, although not viewed as the most accomplished of Mahfouz's works, was no doubt the breakthrough novel that paved the way for future masterpieces.

Afterwards, Mahfouz wrote and published several other novels in the 1940s, including *Midaq Alley*, which was successfully transposed to the 1990s and Mexico City for the 1995 movie *El Callejón de los Milagros* (with a pre-Hollywood Salma Hayek), and *The Beginning and the End*, similarly revamped for the Mexican movie, *Principio y Fin*, by the filmmaker Arturo Ripstein in 1993. Both films are a testimony to Mahfouz's uncanny understanding of the human heart, regardless of time, place, or culture.

## Cairo Trilogy

But it was the *Cairo Trilogy*<sup>3</sup> published in 1956 and 1957 that made him famous throughout the Arab world and eventually helped him earn the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, when he was 77. Modeled after many of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European novels Mahfouz had been reading, the *Cairo Trilogy* portrays three generations of a middle-class Cairo family and Egyptian society from 1917, during the First World War, up to 1944, close to the end of the Second World War.

Despite the formidable presence of the family's pious and pleasure-loving despotic patriarch al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, who is indeed "a piece of work," there is none of the heartiness of Balzac, Zola, Dickens, or Hardy in the Egyptian novelist's work. Rather there is a melancholy tone to the novel, which one reviewer even described as "oppressive" and which may have led another to nickname Mahfouz the "Dostoevsky of Cairo" but which, for others, evoked Proust. The novel uses the traditional "third-person omniscient point of view" but the two characters who skew the bias of the all-knowing writer are the youngest child Kamal and the house-bound mother Amina (her quiet gentle presence dominates the trilogy's opening chapters, and her stroke, paralysis, and impending death are the subject of the very last chapter).

Since Mahfouz has openly stated that in Kamal he was describing himself as a child in the first part of the trilogy, *Palace Walk*, it is easy to assume that his parents and siblings are the inspiration for the rest of the family. And it is this immediate sense of authenticity and this unique insight into childhood that give the narrative and descriptions of *Palace Walk* a majestic, almost blissful completeness missing from the trilogy's two subsequent books, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street* (all titles are actually the names of streets in Cairo), where Kamal is an adolescent and young man and his siblings are adults. It is as if Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience Showing the Two*





Khan el-Kahlili, a souk-market in Old Cairo, in the district of Al Gamaliya, the setting for the *Cairo Trilogy*

*Contrary States of the Human Soul* were being rewritten as a 1,200-page twentieth-century Egyptian novel. *Palace Walk* is life seen from the eyes of a child, and childhood is viewed as a time of slow-motion assimilation, whereas the two other volumes consist of not so much a fall from grace as a chronicle of the world's progressive and oppressive encroachment upon family, adolescent idealism and romanticism, expectations, hopes, and dreams.

Divided into 71 chapters, with an average length of 7 pages each, rich in dialogue and humor, with an easy narrative comprised of mostly short sentences, without much stylistic complexity,

*Palace Walk* is highly accessible and engaging. Readers of the original in Arabic have noted that Mahfouz had, early on, decided he would mix the vernacular Arabic spoken at home, in the streets, in shops, at work, with the classical Arabic of the *Qur'an* and literature, which is usually marked by an elaborate rhetoric but also tending toward virtuosity in poetry and philosophy. Mahfouz was one of the first writers to strike a balance between the two, making classical Arabic dialectal, simpler, and easier-to-understand while anchoring spoken Arabic into literature. Raymond Stock, one of Mahfouz's most prolific translators and also his biographer, indicated: "In narrative as well as dialogue, Mahfouz personally developed the modern Arabic prose language that we take for granted today, replacing the almost Qur'anic mode of earlier periods, still in use when he began to write fiction" and creating, so to speak, a "third language."<sup>4</sup>

## Nobel Prize

Outside of Egypt and apart from his many other readers in the Arab world, not to mention the millions who saw his stories brought to life on the big screen by Egypt's popular movie industry (so far 30 of his novels and short stories have been made into movies), Mahfouz's image was that of an accomplished social realist novelist. And he was content to let that somewhat fabricated, easy-to-digest reputation thrive. Shortly after



winning the Nobel Prize, at the end of an interview, during which he had stubbornly brushed off questions, a British journalist finally asked him which English writers he liked most. Mahfouz cheered up and cried out “John Galsworthy! I love him very much.”<sup>5</sup>

But after the work of translating his output had gathered momentum (there are now no fewer than 600 editions of his work in 40 languages, including 15 translators into the English language alone), it became apparent that beneath this tip was a vast and complex iceberg. In addition to the 34 novels for which he was becoming increasingly famous, he had written over 350 short stories, 30 screenplays, 5 plays for the theater, memoirs, essays, and a collection of parables and sayings. He had also enjoyed a long and productive career as a journalist, including a weekly newspaper column.

Edward Said, the Palestinian-American academic and author of *Orientalism*, in a brief insightful essay on Mahfouz, highlights his exceptional breadth and scope:

Mahfouz has been characterised since he became a recognised world celebrity as either a social realist in the mode of Balzac, Galsworthy, and Zola or a fabulist straight out of the *Arabian Nights* (...). It is closer to the truth to see him, as the Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury has suggested, as providing in his novels a kind of history of the novel form, from historical fiction to the romance, saga, and picaresque tale, followed by work in realist, modernist, naturalist, symbolist, and absurdist modes.<sup>6</sup>

Raymond Stock concurs with Said’s appreciation:

[F]ar from being the stodgy Dickensian drudge, as some have seen him, or just the predictable (if impressive) 19th century realist writer even more people think him to have been, [Mahfouz] was really one of the most restless innovators in modern fiction anywhere. He was constantly changing the style, length, structure and

other techniques of his works in an utterly breathtaking manner.<sup>7</sup>

Mahfouz is now freely referred to, sometimes in the same breath, as an existentialist, a magical realist, a social realist, a surrealist, a modernist, a post-modernist, an allegorist, a disciple of Kafka, Joyce, Proust, Faulkner, Melville, Flaubert, Stendhal, and Tagore. He has been nicknamed the Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky of Cairo, Egypt, and the Arab world. He is also, of course, the heir to the rich tradition of Arabic literature, including the contemporary Egyptian writers who preceded him, such as Muhammad Heykal, Taha Hussein, Tawfiq al-Hakim, and Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, not to mention the *Qur’an* and the *Arabian Nights*. In fact, one of his novels, *Arabian Nights and Days* (1979), is a sequel to the Islamic Golden Age epic and includes several of the same characters, such as the paranoid king Shahryar, his young storytelling wife Scheherazade, and the lamp-rubbing Aladdin.

His 1959 novel, *Children of the Alley*, is a far cry from Mahfouz’s social realism, as it is a highly imaginative, albeit bleak, allegory involving mobster-like characters representing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and of course God, so controversial when first published that it was banned in Egypt, eventually leading to death threats and ultimately his attempted assassination in 1994 (at 83 years old), when an extremist stabbed him twice in the neck. The stabbing permanently damaged the nerve controlling his right arm and hand and drastically constrained his capacity to continue writing.

One of many examples of experimental work is the 1987 novel *Morning and Evening Talk*, which strings together in alphabetical order dozens of character sketches. And in *Akhenaten: Dweller in Truth* (1985), Mahfouz goes back to the 1330s B.C. to give us 14 brief eyewitness accounts of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten who repudiated Egypt’s polytheism for the One and Only God. This inventive attempt to apprehend the truth behind the pharaoh’s quest for truth is undermined by the many contradictory



perspectives provided, so that, by the end of this 180-page novel, truth turns out to be indeed hazy and ambiguous. It is a brilliant contemporary example of the literary devices now known as the Rashomon effect and the unreliable narrator.<sup>8</sup> And Mahfouz's final works, *Dreams* (2004) and *Dreams of Departure* (2007), consist of over 300 brief dreams, some fantastical, others nightmarish, some reminiscent of Borges, others of Buñuel, yet others of Baudelaire's prose poems, but all distinct from anything he had ever written before.

## The Center

When the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk devoted an entire book to understanding the art of the novel,<sup>9</sup> he focused on the hidden message that every reader looks for when exploring the hundreds of pages comprising a novel. Writing about Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Pamuk pointed out that Tolstoy thought that the center of his novel was the role of the individual in history, which the Russian author fully discussed in learned philosophical terms, in the novel's final chapter, an essay he tacked onto the end of the narrative after showing us Pierre and Natasha happily married. Pamuk claimed it was not that at all:

[T]he center and main idea of *War and Peace* is not the subject Tolstoy discusses at the end of the novel—the point of history and the role of the individual in history—but the intense and compassionate attention the characters give to the details of everyday life, and the clear, all-encompassing gaze that unites the various life stories in the novel. When we've finished reading the book, what remains in our mind is not history and its meaning, but our thoughts on the fragility of human life, the immensity of the world, and our place in the universe.

The same can be said of Mahfouz. When he was interviewed in 1992, he suggested that the subject of his writing was freedom:

Freedom. Freedom from colonization, freedom from the absolute rule of a king, and basic human freedom in the context of society and the family. These types of freedom follow from one to the other. In the trilogy, for example, after the revolution brought about political freedom, Abd al-Jawad's family demanded more freedom from *him*.<sup>10</sup>

In other interviews he not only repeats the theme of freedom but insists on social justice as the core of his fictional universe. Nevertheless, despite his depiction of a world far different from that of nineteenth-century Russia, Mahfouz was doing what Tolstoy did: portraying the intensity with which each individual lives life, the depth of feeling involved in even the slightest of experiences, the vulnerability that this entails, and how ingeniously, and sometimes tragically, everyone maneuvers their way in the larger world of family and kinship, neighborhood and school, work and society, country and world, and ultimately the cosmos.

One of Mahfouz's insights might actually be that the freedom and social justice he championed must be in the "details of everyday life" (to use Pamuk's words), otherwise they are not freedom or justice at all, but simply something you talk about at school, read about in books, and hear assertively proclaimed at public events. And freedom and justice as universal rights and absolute principles have no meaning if they are not "all-encompassing" (another word used by Pamuk), that is, if they are only for the few or even for just a majority.

Therein lies the painful awareness, for example, of the young man Kamal in the *Cairo Trilogy*, when he rebels against his parents' ignorance. When Kamal was a baby and toddler, his father would delight in playing with him, but as soon as he outgrew his early childhood and turned into a boy, his father became stern and forbidding, referring to him in the third person as "that son of a bitch." When his father would leave the house to work, the child Kamal would jump up to put on a show for his mother, imitating his father's vanity and



Mahfouz with his two daughters (left Umm Kalthum) “He was different from other parents because of his age. He married late. If we didn’t agree with his opinion, we could discuss our differences. If we couldn’t convince each other, he wouldn’t say this is right or wrong. He was open minded.”  
—Faten Mahfouz (right)

pompousness, twirling a fake moustache in front of a mirror and leaning on an imaginary walking stick with head held high, although in his mind the love and respect he had for his father was absolute, albeit mixed with fear and puzzlement. He would later realize that his father’s authoritarianism was not based on any true superiority, knowledge, tradition, or even authority, nor was it aimed at instilling any kind of resilience or discipline; it was selfish, convenient, hypocritical, and toxic. And his mother’s loving kindness concealed a traumatic denial of her husband’s philandering, drinking, and cruelty, and her constant peacemaking was also a sign of passivity and anxiety over confrontation. The family’s ambiguities and contradictions reflected those of the country as well.

Another insight might be that, although Mahfouz used many literary genres, techniques, and devices, ultimately what he was seeking was truth, the truth embedded in the world he lived in. And it is only possible to change the world when you know it well to begin with. The image a culture or society or country projects

of itself and to itself is usually far removed from what it actually is, and this is true in America, Europe, Asia, Africa, everywhere and true for individuals as well. Mahfouz believed in the power of the novel to foster change by showing what can be changed, to such an extent that he would even write simplified versions of his books for younger readers and schools,<sup>11</sup> so they could learn about their country, history, and culture.

Virginia Woolf, after reading George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, mordantly opined that it was “one of the few English novels written for grown-up people.” The same can be said of Mahfouz’s entire work, which, in a nutshell, invites us, but without mordancy, to grow up. When Mahfouz died in 2006, had it not been for severe government restrictions prompted by fears of large-scale protests and bottlenecks, his funeral would no doubt have been accompanied by crowds of mourners no smaller than those attending Dostoevsky’s funeral in 1881 or Victor Hugo’s in 1885 to pay tribute to his genius.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Although Mahfouz had planned to write no less than 30 historical novels to cover the thousands of years of Egypt's past, he ended up writing only 3 at the beginning of his career, none of which were published in English until the twenty-first century (trans. Raymond Stock).
- <sup>2</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, *Cairo Modern*, trans. William M. Hutchins (New York: Anchor Books and Doubleday, 2008).
- <sup>3</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, *The Cairo Trilogy*, trans. William M. Hutchins and others (New York: Anchor Books and Doubleday, 1990-1992). The trilogy consists of three books: *Palace Walk* (498 pages), *Palace of Desire* (422 pages), and *Sugar Street* (308 pages).
- <sup>4</sup> Raymond Stock in the December 14, 2011 interview "Q&A with Naguib Mahfouz Biographer Raymond Stock: On the Author's Life," by Marcia Lynx Qualey for the blog *Arabic Literature (in English)*, <https://arablit.org/2011/12/14/qa-with-mahfouz-biographer-raymond-stock-on-the-authors-work-archives/>
- <sup>5</sup> Naguib Mahfouz Obituary by Sabry Hafez in *The Independent*, August 30, 2006, with the anecdote of D.J. Taylor interviewing Mahfouz after he won the Nobel Prize, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/naguib-mahfouz-414043.html>
- <sup>6</sup> Edward Said, "Naguib Mahfouz and the Cruelty of Memory," *Counterpunch*, December 15, 2001 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2001/12/15/naguib-mahfouz-and-the-cruelty-of-memory/>
- <sup>7</sup> Raymond Stock, December 14, 2011, "Q&A with Naguib Mahfouz Biographer Raymond Stock," by Marcia Lynx Qualey, *Arabic Literature (in English)*, <https://arablit.org/2011/12/14/qa-with-mahfouz-biographer-raymond-stock-on-the-authors-work-archives/>
- <sup>8</sup> From the Japanese movie *Rashomon* (1952) by Akira Kurosawa, which tells four different versions of an event involving murder, highlighting the fears and self-serving needs of the four narrators. The unreliable narrator usually involves one or several persons providing a highly biased and even counterfactual account of events, requiring the reader (or the omniscient writer) to figure out the truth. Detective and mystery stories are popular examples, whereas Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* is a more sophisticated literary example.
- <sup>9</sup> Orhan Pamuk, *The Naïve and Sentimental Novelist: Understanding What Happens When We Write and Read Novels*, Norton Lectures Harvard University, trans. Nazim Dikbas (New York: Vintage, 2010), 162-163
- <sup>10</sup> "Naguib Mahfouz," interviewed by Charlotte El Shabrawy, The Art of Fiction No. 129, *The Paris Review*, issue 123, Summer 1992 <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2062/naguib-mahfouz-the-art-of-fiction-no-129-naguib-mahfouz>
- <sup>11</sup> Rym Ghazal, "Arabic Treasures: how the Cairo Trilogy is a family saga for the ages," *The National*, February 21, 2017, <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/arabic-treasures-how-the-cairo-trilogy-is-a-family-saga-for-the-ages-1.66785>

The American University in Cairo Press, as Naguib Mahfouz's primary English-language publisher and worldwide agent for all translation rights, is a rich source of information and online links on Mahfouz: <http://www.aucpress.com/t-NM.aspx> and [http://www.aucpress.com/t-aboutnm.aspx?template=template\\_naguibmahfouz](http://www.aucpress.com/t-aboutnm.aspx?template=template_naguibmahfouz)

In addition to the above, much information on Mahfouz for this article has been gleaned from the following article: Marie Francis-Saad, "Naguib Mahfouz. Du fils du pays à l'homme universel," *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, No. 59-60, 1991. Des ethnies aux nations en Asie centrale, sous la direction d'Olivier Roy, 241-252. [http://www.persee.fr/doc/remmm\\_0997-1327\\_1991\\_num\\_59\\_1\\_2682](http://www.persee.fr/doc/remmm_0997-1327_1991_num_59_1_2682)

# ONLINE RESOURCES AND RECOMMENDED READING FOR ARAB LITERATURE

## ***The American University in Cairo Press***

<http://www.aucpress.com/>

The American University in Cairo Press is the Middle East's leading English-language academic book publisher. Its mission is to accurately reflect Egypt and the Middle East to a global readership in line with the main teaching and research interests of the American University in Cairo.

Drawing on an international author and editor community, the AUC Press publishes—in both digital and print formats—reviewed scholarly books, fiction (through a separate imprint: <http://hoopoefiction.com/>), Arabic teaching books, Egypt-focused books, and general interest publications. The Press currently produces up to 80 new books each year, and maintains a backlist of some 800 titles mainly for distribution worldwide through Oxford University Press (North America) and I.B. Tauris (rest of world, excluding North America). It also operates six bookstores in Cairo, including a flagship store in Tahrir Square.

Today the AUC Press publishes books in twelve main categories: Arabic Language Learning, Archaeology & Ancient Egypt, Art & Architecture, Business, Economics, and Environmental Studies, Coptic and Islamic Studies, Egypt Guidebooks, Fiction in Translation, History, Literary Criticism, Middle East Studies, Middle East Travel, and Naguib Mahfouz.

## ***Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature***

<http://www.banipal.co.uk/>

*Banipal* magazine showcases contemporary Arab authors in English translation, from wherever they are writing and publishing. An independent magazine, founded 19 years ago, in 1998, by Margaret Obank (publisher) and Iraqi author Samuel Shimon (editor-in-chief), *Banipal's* three issues a year present both established and emerging Arab writers through poems, short stories or excerpts of novels, plus the occasional features of LITERARY INFLUENCES, TRAVELLING TALE. The magazine features interviews with authors, publishers and translators, book reviews and photo-reports of literary events. Since *Banipal 41 – Celebrating Adonis*, each issue includes a Guest Literature or Guest Writer feature on non-Arab, non-Arabic literature as part of *Banipal's* mission to promote intercultural dialogue. Each issue has a main theme, as well as being illustrated throughout with author photographs.

*Banipal* takes its name from Ashurbanipal, last great king of Assyria and patron of the arts, whose outstanding achievement was to assemble in Nineveh, from all over his empire, the first systematically organised library in the ancient Middle East. The thousands of clay tablets of Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian writings included the famous Mesopotamian epics of the Creation, the Flood, and Gilgamesh, many folk tales, fables, proverbs, prayers and omen texts. (Source: *Encyclopædia Britannica*)

From the first issue, the three cornerstones of *Banipal* have been: 1) that Arab literature is an essential part of world culture and human civilisation; 2) that dialogue between different cultures needs to be continually deepened; and 3) that the joy and enlightenment to be gained from reading beautiful poetry and imaginative writing is an integral part of human existence. These three points have guided *Banipal*'s translation and promotion of contemporary Arab literature. Literary translation has such an inspirational power to develop dialogue and interaction between cultures; the moment a reader starts to read a translation dialogue begins. *Banipal* sees itself as a vehicle for intercultural dialogue and exchange that opens a window for UK and other Western audiences on the realities of Arab culture in all its diversity and vibrancy, enabling fruitful discourse to develop, that will lead to further exchange, mutual respect, new writings, deeper understanding, and Arab literature taking its rightful place in the canon of world literature.

*Banipal* is a magazine for lovers of literature, of world literature, to encourage a wider readership of Arab writers and poets for their own sake, and for both the particularity and the universality of their voices. *Banipal* publishes Arab writers and poets who write in French, English or German as well as the main Arabic language, presenting the reality of literature from the Arab world and naming it 'Arab' rather than 'Arabic' literature (which excludes literature by Arab authors not written in Arabic – and consequently many great Arab writers).

*Banipal* is distributed in the UK and the rest of Europe by Central Books ([www.centralbooks.com](http://www.centralbooks.com)). Copies of the magazine can be bought direct from *Banipal* (<http://www.banipal.co.uk/>), from our distributors, who include Inpress Books, or can be ordered from bookshops in the UK and the rest of Europe. The magazine also welcomes submissions: <http://www.banipal.co.uk/submissions/>

“Literary translation has such an inspirational power to develop dialogue and interaction between cultures; the moment a reader starts to read a translation dialogue begins.”

### ***Arabic Literature (in English)***

<https://arablit.org/>

This well-designed, easy-to-read website/blog, abundantly illustrated with photos of writers and book covers, is an essential reference for all those interested in Arabic Literature translated into English. It is truly up-to-date and provides a wealth of information and news about the Arabic literary community worldwide, including interviews, in-depth articles, featured categories, such as poetry, translation, international prize for Arab fiction, and individual countries, as well as an events calendar and dozens of links to other blogs, websites, references, articles, etc. It is also open to submissions from contributors (<https://arablit.org/about/arablit-contributors-submissions/> )

The person behind the blog, M. Lynx Qualey, is a reader and writer based in Cairo Egypt. She can be contacted at [mylynxqualey@gmail.com](mailto:mylynxqualey@gmail.com)

### ***AL-BAB: An open door to the Arab world***

<http://al-bab.com/>

AL-BAB has been in existence since the early days of the internet. Originally intended to be a website about Yemen, it began in February 1998 as “Yemen Gateway”. Its web address, [al-bab.com](http://al-bab.com), alluded to Bab al-Yemen (also known as “al-bab”), the famous gateway leading into the old city of Sana’a. At the same time, this choice of name also highlighted the site’s purpose, which was to provide an electronic gateway to information about Yemen.



At the time I was working on a PhD thesis (uncompleted) about Yemeni politics. In the process I had amassed a lot of documents and other material. Knowing how difficult it can be to obtain information about Yemen, I decided to make them more widely available by posting them on the internet. I added to this a collection of links to material about Yemen which could be found elsewhere on the internet, with the intention of creating a comprehensive information resource for researchers, students, journalists and anyone else who wanted to know more about the country.

Shortly afterwards, I decided to extend this idea of an information resource to include the other Arab countries ("Arab"—for the purposes of the website—being defined as those countries that belong to the League of Arab States). In the late 1990s information about the Arab countries was both scarce and hard to find online (Google was still in its infancy) and al-bab consisted mainly of links aimed at making whatever was available more accessible.

During the last few years the amount of basic information about the Arab countries that is available online has grown enormously and, thanks to search engines, has become much more accessible. In parallel with that, the function of al-bab has evolved; it now focuses less on providing collections of links and more on providing background information and context.

—Brian Whitaker, British journalist and founder of *al.bab*

In addition to its many articles, informative sections, daily news, references, and links, the blog provides introductions to Islamic and Arab art, culture, architecture, literature, poetry, music, and the Arabic language. It is truly an online encyclopedic "gateway." (<http://al-bab.com/arts-and-culture/arab-and-islamic-architecture>, <http://al-bab.com/arts-and-culture/liiterature-section/literature>, <http://al-bab.com/liiterature-section/arabic-poetry>)



Fourteenth-century Islamic calligraphy, the Qur'an

### Fordham University's Internet History Sourcebooks Project

<http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/Halsall/index.asp>

Fordham University's Internet History Sourcebooks Project is a vast collection of public domain and copy-permitted historical texts presented cleanly (without advertising or excessive layout) for educational use. Designed and maintained by its editor, Paul Halsall, the Internet History Sourcebooks Project is one of the most visited pedagogical sites in the world and has received numerous accolades from teachers and scholars. Its Main Sourcebooks are "Ancient," "Medieval," and "Modern," which in turn have Subsidiary Sourcebooks, ranging from "Africa" to "Women."

Notably, among its Subsidiary Sourcebooks, it includes the Internet Islamic History Sourcebook (<http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/Halsall/islam/islamsbook.asp>), which provides dozens of web pages with hundreds of primary historical, cultural, government, religious, theological, philosophical, and scientific source documents from Arabia, but also from Persia and Turkey, the caliphates ranging from the seventh century to the Renaissance, and the Byzantine, Ottoman, and Mughal empires, including web pages on Arab, Persian, and Turkish literature and poetry (for example Rumi and the Sufis, Omar Khayyam, Ottoman and Mughal *ghazals* and *diwans*, Moorish poetry), translated into English and with brief informative introductions.

The following web pages specifically for reading about ancient and classical Arab literature, including examples, excerpts, and sometimes full works, are highly recommended:

Pre-Islamic Arabia: The Hanged Poems, before 622 CE: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/640hangedpoems.asp>

The Poetry of the Spanish Moors, Selections: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/moorishpoetry.asp>

Al Hariri of Basrah (446-516 A.H./1054-1122 CE): Maqamat, (The Assemblies), c. 1100 CE: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/1100Hariri.asp>

Thousand and One Nights: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/med/1001.asp>

The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/lang1k1/tale15.htm>

Sir Richard Burton's translation of the Arabian Nights: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/burt1k1/>

The Poets of Arabia, Selections: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/arabianpoets1.asp>

**ATA Arabic Language Division (ALD)**  
<http://www.ata-ald.org/>

As many of us know, Arabic is a language spoken by millions of people around the world, is one of the six official languages of the United Nations, and has become of crucial importance in the United States today. The Arabic Language Division (ALD) of the American Translators Association (ATA) was created in 2012 to facilitate communication among its members. It provides information and services in specific fields of interest related to translations that deal with the Arabic Language. We hope to bring together a community of professional translators and interpreters who can share resources, experience, and expertise that will benefit all. We also hope to create an environment for professionals in the field to network, to help grow their businesses, and to keep up with the new trends and ever changing technological advances in this our profession. In addition, we hope that ALD will create a forum where Arabic translators and interpreters can develop best practices. All ALD members are invited to join the ALD listserv, a discussion forum open to all ALD members

For more information, please contact:

ALD Administrator: Sam Fatima  
ALD Assistant Administrator: Heather Knight Wiersema

## Poets of Arabia

### On Fatalism

Not always wealth, not always force  
splendid destiny commands;  
The lordly vulture gnaws the corpse  
That rots upon yon barren sands.

Nor want, nor weakness still conspires  
To bind us to a sordid state;  
The fly that with a touch expires  
Sips honey from the royal plate.

—*The Holy Imam Shafay (767-820)*

---

### To the Caliph Haroun Al-Rashid

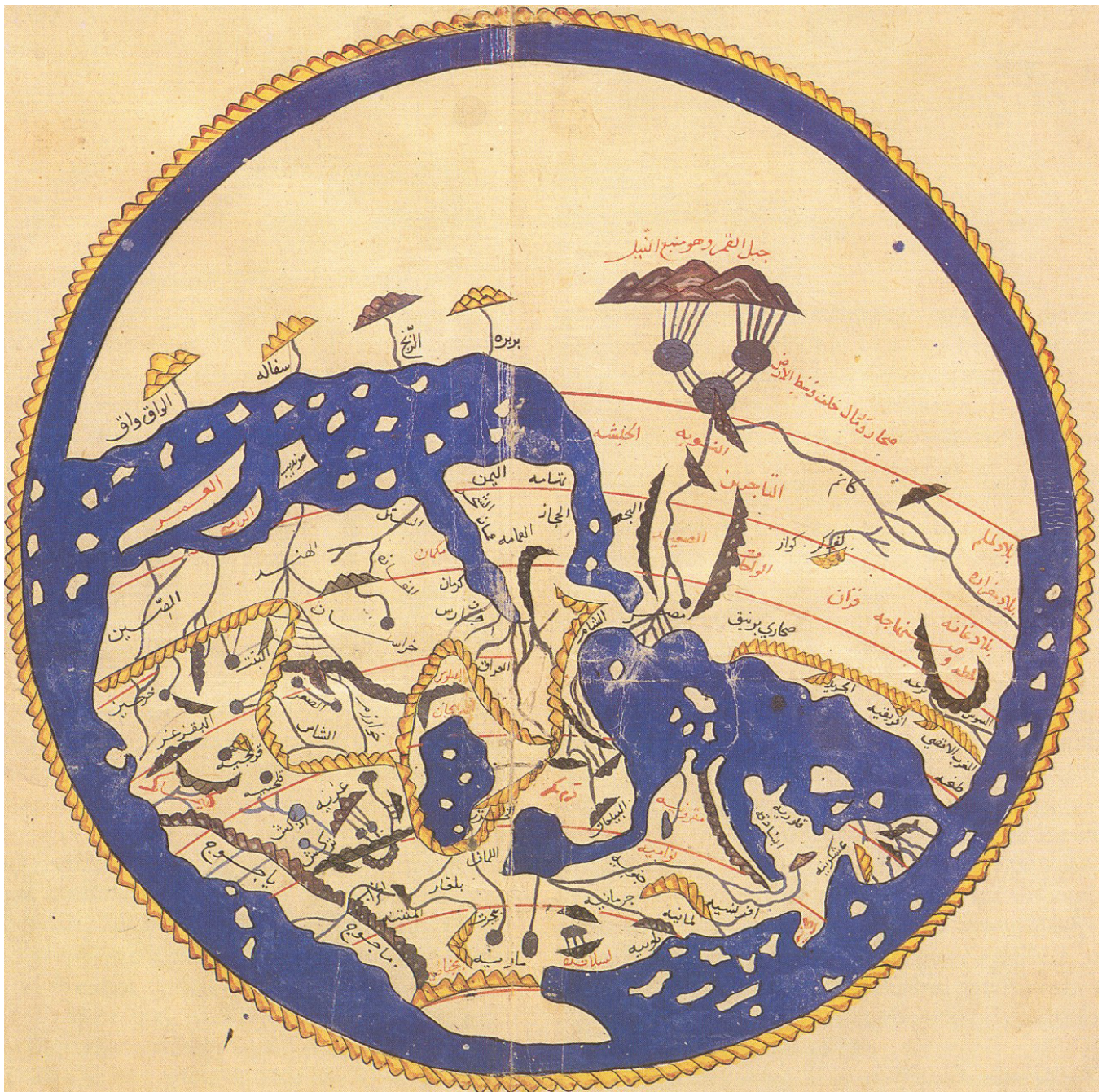
Religion's gems can ne'er adorn  
The flimsy robe by pleasure worn;  
Its feeble texture soon would tear  
And give those jewels to the air.

Thrice happy they who seek th' abode  
Of peace and pleasure in their God!  
Who spurn the world, its joys despise,  
And grasp at bliss beyond the skies.

—*Prince Ibrahim Ben Adham (died 777)*







The *Tabula Rogeriana*, a book of maps drawn by the Arab geographer Muhammad Al-Idrisi for King Roger of Sicily and published in 1154, is drawn in such a way as to put Mecca at its very center, in line with Islamic belief that Mecca is the center of the world. Asia is to the left, prominently featuring China, and Europe is a blurry squiggle in the lower right-hand corner. For the Western world, it is an upside-down map, with Africa pointing upward and northern Europe and Russia downward.

The original *Tabula Rogeriana* was destroyed not long after its creation and a second abbreviated work of the *Tabula Rogeriana* was created by Al-Idrisi, so that the closest thing to one of the original maps is a page from that book, copies of which can be found in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, England's Bodleian Library, and Istanbul, although it was in turn copied in the fifteenth century and is available in this cleaner version.



# ADD ARABIC AND SIMMER FOR EIGHT CENTURIES

## A brief account of the origins and evolution of the Spanish language



By  
Tony  
Beckwith

*The strength of a language does not lie in  
rejecting what is foreign but in assimilating it*  
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Language is history. Words have been our constant companions on the long journey of human evolution, capturing the prosaic and the sublime, conveying the tangible and the ephemeral, expressing the essence of our existence. In the natural order of things, words are assimilated and discarded as times change, people move, and cultures overlap. Like us, our languages are organic; like us, our languages evolve or die.

Sometimes the assimilation involves just a word or two; a convenient expression crosses a linguistic frontier to take root in a different language and, after a period of time, loses its “foreign-ness” and is granted “native” status. Words like *paparazzi*, *glasnost*, and *geisha* come to mind.

In other cases, a whole collection of words is borrowed when a new technology of some kind is introduced from one culture to another, as we have recently seen with the migration of computer-related terms from English to other languages. Something similar occurred many years ago when the French brought their cuisine to Great Britain, doing wonders for the British diet and enriching the English language with words like *au gratin*, *canapé*, and *roux*.

And then there are loans and transfers on a massive scale that influence a language and give it a breadth of expression and depth of nuance that it never had before. One example of this

was the Norman conquest of Britain in 1066. Another was the Moorish invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 711 A.D. Who were the Moors? And where were they from? Before answering those questions let us very briefly review the history of the land they conquered.

Neanderthals, of course, roamed the Iberian Peninsula about 32,000 years ago, long before our story begins. Far closer in time to our period, the area was inhabited by Iberians, Celts, Celtiberians, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Greeks, among others. The region was called Hispania when it became a province of the Roman Empire, and the language spoken there during that period was a variation of the Vulgar Latin imposed by the Romans over existing local dialects. The Empire collapsed in about 476 and Hispania was subsequently taken over by the Visigoths—Germanic tribes that ruled the Peninsula until they were defeated by the Moors.

These Moorish invaders were nomadic Muslims who crossed the western Mediterranean at its narrowest point, the Straits of Gibraltar, then swept across the rugged Iberian terrain in wave after conquering wave that carried them as far as the Ebro River in the north. They were mainly Berbers and Arabs from North Africa but their inspiration was the Islamic faith which was born almost a century earlier many miles to the east in Mecca. During the late 7<sup>th</sup> century the Muslim empire rippled out from the desert kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula to hold sway over a vast territory that stretched from India in the east to the Pyrenees in the west. Arab horsemen rode as far west as they could across



The Alhambra and sunset in Granada

Northern Africa, converting those in their path to Islam, and then turned north. In 711 they landed in Gibraltar and were soon masters of this southwestern tip of Europe, which they controlled for the next eight hundred years. They brought with them a refined sense of art and architecture, a profound respect for learning, and their language: Arabic.

The Moors established many centers of trade, civil administration, and scholarship in their new territory, most notably in the cities of Córdoba, Toledo, Granada, and Sevilla. Córdoba, the ancient city on the banks of the Guadalquivir River that had been an Iberian settlement and an important metropolis in Roman and Visigoth times, became the capital of the Islamic Caliphate that ruled Al-Andalus (known today as Andalucía), the Moorish

domain in the southern portion of the Iberian Peninsula. By the 10th century, Córdoba was considered the most populous city in the world, and was also the intellectual capital of Europe. It was a widely acknowledged center of learning, where scholars flocked to study and translate documents dealing with science, philosophy, mathematics, astrology, medicine, and education. This was truly a golden age of translation! Here, as in Damascus and Baghdad—the other great centers of the Muslim empire—classical and canonical Greek and Roman texts were translated into Arabic and preserved for posterity, providing a link to past knowledge that was all but lost when Europe slipped into the Dark Ages.

The Arabic that flourished in medieval Spain belonged to the Semitic subgroup of the



Afro-Asiatic family of languages. It was closely related to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Phoenician, and was thus directly linked to the earliest languages spoken by mankind. Over the course of many centuries it had evolved into an eloquent, poetic language with a vast vocabulary, making it ideally suited to the task of transforming the Romance dialects of southern Europe into the flowering languages of the Renaissance.

This Arabic was the language that percolated throughout the Iberian Peninsula during the eight centuries of Muslim rule. It was spoken mainly by those living in the southern region of Al-Andalus, and was learned by the many European scholars who came to do research in the libraries and universities established in Toledo and Córdoba. Over time, it seeped into the Latin dialects that were still spoken among Christian populations living in northern Spain. How, precisely, did that happen?

The Christian monarchs of the old Spanish kingdoms, of course, had never accepted the Muslim conquest and, ever since the Moorish invasion had been fighting to reconquer the lands they had lost—a campaign that lasted for centuries and was known as *La Reconquista*. Toledo was taken in 1085 by Alfonso VI, the king of León and Castilla. Córdoba fell to Ferdinand III of Castilla in 1236. Málaga was taken in 1487 after being besieged by the armies of a recently united Christian Spain following the marriage of Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon, the Catholic Monarchs. And finally, early in 1492 Granada, the last Moorish stronghold in Al-Andalus, surrendered and an extraordinary period in history came to an end.

During the *Reconquista*, as the Christian forces moved gradually south, towns and cities that had been under Moorish rule for generations were flooded with northerners who spoke a variety of Romance dialects, the most durable of which was Castilian. Christians living in Moorish territory had, by and large, developed hybrid dialects such as Mozarabic, a combination of Romance languages and Arabic.

These dialects were quickly absorbed and replaced by Castilian, which in turn embarked on a massive borrowing spree, assimilating Arabic grammar and vocabulary and transforming itself into the forerunner of the Spanish that is spoken today. As a result of this dual Latin and Arabic influence, the “language of Cervantes” became rich in synonyms. Spanish speakers can thus refer to the olive in their martini with an Arabic word, *aceituna*, or a Latin one, *oliva*. Similarly, to warn of a lurking scorpion they can say *alacrán* or *escorpión*. When arranging appointments they can consult







La Giralda, originally a Moorish minaret built in 1187-1198, now the bell tower of the Cathedral of Seville

their *almanaque* or *calendario*, and both mean calendar. It helps to remember that most Spanish nouns that begin with *al*—(the Arabic definite article) were borrowed from the Moors.

The list of Arabic words that migrated into Spanish during that period is far too long to include here. But, as a matter of interest, let us look at just a few examples, grouped in categories for ease of reference. Many of these words ultimately found their way into other European languages as well, including English.

Civil administration: *alcalde* (mayor); *barrio* (neighborhood); *aduana* (customs).

Home furnishings: *alfombra* (carpet); *almohada* (pillow); *sofá* (sofa).

Food and beverage: *azúcar* (sugar); *limón* (lemon); *café* (coffee); *azafrán* (saffron).

Building and architecture: *alcoba* (bedroom); *adoquín* (paving stone); *azulejo* (tile).

Mathematics: *cero* (zero); *álgebra* (algebra); *cenit* (zenith).

As the *Reconquista* inexorably advanced, Castilian advanced with it to become the lingua franca of Spain—a Romance language generously seasoned with Arabic. King Alfonso X of Castilla, known as *Alfonso el Sabio* (Alfonso the Wise), prompted the creation of a standardized form of written Castilian in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by assembling a group of scribes at his court to transcribe an extensive collection of works on history, astronomy, the law, and other fields of knowledge.

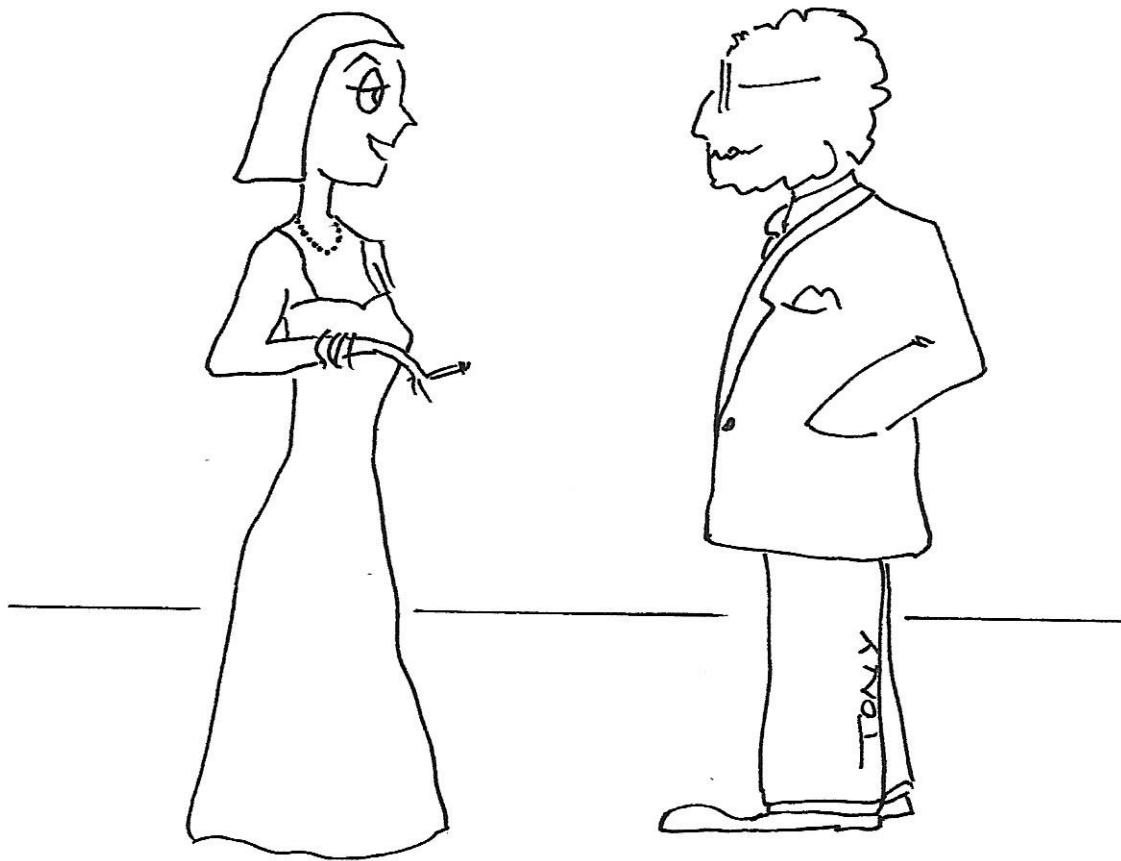
The Spanish Royal Academy was founded in 1713, essentially for the purpose of preserving the “purity” of the language. The Academy published its first dictionary in six volumes between 1726 and 1739, and its first grammar book in 1771.

Spanish is now the official language of 21 countries. When the United Nations was established in 1945, Spanish was one of the five official languages, along with Chinese, English, French, and Russian. Interestingly, Arabic became the sixth official language of the UN in 1973.

Spain finally shook off eight centuries of Moorish rule with the *Reconquista* of Granada in 1492. Later that same year, Christopher Columbus was commissioned by Queen Isabella to set sail westward, and his voyage not only changed the world—it opened up a whole new chapter in the evolution of the Spanish language. But that’s another story.

Add *Arabic and Simmer for Eight Centuries* was originally published in *Source*, Fall 2012, and reprinted in the *The ATA Chronicle* in March 2013.

BTW



*"She said she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth,  
but maybe she was speaking with a forked tongue."*



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2017

## NORMAN DI GIOVANNI, THE MASTER'S TRANSLATOR\*

By Andrew Graham-Yooll

Former editor-in-chief of the *Buenos Aires Herald*,  
Andrew Graham-Yooll, pays tribute to a true friend.

Norman Thomas di Giovanni will be remembered by friends in Buenos Aires for his wit and for his brash manner in all that he set out to do. He must also be remembered for his brilliant literary training, his high quality as a translator and his capacity to move from his hard-knocks managerial style to his kindness as a friend to all of his friends and for his often excessive generosity. Di Giovanni wanted to help the whole world. He was a sponge for attention and affection from all those he befriended or was close to at any one time.

However, Di Giovanni would probably want to be remembered simply as the best translator that Jorge Luis Borges ever had.

Di Giovanni died last week, on February 15. He had reached the respectable age of 83 last October 3. He died in his sleep, in hospital at Bournemouth, in southern England. He had been unwell for some time with heart and kidney problems, and had difficulty walking in part due to a knee surgery which had not worked well. Norman was born in Newton, Massachusetts, in 1933, and was named after the leader of the US Socialist Party, Presbyterian minister Norman Thomas (1883-1968). Di Giovanni graduated in 1955 from Antioch College, a studies centre he remained linked to through its excellent literary magazine, *The Antioch Review*, for several decades.

Shortly after graduation, Di Giovanni started to work with Spanish poet Jorge Guillén (1893-1984), then at Harvard to deliver the Eliot Norton lectures in 1957 and 1958. Norman was the editor and translator into English of 50 of Guillén's poems with a group of translator-poets. From that start he grew into a trenchant, but still kind and patient editor. He was amusing to watch at work, squinting at the screen (or paper in times of typewriters), ready to be distracted by every woman that passed his way.

Ten years later, in 1967, Norman was to meet Jorge Luis Borges who, in turn, was the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard and proposed

that they collaborate in a style like the bilingual production of Guillén's poetry. Borges returned to Buenos Aires and suggested that they work together. First published in *The New Yorker*, the translations appeared in book form in 1972 as *Selected Poems, 1923-1967* with the Spanish and English versions on facing pages. Di Giovanni and his wife and their two sons, Derek and Tom, were to spend two years in Argentina.

The *Herald* was a direct and early beneficiary of the association, which some in Buenos Aires were tempted to call a "Johnson-Boswell" arrangement. However, the monumental volume of the posthumously published diaries of Adolfo Bioy Casares (1914-1999) knocks down that bit of gossip. Among the early translations completed by the author and translator was *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, a selection of which the *Herald* published in 1970, illustrated by Hermenegildo Sabat, and reprinted by permission of Borges' widow, María Kodama, and Sabat in 2006. Another piece of gossip held that in an interview at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in April 1980, Borges said that Norman di Giovanni claimed his translations were better than Borges' originals. Funny, I had heard Borges, not Norman, say that he thought some of his poems sounded better in English than in the Spanish original. Probably each had misquoted the other.

In 1971, Norman and family left Buenos Aires for England. His feeling was that Argentina was stumbling toward chaos. He was divorced and, later, with his second wife, Susan Ashe, formed a literary translation partnership that includes several books, among them *Hand-in-Hand Beside the Tracks* (Constable, London, 1992), a collection of contemporary stories by Argentine writers, and many more translations, of course.

After the death of Borges in 1986, Norman's relationship with María Kodama went on a collision course, with legal arguments and much unpleasantness.

Norman's books included: *Celeste Goes Dancing and other stories* (Constable 1989), translated with Susan Ashe, the above-mentioned collection of stories, and *The Lesson of the Master, On Borges and his Work* (Continuum 2003), among others. He also has three books due to come out this year, one a novel he wrote years ago, an autobiographical book about his life in Boston as a young man, and the last a collection of short pieces about the place where he grew up in Boston in the 30s and 40s. Di Giovanni also wrote the novel *Novecento*, published in the US and UK in 1976, based on the similarly titled film by Bernardo Bertolucci.

He led a rich and productive life and his style of charm and friendship will be missed by those who knew and worked with him.

\*Reprinted with the author's permission

# THE VARMINT AND ME: A REMEMBRANCE OF NORMAN THOMAS DI GIOVANNI

By  
Michele  
Aynesworth

Norman Thomas di Giovanni's life and career have been eloquently covered in Andrew Graham-Yooll's preceding article, which was originally published in the *Buenos Aires Herald* on February 26th. In the following essay, I offer a close-up of di Giovanni as a friend, mentor, and master craftsman.

I affectionately called him "Varmint." He was colorful and crusty, a short, muscular man with an outsized personality.

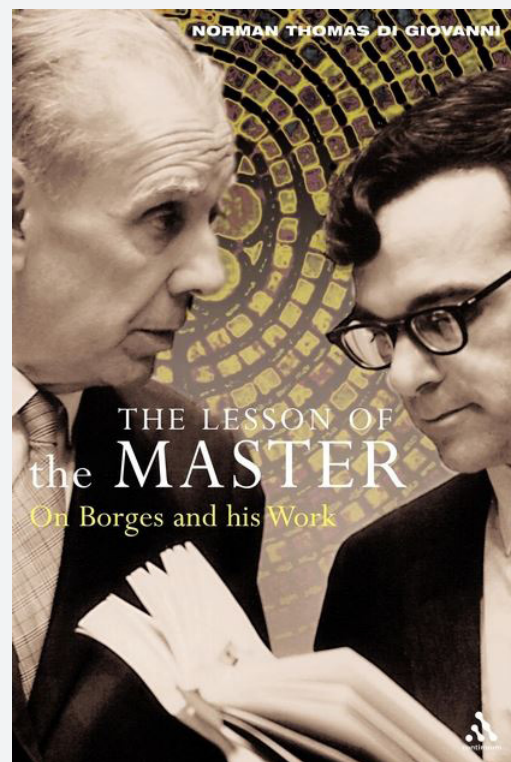
We first met by email, when I was doing some translating for Argentine writer and linguist Fernando Sorrentino. At the time, my only important publication was *Mad Toy*, an English version of Roberto Arlt's novel *El juguete rabioso*. So Fernando suggested I send an email to di Giovanni and ask him to take a look at a draft I'd been working on.

Norman's first response was typically crusty. He said my translating certainly could benefit from some advice, but I should first buy his recently published book, *The Lesson of the Master*, about the translating lessons he'd learned from his collaboration with Borges on translations of the latter's works into English.

When Norman received that first email, he was thinking in Italian and decided my name, Michele, indicated I was a guy. My email address, micheletexas@, in fact, was a turn-off for him. He suggested I call him, then quizzed me closely on my politics, as Texans aren't noted for their liberal views, and Norman, named after the socialist Norman Thomas, had gone so far as to abandon the US in disgust and become a British citizen. He was pleasantly surprised to learn that, instead of being a good ol' boy redneck, I was a left-leaning female. To prove my bona fides, I sent him a copy of a poem I'd written, "Babylonian Blues," with a sung refrain:

My brother Joe's gone to fight in Iraq,  
With tanks in the desert, choppers on the tarmac,  
Oh Lord, is he ever comin' back.

Well, we became friends after that. Over the years, Norman was not just a friend but a mentor, critiquing my translations as well as my own poems and prose. He generously placed



With Borges: Lesson of the Master [cover]

After a session with Borges, I would return home and type out what we had gone over together, then set to work shaping and polishing the sentences and paragraphs, this time trying to supply the exact words. Now I would refer back to the Spanish only for checking rhythms and emphases. The concern would be with matters of tone and tension and style. To anyone who constructs a piece of prose and cares about style, this amounts to a slow and painstaking search for meanings to fit the sound patterns one keeps turning and turning in one's head. (Since good prose is written with the ear, music emerges before meaning.)

(*The Lesson of the Master*, p.167)



one of my poems, “The Dependable Blackness of Ink,” on his website.<sup>1</sup> I’m especially grateful for his encouragement and comments on my translation of Charles Rist’s World War II diary, recently published as *Season of Infamy*.

Norman trained me to avoid excess, to “free the sentences of cumbersome or indirect locutions” (*Master*, 167). And he taught me to value the drama of sentences and paragraphs.

In 2005, I spent three weeks in Keyhaven with him and his life partner, Susan Ashe, in order to pay Norman back a little by helping him sort through and catalogue his extensive collection of memorabilia from his time with Borges.



Norman and Michele at work

In his obituary, Andrew Graham-Yooll mentions a forthcoming publication of “an autobiographical book about his life in Boston as a young man.” Norman sent me a digital copy of the book several years ago. The title is *What About Reb*, and an intro and excerpt can be found on his website.<sup>2</sup> The blurb there quotes an “anarchist thinker” characterizing the novel as “anarchist fiction.”

Well, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It was the music of the prose and the “golden ratio” of its structure that stayed with me, not the anarchist story line. An example from Chapter 1 shows Reb, the young carpenter, having a Zen-like moment as he works on the roof of a house being built:



Susie and Michele, Keyhaven, 2005

Below him, shafts of sunlight streamed down into the house, slicing the geometry of evenspaced ceiling joists and two by four studs in a slightly distorting diagonal and at the same time lighting up the pale hemlock uprights and the reddish fir of the intersecting joists. A fragrance of new lumber swam up through the remaining foot of open roof. Reb kicked a bit of sawdust into the slant of light and watched it fill the sunny air like a tiny shower of gold. Before reaching the floor it passed into the dimness and vanished.

(*What about Reb*, 18)

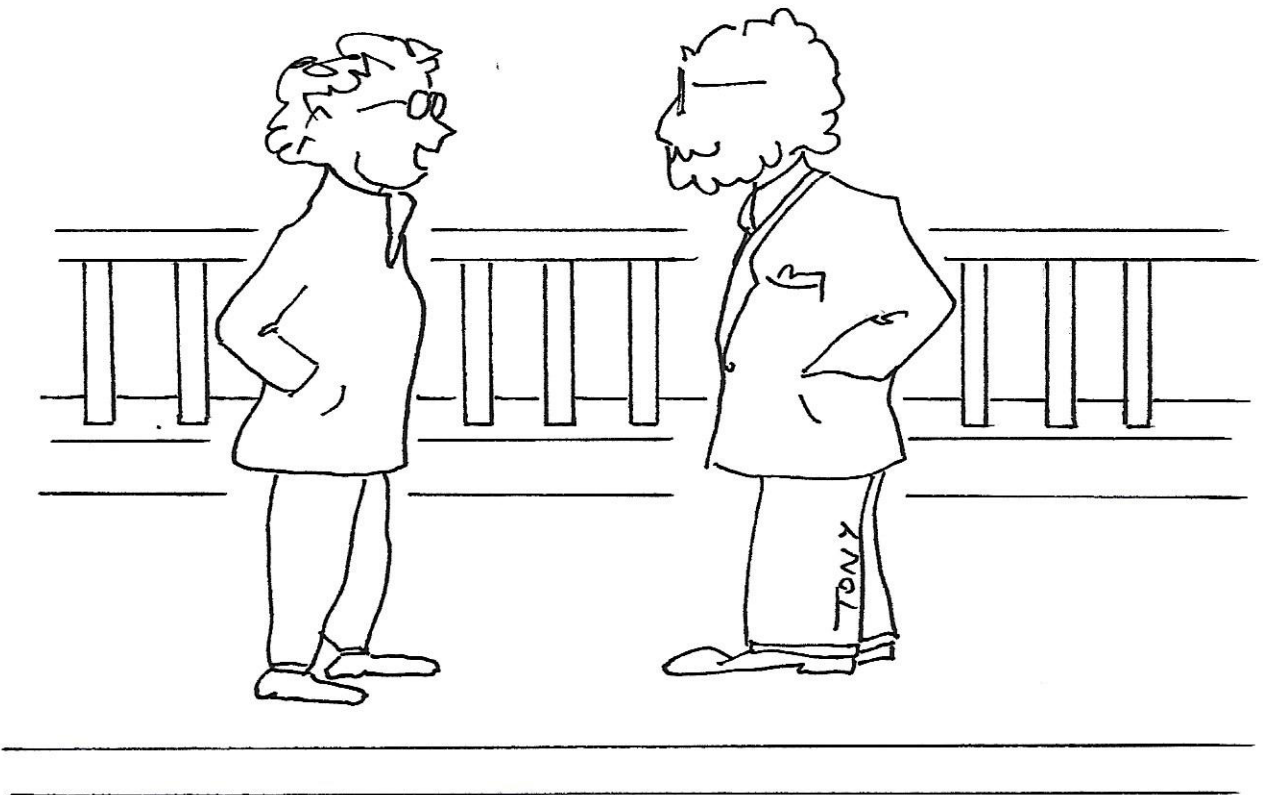
Carpentry was a manual skill Norman was proud of, a skill he relied on in later years to make money, a skill not unrelated to the craft of composition. The beauty in the passage above resides not just in the words, but in the young man’s sensual attention to the details of experience, the colors, the fragrance, the physical connection, as Reb kicks a bit of sawdust into the slant of light. These are lessons of a master craftsman.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.digiovanni.co.uk/among-friends/Michele-McKay-Aynesworth/the-dependable-blackness-of-ink.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.digiovanni.co.uk/work-in-progress/N-T-di-G/what-about-reb.htm>

BTW



*"At the end of the day I'll probably wish I had never heard of this really annoying expression."*

# CREDITS

## Cover

Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933), *On the Way between Old and New Cairo, Citadel Mosque of Mohammed Ali, and Tombs of the Mamelukes*, 1872, oil on canvas. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of George Foster Peabody, from Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Louis\\_Comfort\\_Tiffany\\_On\\_the\\_Way\\_between\\_Old\\_and\\_New\\_Cairo,\\_Citadel\\_Mosque\\_of\\_Mohammed\\_Ali,\\_and\\_Tombs\\_of\\_the\\_Mamelukes.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Louis_Comfort_Tiffany_On_the_Way_between_Old_and_New_Cairo,_Citadel_Mosque_of_Mohammed_Ali,_and_Tombs_of_the_Mamelukes.jpg)

## Page 7

Photo of Naguib Mahfouz in his twenties, published here with the kind permission of the American University in Cairo Press, <http://www.aucpress.com/t-NM.aspx>

## Page 9

Khan el-Kahlili, a souk-market in Old Cairo, in the district of Al Gamaliya, the setting for the *Cairo Trilogy* and the neighborhood where Mahfouz was born and raised, photo by Joel Suganth, April 3, 2009, from Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khan\\_el\\_khalili.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khan_el_khalili.jpg)

## Page 12

Photo of Naguib Mahfouz with his two daughters (around 1970), published here with the kind permission of the American University in Cairo Press, <http://www.aucpress.com/t-MahfouzPhotoGallery.aspx>

## Page 14

Information on the American University in Cairo Press drawn from its website with their kind permission.

## Page 16

Muhaqqaq script, Islamic calligraphy, fourteenth century folio from the *Qur'an*, Mamluk Dynasty, Egypt, ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper, from Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Folio\\_from\\_a\\_Qur%27an\\_\(Mamluk\\_dynasty\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Folio_from_a_Qur%27an_(Mamluk_dynasty).jpg)

## Page 18

Both poems are from The Poets of Arabia, Selections, which is part of The Islamic History Sourcebook of Fordham University's Internet History Sourcebooks Project: <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/halsall/source/arabianpoets1.asp>

Harun al-Rashid (Aaron the Just, A.D. 763-809) was the fifth and most famous Abbasid Caliph; his reign coincided with the peak of the Islamic Golden Age

and was immortalized in *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*. Persian miniature, source and author unknown, from Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harun\\_Al-Rashid\\_and\\_the\\_World\\_of\\_the\\_Thousand\\_and\\_One\\_Nights.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Harun_Al-Rashid_and_the_World_of_the_Thousand_and_One_Nights.jpg)

## Page 19

Fifteenth-century copy of one of the maps of the *Tabula Rogeriana*, drawn by the Arab geographer Muhammad al-Idrisi for King Roger of Sicily and published in 1154. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1154\\_world\\_map\\_by\\_Moroccan\\_cartographer\\_al-Idrisi\\_for\\_king\\_Roger\\_of\\_Sicily.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1154_world_map_by_Moroccan_cartographer_al-Idrisi_for_king_Roger_of_Sicily.jpg)

## Page 21

The Alhambra and sunset in Granada, with the Moorish fortress and palace (1333-1391) stretching from left to right at the forefront and the Renaissance palace (1527) of the Spanish King Carlos V (Holy Roman Emperor from 1519 to 1556), in the center and background. Photographer Alejandro Mantecón-Guillén, June 3, 2006, from Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Granada%27s\\_sunset.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Granada%27s_sunset.jpg)

## Page 22

Mosque-Cathedral in Cordoba, Spain, also known as the Great Mosque of Córdoba, built from 784 to 986 over the site of a former Visigothic Christian church. Photograph Ronny Siegel, June 13, 2014, from Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mezquita-Catedral\\_de\\_Cordoba\\_01.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mezquita-Catedral_de_Cordoba_01.JPG)

## Page 23

La Giralda at dusk, the tower of the Cathedral of Seville, as viewed from the Plaza Virgen de los Reyes in Seville, Spain. Photo by David Iliff: CC-BY-SA 3.0, from Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La\\_Giralda,\\_Seville,\\_Spain\\_-\\_Sep\\_2009.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Giralda,_Seville,_Spain_-_Sep_2009.jpg)

## Page 27

*The Lesson of the Master*, cover: Bloomsbury Academic (December 30, 2004)

## Page 28

Photo of Susan Ashe and Michele Aynesworth with a cane used by Jorge Luis Borges, courtesy of Michele Aynesworth

Photo of Norman di Giovanni and Michele Aynesworth at work, organizing di Giovanni's papers relating to his time with Borges, courtesy of Michele Aynesworth