

HBKU Press Launches the Much-Anticipated Translation of the Award-Winning Book, After Coffee, in SOAS London

In an exclusive event at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London on 14 January 2018, Hamad Bin Khalifa University Press launched the English translation of *After Coffee*, the 2014 Sheikh Zayed Book Award winner written by Abdelrashid Mahmoudi.

The event, hosted by Dr. Nora Parr, OWRI Research fellow in the School of Languages, Cultures, and Linguistics at SOAS, included the author as well as the translator, Nashwa Gowanlock, in a panel discussion on the intertextual exploration of belonging, of Egyptian society, and the Arabic literary past. The focus was on the book's unique investigation of contemporary (post-2011) Egypt that is not 'dystopian' or futuristic but rather a story that looks to the past (and not the future) in order to make its commentary on the present.

"I was particularly excited to be able to provide the opportunity for students at SOAS to meet and interact with a contemporary award-winning Arab author and the esteemed translator who explored the text in the context of a totally different language," explains Parr. "Students learned more about the city/country dynamics of the text, and how ideas and representations of these (false?) oppositions have shifted over the years, as well as the use of the trope of a traveller to Europe beyond the context of the Nahda."

Through the efforts of HBKU Press, the critically-acclaimed book is now available to English-speaking audiences around the world.

"At HBKU Press we are committed to providing both our English and Arabic-reading audiences exceptional works of literature," explains Fakhri Saleh, Senior Editor at HBKU Press. "The translation of this book is especially important as we are highlighting an award-winning literary work in Arabic that spreads knowledge and ideas that are coming out of the Arab world. This type of cross-cultural communication through translations from Arabic to English is essential as it allows non-Arabic readers the chance to become immersed in the highest level of Arabic literature."

Inspired by Mahmoudi's personal experiences in Vienna where he was struck by the strong presence of the arts (especially music, dance, and pantomime) all around him, an idea of writing a novella about an Egyptian man in midlife crisis against the vivid scenes of the Austrian capital quickly formed in his mind. Once written, this first draft turned out to be the driving force for undertaking a much more



ambitious work ranging far and wide, and finally incorporating the Viennese adventure as its conclusion.

The translation, however, allowed Nashwa Gowanlock a little more creative licence.

“I reviewed her [Gowanlock’s] version wherever she had queries with regard to the original Arabic,” says Mahmoudi. “My comments and revisions were given as mere proposals; and it was left to her to produce the final version. So far, the initial reactions to the translation have been favorable.”

For Gowanlock, staying ‘true’ to the original text while explaining potentially unknown idioms, phrases, and ideas in a way that English language readers would understand was definitely a challenge.

“This is a case of working to maintain the spirit and tone of the work I’m translating,” explains Gowanlock, “focusing on transporting the meaning across, even if that requires taking so-called liberties, or using whichever expressions or turns of phrase are more congruent with the meaning expressed in the source text.

“I always prefer to work with the author, where possible. In this case, [he] was very keen to be involved. This was a great help since he was also a mine of knowledge of the era and context he had written about and within, both of which were unfamiliar to me. Being a translator into English himself, he could offer suggestions and solutions which we could discuss together.”

Both Mahmoudi and Gowanlock are optimistic about the reception of the English version of the book. Their combined efforts in presenting Arabic literature to non-Arabic readers will, in their perspective, present to the English-speaking reader a different way or ways of viewing, and thinking about, a world so different from their own, and yet one that is still so profoundly human.

“When literature is available in translation, it is an incredibly valuable tool for communication across cultures and beyond boundaries,” explains Saleh. “*After Coffee* will surely reverberate with a large audience as the author and reader are inextricably linked through the universal experiences of forced emigration and belonging.”

After Coffee is available in bookstores in Qatar and online on Waterstones.com, on Kindle and jamalon.com.

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