

## English abstracts

### **Kerstin Eksell: “Elias Khoury the Storywriter”**

The novel, *Ka’annahā nā’ima*, *As If She Was Sleeping* from 2007, is set in Beirut and Nazareth between 1923 and 1948. The Lebanese Milia marries the Palestinian Mansour, and they settle down to daily life in Nazareth, where Milia finally gives birth to a son. Much of the story is told in the form of Milia’s dreams and recapitulates the family history in early 20th century Beirut.

The novel is multilayered, mixing high and low registers, and rich in intertextual references. The Christian myth of death and sacrifice functions as a historical allegory of the political tragedy of the modern Arab world, in particular that of Palestine. However, the vitality and strength of Milia – Mary offers an alternative reading of human survival and resurrection, deeply rooted in the oriental potential of mysticism and poetry.

### **Stephan Guth: “The Arabic Novel since the 1980s”**

The study examines some recurrent motifs in Arabic novels from the 1980s until the early 2000s in the light of an analytical method that assigns “postmodern” features their place in a trinary structure of meaning. Faced with the destruction of their “houses”, the heroes start to “dig” in the ruins and, later in the period, begin to discover “treasures” that seem to have survived undamaged: An alternative approach in a time where the term “postmodernism” has come under attack as being too Eurocentrist.

### **Sabry Hafez: “Literature after Orientalism – The Enduring Lure of the Occident: Modernity, Canon and Translatability”**

After reflecting on the status and challenge of “world literature”, the article addresses three issues concerning orientalism: modernity, canon and translatability. The attraction to the West played a significant role in the formation of the modern Arabic literary canon, despite Arabic culture’s long history and tradition of creating its own canon. Unlike the West, in which the concepts of canon and canonical literary texts goes only to the 18th century, Arabic culture has had its classics and classification of writers and works since pre-Islamic time and the idea of Mu’allaqat, when a few poems were selected to be hung on the walls of the Ka’bah. The concept of classics, and the formation of the literary canon in the modern period, benefitted from some of the achievements of the past, but had its eyes on the occident, which was clearly in the desire to have works recognised by the West, first by its specialists, read orientalists, then by its literary circles. The intervention of the international literary field led to a crisis of canon and a distortion of the literary field in Arabic culture, which was already distorted by the intervention of the establishment. Finally, the article considers the marginal role Arabic literature plays in world literature today.

**Bo Holmberg: “Arabic Prison Literature and the Syrian Poet Muhammad al-Maghut”**

This article deals with some aspects of prison literature from the Middle East and mainly in Arabic. Prison literature may be literature written by prisoners either during imprisonment, or after imprisonment. It may also include literature by non-prisoners who are writing in a society where imprisonment is a constant threat for political, religious and moral reasons. Special attention is given to the situation in modern Syria, and the poetry of Muhammad al-Maghut (1934-2006) is highlighted.

**Nathalie Khankan: “Sails in the Soil”**

In standard accounts of Palestinian literature, literary expression invariably figures as national allegory, rarely explaining meaning as it is created in the text. This article problematizes the categories used by historiographers to describe Palestinian literature. It does so through the site of the so-called New 1990s Poets, whose texts upset monolithic literary narratives. At the same time these poems also help us better understand the endurance of that overriding tension in Palestinian cultural production between the political and collective pressures of the text on the one hand and more personal, subjective figurations on the other.

**Elisabeth A. Moestrup: “Diglossia in Modern Arabic Fiction”**

This article discusses the phenomenon of *diglossia* as it is encountered in two recent works by the contemporary authors, Yusef Fadel from Morocco and Rashid al-Daif from Lebanon, Fadel and al-Daif each applies their own experimental way of negotiating the reality of *diglossia* and all that it entails. The article also looks into Dan Diner’s *Lost in the Sacred* in which he ascribes the ailments of the Arab world to among other things the failure to modernise the state of the language; as it looks into Sidney Pollock’s article about linguistic homogenization globally and Arabic’s place in this.

**Peter Q. Rannes: “In Yacoubian’s Building”**

In his article Peter Q. Rannes examines the unexpected international bestseller status the novel *The Yacoubian Building* by the Egyptian writer Alaa al-Aswany has achieved. Through a short review of the Arab literary history it is argued that the modern Arabic prose literature traditionally has been dominated by an “epic unwillingness” which explains its poor international distribution.

Demonstrating how *The Yacoubian Building* structurally and technically manages to overcome the epic limitations of the Mahfouz’ian collective novel form which the novel employs, an understanding of *Yacoubians Building* not only as an international bestseller but also as a genuine Arabic prose breakthrough is revealed.

**Tetz Rooke: “Leaving the Sect”**

In the prize-winning novel *Azazil* (2008) by Yusuf Zaydan, a Christian monk tells the dramatic story of his life, which is also the dramatic story of early Christianity in the Middle East. The novel problematizes the role of religion in politics and the individual’s responsibility for violence directed against “non-believers”. The same issues are also addressed in the true life story of the former Egyptian, Islamist activist Khaled al-Berry, *Life is More Beautiful than Paradise* (2001). Both books show defection as a proper solution when religious movements turn authoritarian and sully both individual freedom and moral principles.

**Ellen Wulff: “Translating from the Arabic”**

This article deals with a translator’s problems when translating from the Arabic into Danish. The introduction presents the literary texts used as material and published in this edition of *Passage*, two chapters of the Libyan author Ibrahim al-Koni’s novel *The Bleeding of the Stone*. The first part discusses a translator’s difficulties due to disparity between grammatical structures in Semitic and Indo European languages, the second part difficulties due to divergent concepts of ‘good language’.