

Banipal 37 – Iraqi Authors

Banipal's first issue of 2010 celebrates authors from Iraq, with over half its pages devoted to fiction and poetry by 21 writers from different generations, some spread across the world, but many writing from within the country. We celebrate, in particular, a new generation of Iraqi fiction writers and poets who are free to write the story of Iraq we've been waiting to hear, however hard.

There are also glimpses into the powerful fiction of Yemeni author Ali Mohammed Zayd, of Egyptian novelists Mohamed al-Bisatie and Ezzat el-Kamhawi, an excerpt in translation by Marilyn Hacker from Algerian poet Habib Tengour's historical epic poem *Ce Tatar-là*, and a short story from Flemish author Rachida Lamrabet. As ever we never have enough pages for all the authors we'd like to feature, and are still holding over a number from Yemen and Iraq.

Hussain al-Mozany begins the Iraqi feature with a tale about the distressing “new” Baghdad he hardly recognises – a jungle of concrete and steel, “fertile ground for the most dangerous kinds of sectarian violence, corruption and filth”. **Lutfiya al-Dulaimi**, with her new novel *The Book of the Girls* – which will surely be translated into many languages – rivets the reader's attention with her modern female characters struggling to find safe haven after suffering violently at the hands of fanatics. **Luay Hamza Abbas** and **Diya al-Jubaily**, on the other hand, have short story flashes of very Iraqi daily life, school boys with foreign “girly” magazines, identifying the corpse of a bullet-ridden old friend, and getting caught in a bomb blast in the Friday market.

Safe from fanatics, land-mines and war, erstwhile dictatorship and secret police, Western readers can only marvel at the strength of character and patient persistence of writers we have never had a chance to read before, such as novelists **Nazum al-Obeidi** and **Nassif Falak** (who has his own hair-raising personal story of flight, capture on a number of borders, imprisonment in Abu Ghraib during the Saddam regime), the atmospheric writer **Enas al-Badran**, **Ahmad Saadawi** and **Shakir Nouri**. A pioneer of Iraqi fiction writing is the late **Mahdi Issa al-Saqr**, who joins the “new” generation of writers in this feature with an excerpt from his first novel in English translation. He wrote his novels and secreted them from seizure by the ancien regime.

The poems from the **eleven poets** featured are proclamations of free and open expression even though Bassim al-Ansar has a title “I Have Nothing to Say”. They write of love, loss, old memories, but also of rage, disquiet and deep emotion as well as often a keen sense of the colossal heritage that the modern Iraqi shoulders.

Banipal is indebted to the translators and copy-editors of this feature, without whom it would be impossible to bring readers the wealth and richness of these writers' creative powers, the range of human experience they express, with the intricate details of varying imaginations, styles and characterisations.

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PLUS

**Mohamed el-Bisatie, Habib Tengour
Ezzat el-Kamhawi, Ali Mohammed Zayd**