

#### **XIV. Four Successful Translators from Arabic**

**Johnson Denys -Davies** is an eminent Arabic-to-English literary translator who has translated, *inter alia*, several works by Nobel Prize-winning Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz, Sudanese author Tayeb Salih, Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish and Syrian author Zakaria Tamer.

Davies, referred to as “the leading Arabic-English translator of our time” by the late Edward Said, has translated more than twenty-five volumes of short stories, novels, plays, and poetry, and was the first to translate the work of Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz. He is also interested in Islamic studies and is co-translator of three volumes of Prophetic Hadith. He has also written a number of children’s books adapted from traditional Arabic sources, including a collection of his own short stories, *Fate of a Prisoner*, which was published in 1999.

Born in 1922 in Vancouver, Canada to English parentage, Davies spent his childhood in Sudan, Egypt, Uganda, and Kenya, and then was sent to England at age 12. Davies studied Oriental languages at Cambridge, and has lectured translation and English literature at several universities across the Arab World. In 2006, he published his memoirs. In 2007, he was awarded the Sheikh Zayed Book Award "Culture Personality of the Year", a valued at about \$300,000. Davies lives between Marrakesh and Cairo.

**Humphrey T. Davies** is a translator of Arabic fiction, historical and classical texts. Born in Great Britain, he studied Arabic in college and graduate school. He has worked for decades in the Arab world and been based in Cairo since the late 20th century. He has translated at least 18 Arabic works into English, including contemporary literature. He is a two-time winner of the Banipal Prize.

Born in Great Britain, Humphrey Davies studied Arabic at Cambridge University and the American University in Cairo's Centre for Arabic Studies Abroad (CASA) in the 1960s. After working in the Arabic world and as a translator for years, he completed a PhD in Arabic in 1981 at the University of California, Berkeley.

Davies has worked for NGOs and funding institutions in a number of countries in the Arab world, including Save the Children in Palestine and the Ford Foundation in Sudan. He began translating in 1997. Since the early 21st century, he has focused solely on literary translation.

Davies has translated both classical and colloquial Arabic texts and has noted in particular his "respect for colloquial Arabic". He worked in collaboration on the *El-Said Badawi Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic*. Davies began translating while working on a critical edition and lexicon of Yusuf al-Shirbini's *Hazz al-Quhuf bi-Sharh Qasid Abi Shaduf* (Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abu Shaduf Expounded), a 17th-century Egyptian text on Ottoman rural culture. This is

considered a valuable source for the period's colloquial Egyptian Arabic.

Davies' first published translation was a short story by Sayed Ragab, which appeared in *Banipal* magazine in 2000. Since then, he has translated several well-known works of Arabic literature, including Alaa Al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*. His 2004 translation was voted one of 50 outstanding translations in the last 50 years by the British Society of Authors. His translation of Lebanese writer Elias Khoury's novel *Gate of the Sun* won the English PEN "Writers in Translation" award and the Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation.

Davies says that when he translates the work of a living author, he makes it his practice to call upon the author for advice. His work has been published by AUC Press, Words Without Borders, and Banipal. Other translations include: *Thebes at War* by Naguib Mahfouz, *Friendly Fire* by Alaa Al-Aswany , *Being Abbas el Abd* by Ahmed Alaidy , *Pyramid Texts* by Gamal al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogues* by Gamal al-Ghitani, *Black Magic* by Hamdy el-Gazzar , *Tales of Dayrut* by Mohamed Mustagab, *Life Is More Beautiful Than Paradise* by Khaled al-Berry , *Yalo* by Elias Khoury , *Sunset Oasis* by Bahaa Taher , *As Though She Were Sleeping* by Elias Khoury, *Midaqq Alley* by Naguib Mahfouz , *Leg Over Leg* by Ahmad Faris Shidyaq.

**Jonathan Wright** was born in Andover, Hampshire, and spent his childhood in Canada, Malaysia, Hong Kong and

Germany. He attended Packwood Haugh School from 1966 to 1967 and Shrewsbury School from 1967 to 1971. He studied Arabic, Turkish and Islamic civilization at St John's College, Oxford. He joined Reuters news agency in 1980 as a correspondent, and has been based in the Middle East for most of the last three decades. He has served as Reuters' Cairo bureau chief, and he has lived and worked throughout the region, including in Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, Tunisia and the Gulf. From 1998 to 2003, he was based in Washington, DC, covering U.S. foreign policy for Reuters. For two years until the fall of 2011 Wright was editor of the *Arab Media & Society Journal*, published by the Kamal Adham Center for Journalism Training and Research at the American University in Cairo. Among the works that Wright translated into English are: Taxi for Khaled al-Khamissi, The Madman of Freedom Square for Hassan Blasim, On the State of Egypt: What Caused the Revolution for Alaa Al-Aswany, Judgement Day for Rasha al Ameer, Whatever Happened to the Egyptian Revolution? for Galal Amin, Land of No Rain for Amjad Nasser, Temple Bar for Bahaa Abdelmegid, The Bamboo Stalk for Saud Alsanousi, Sleepwalkers for Sa'ad Makkawi, The Televangelist for Ibrahim Eissa and The Longing of the Derwish for Hammur Ziada.

**William Maynard Hutchins** (born October 11, 1944) is an American academic, author and translator of contemporary Arabic literature. He is currently a professor in the

Department of Philosophy and Religion at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.

Hutchins graduated from Yale University 1964, where he majored in art history. Subsequently he moved to the University of Chicago, where in 1967 he obtained a Master of Arts in philosophy and a Ph.D. in 1971 in Near Eastern languages. His doctoral thesis, on the Persian philosopher Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, is entitled "Fakhr al-Din al-Razi on Knowledge". After stints at Encyclopedia Britannica, Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, the University of Ghana, and Harvard University, Hutchins in 1978 joined the faculty of Appalachian State. He was promoted to full professor in 1986.

As a translator, Hutchins's best-known work is his translation of the Cairo Trilogy by Egyptian Nobel Prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz. This trio of novels is widely regarded as one of the finest works of fiction in Arabic literature, and Hutchins' translation is the principal version available in English (published by Everyman's Library among others). In addition, he has translated a variety of Arabic authors: Tawfiq al-Hakim, Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir al-Mazini, Muhammad Salmawy, al-Jahiz, Nawal El-Saadawi, Muhammad Khudayyir, Ibrahim al-Koni, Fadhil Al-Azzawi, Hassan Nasr, and others.

In 2005-2006, Hutchins received a US National Endowment for the Arts grant in literary translation. His translations have appeared in several issues of Banipal magazine. He

has also written a number of original short stories that have been published in the journals Cold Mountain Review and Crucible.

Text prepared by Kadhim Al-Ali from different Wikipedia entries.

**Reading Guidelines:**

Reading should be approached by bits and pieces in order to be digested very well. "Long" texts such as this one must be divided into distinct units like Davis's unit, Davies's unit, Wright's unit and Hutchins unit.

**Q.I** Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: eminent, inter alia, late, fate, focused, solely, collaboration, confounded, expounded, outstanding, rural , call upon, alley, based, temple, stalk, longing, currently, stints, trilogy, endowment.

**Q.II** Derive as many words as you can from the following words: eminent, leading, collection, parentage, valued, completed, classical, published, dialogues, correspondent, revolution, graduated, promoted,

**Q.III** Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: eminent, collaboration,

valuable, living, at war, friendly fire, beautiful, freedom, promoted, available, appeared.

**Q.IV** Answer the following questions briefly:

1. Who was Edward Said? What does it mean that Denys-Davies replaces Said's word "leading" by "only"?
2. Does Denys-Davies deserve Sheikh Zayed Book Award? Why?
3. What does "He is a two-time winner of the Banipal Prize" mean? For which works?
4. Does the varied expertise of Humphrey Davies qualify him as a translator?
5. What writing projects were Wright involved in? Do such projects help in translation?
6. Single out the Iraqi writer Wright translated for. What other books did he translate for him?
7. Why do you think the reason behind Hutchins translating the Cairo Trilogy?
8. Did Hutchins translate for Iraqi writer Muhammad Khudayyir ? Which book?

**Q.V** Translate into Arabic the story life of any one of the four translators.

Research Activity:

1. Go back to the text and try to list down the strengths in the career of each translator.
2. Why do you think the Iraqi literature is less translated than the Egyptian literature? You may consider the nature of the political regime before 2003 and the security situation after 2003 with regards to the settlement of foreign translators in Iraq.
3. Give a brief summary of Edward Said's views on the translation of Arabic literature in his article "Embargoed Literature"

**Quote of the Day:**

**Even the simplest word can never be rendered with its exact equivalent into another language.**

Kimon Friar