



"Badly Paid and Little Read"

The Dec. 16, 2000 issue of The Economist carried an article about the dire situation of literature in the Arabic world. Not that the twenty-two countries of that world lack talented writers of both sexes. But they are toiling under desperate conditions.

According to the article, one of the great handicaps for Arabic authors is the widespread illiteracy around them, which would drastically reduce their audience in any case. But they also have to contend with a rigorous censorship, plus the fact that the language differs widely from one country to another, and that written Arabic, rooted in the Koran, presents difficulties to the ordinary readers.

Most of the publishers, compelled to keep the price of books very low, have given up paying royalties to their authors. Indeed, some charge the authors for printing their works. There is no way for Iranian or Egyptian novelists, no matter how brilliant, to make a living at their profession; they need to have either a personal fortune or a job that allows them to write in their free time - as a hobby.

And yet, they do write! Male and female authors produce a steady stream of fiction, poetry, and books on history, social and political topics. Ahlam Mustaghanni, an Algerian woman, caused a sensation by daring to write about sex. Both her novels ("Memory of the Body" and "Chaos of the Senses"), published in Beirut, have been translated in French and in English. She was recently awarded a literary prize.

A number of translated Arabic works are available in France and in England. But few translations could be found in the United States until Nagib Mahfouz's Nobel Prize in 1988, drew attention to Arabic literature.

You can find in the Carmel Library:

- Nagib Mahfuz (Egyptian) eleven novels, including:  
Palace Walk  
Sugar Street  
Adrift On the Nile
  - Abd-al-Rahman Munif (Saudi) Cities of salt
  - Alidaf Soueif (Part Iranian) The Map of Love  
In the Eye of the Sun
- also:
- G.Nahai (Iranian living in USA) Moonlight On the Avenue of Faith  
Cry of the Peacock



*I don't know if Bacon wrote the works of Shakespeare. But if he did not, he missed the opportunity of his life.*

*James Barrie*