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## Who Reads Modern Arabic Literature, How and Why? Interdisciplinary Approaches to Readers, Media, Translation and Reception in a Globalized World

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## Who Reads Modern Arabic Literature, How and Why? Interdisciplinary Approaches to Readers, Media, Translation and Reception in a Globalized World

While readers are integral to the experience of literature, literary studies has often shied away from approaching readers and mapping the reception of literary texts. One of the currents that dealt with readers was reader-response criticism in the second half of the 20th century. Focusing on the poetics and aesthetics of literature, it usually relied on idealised model readers implied in or derived from the literary text itself (e.g., Iser 1972). In recent years, some scholars have revisited reading from an affective and post-critical perspective, asking, for instance, “Why [do] we read fiction?” (Zunshine 2006) and what are the “Uses of Literature” (Felski 2008)? In contrast, the sociology of literature seeks to understand literature in terms of practices of social production, distribution and reception and therefore relies on empirical methods such as interviews or participant observation (Griswold, 2000). With the rise of social media and participatory reading cultures, scholars from different disciplines have turned to “The Digital Literary Sphere” (Murray 2018), studying the habits and responses of non-professional readers on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Amazon or Goodreads, sometimes bringing together hermeneutical, empirical, and digital approaches (e.g., Rehberg Sedo 2017, for an overview see Willis 2018).

The fields of Modern Arabic literature, Arabic studies and comparative literature have for a long time paid little attention to readers and their practices and communities. While one challenge was the scarcity of sources, the other was the perceived absence of theories and methods appropriate to the region. In recent years, however, scholars have placed readers and reception at the heart of their approaches towards historical reading practices (e.g., Ayalon 2004), the reception of genres and the readership of popular literature and culture (e.g., Jacquemond 2006) and youth literature (e.g., Abou Ghaida 2020). In addition, political and cultural institutions have conducted reading surveys (e.g., “What do Arabs read”, “Arab Reading Index”) while translation studies have discussed the act of translation as reading and the economy and reception of translation (e.g., Jacquemond 1992). Moreover, the Arabic periodical press is being revisited as an important site for author-reader interaction (e.g., Glaß 2004) while, on the other hand, recent studies have focused on new forms of interactive readership (Pepe 2019) and non-professional criticism (Junge 2021) enabled by the internet.

Against the backdrop of these developments, this conference aims to bring together scholars from different fields such as literary studies, comparative literature, cultural studies, media and communication studies, translation studies, anthropology, ethnography, social sciences, history and digital humanities in order to discuss interdisciplinary approaches to texts and readers, communities and practices, media and institutions, translations and adaptations, distribution and receptions to address in one way or another the main question of: Who reads modern Arabic literature, how and why?

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## About AGYA

The Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) brings together excellent Arab and German scholars to address common challenges and develop solutions through sustainable research cooperation. It was established in 2013 as the first bilateral young academy worldwide.

AGYA promotes research cooperation among outstanding early-career researchers from all disciplines who are affiliated with a research institution in Germany or any Arab country. The AGYA members initiate and implement interdisciplinary projects and collaborative initiatives on research topics such as Arab and German Education; Common Heritage and Common Challenges; Energy, Water and Environment; Health & Society; Innovation and Transformation.

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## Abstracts

### Presentation 1

#### Reading Books, Shaping Tastes: Gulf Social Media Influencers for Arabic Literature

**Presenters:** Ildiko Kaposi & Shahd Alshammari

#### Abstract

The internet, in general, and social media, in particular, have turned into potent socio-cultural forces in the hands of contemporary Gulf authors who wish to employ new communication technological tools beyond self-promotion. The paper explores the online persona and literary activism of Kuwaiti author and cultural figurehead Bothayna Al-Essa. Author of ten novels, Al-Essa started the Takween project in 2016 as an account on Instagram, which then developed into a blog, a website, and finally a creative writing platform, a bookstore, and a publishing house. Through Takween, Al-Essa and her partners have worked on a mission of popularizing the practices and rituals of reading books among young Khaleeji audiences (Kaposi and Alshammari 2021). Al-Essa has built a loyal following on social media where she cultivates highbrow readership mainly on the strength of her recommendations. The recommendations amount to a carefully curated display of canonical taste rather conservatively encompassing “the best which has been thought and said in the world” (Arnold 2006: 5). Yet we argue that as a self-made arbiter of taste who is using her social media influencer status for fulfilling roles characteristically taken on by state cultural institutions in small nations, Al-Essa is able to credibly address young readers otherwise beyond the reach of government-funded literary centres.

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### Presentation 2

#### A Proposed Framework for Studying the Response of the Arab Audience to Literature. YouTube Comments on the Poem *Spartacus' Last Words* by Amal Dunqul as an Example (in Arabic)

**Presenter:** Emad Abdul-Latif

#### Abstract

*Balaghat Al-Jumhour* (Audience rhetoric) studies the relationship between discourse and the actual responses produced by its recipients. *Balaghat Al-Jumhour* aims at rhetorical empowerment of the audiences by providing them with cognitive tools. That enables it to resist authoritarian discourses, and distinguishes between rhetorical responses that resist discourses that practice discrimination, domination, exclusion, racism, hatred, or other forms of abuse of discourse and non-rhetorical responses that support such.

Within this framework, some studies have investigated the responses of readers to literary texts in both natural and virtual spaces, such as analyzing reader responses to literary texts in mainly virtual public communication spaces, especially the site Goodreads (Abdul Latif 2018, Al-Samadi 2018, Al-Athba 2018, Al-Yazghi 2018). These studies examine the characteristics of the reader's responses and interactions.

The paper offers a framework for analysing the responses of Arab audiences to literature in virtual space. It applies this framework to the comments left by readers on videos of seven



different versions or readings of Amal Dunqul's poem, *Spartacus' Last Words*, published on YouTube. The proposed framework includes several procedures and phases for analysing the interaction between the discourse and audiences and interactions between the various readers leaving comments on the videos. This framework aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- What factors affect the audiences' responses, and how do they produce these effects?
- What is the relationship between the audience's responses and the linguistic, stylistic and aesthetic structure of the text, its performance, the medium of its circulation, and the context of its reception?
- What is the role of the audience's immediate responses in directing the discourse and in supporting or resisting the author's authority?

### Presentation 3

#### Augmented Reading and Distributed Authorship: Arabic Literature in an Artificial Intelligence Age

**Presenters:** Reham Hosny and Mohamed A. Nasef

##### **Abstract**

The triad of the reader, the author, and the text is experiencing great mutations with the advent of the new digital paradigm and its emergent born-digital literary forms, which are called electronic literature. "Reader agency" has increased since the appearance of electronic literary studies in the late 1980s (Murray 2018) and authorship has become a distributed/shared/collaborative activity between the author and the reader/interactor. With the development of digital communication technologies and the appearance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), more advanced capacities and roles have been assigned to this triad. In the Arabic context, the novel *Al-Barrah* (2019, 2021) by Reham Hosny and Mohamed A. Nasef, the winner of the Robert Coover Award's Honorable Mention (June 2022), is the first Arabic literary work to make use of AI technology to immerse the reader in its fictional narrative and distribute authorship between the authors and the readers/users. The poetics and aesthetics of *Al-Barrah* take place and manifest at the liminal zone between print and digital with the help of an augmented reality application. This practice-based presentation will reflect on the dynamics of interaction and collaboration among the pillars of the reader-author-text triad and their manifestations in *Al-Barrah*. The main aim of this presentation is to trace the development of reading, authorship, and textuality in their journey from literacy into digitality to conceptualize and define their new roles and horizons in the Arabic literature. A close-reading approach inspired by electronic literary studies and our own experience in writing/developing *Al-Barrah* will be employed. The first theoretical part of this presentation will provide its theoretical and conceptual framework and reflect on related concepts such as interactivity, augmented and immersive textuality, distributed authorship, and augmented and immersive reading. The second empirical part will explore how *Al-Barrah*'s creative tactics and dynamics have opened new avenues and expanded the boundaries of authorship and reading in Arabic literature.

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#### Presentation 4

### Prison Heritage: On the Making, Circulation, and Reading of a Journal Inside Palestine Branch

**Presenters:** Anne-Marie McManus & Jaber Baker

#### **Abstract**

Since its emergence in the 1970s, the genre of Arabic prison literature has been studied through the lens of human rights and survival (e.g., Elimelekh 2014; Booth 1987; Taleghani 2021). While such studies rarely engage directly with the readership of prison literature, this framing of the sub-field has meant that prison literature is almost always understood to be received outside prisons. Indeed, the production of this genre has also been traditionally understood as an external matter, with scholars highlighting how the writing of prison memoirs permits survivors to reconstruct their language and selves in acts of resistance against the states that detained them. Although studies have acknowledged that detainees wrote and composed literature inside MENA prisons, under varying circumstances and access to writing materials (e.g., Nashif 2008), no research has attempted to theorize these practices in relation to prison literature's circuits of production and reception within carceral walls.

The proposed presentation is part of an ongoing collaboration by Baker and McManus, titled "Prison Heritage" that situates the production and reception of Syrian prison literatures and narratives within broader material practices of making and re-fashioning (e.g., clothes, musical instruments, furniture, medical tools) inside Syrian prisons and detention centers since the late 1970s. Through interviews with former detainees, our research explores material and embodied aspects of literature's making (e.g., the fashioning of paper, the binding of pages, memorization), as well as its transmission and reception among detainees. We propose to present the case study of *al-Bidaya*, a journal of approximately 15 issues that ran to lengths of between 70 and 80 pages and was first "published" in 1989 inside Palestine Branch, one of the most notorious detention centers in Damascus. Based on interviews with one of the journal's editors, who is now resident in France and who managed to smuggle out exemplary pages of the journals, we will detail the practices of literary making and readership that took place within the tiny, overcrowded cell that held 25 men. Finally, we will speculate on the methodologies needed to conduct this kind of research and its connection to wider inquiries into the readership of Arabic literatures.

#### Presentation 5

### Reading Egyptian Literature at Home and Abroad: Transnational Reception of Mīrāl al-Ṭahāwī's *Brooklyn Heights*

**Presenter:** Nancy Linthicum

#### **Abstract**

This paper examines the reception of Mīrāl al-Tahāwī's award-winning novel *Brooklyn Heights* by a diverse group of national and transnational readers, with particular attention to how prizes and translation have affected who reads contemporary Arabic literature and how they read it. Originally written in Arabic and published in Cairo in 2010, al-Tahāwī's diasporic novel presents the fractured story of Hend, a single mother who immigrates to post-9/11 New York from Egypt with her young son. Within a year of its publication, *Brooklyn Heights* won the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature, a prize that introduces each year's winning novel to global, Anglophone audiences via translation and publication with the well-established American University in Cairo Press.

Using data collected from the social cataloguing site Goodreads, I provide a reader reception study with analysis of bibliographic data, ratings, identity markers like language and location, and close readings of posted reviews and comments about *Brooklyn Heights*. I identify alternative modes of reading used by Goodreads readers that cross linguistic and national boundaries and defy practices typically anticipated and employed by academics. Such modes include, notably, affective and anthropological readings, conflation of author and protagonist, personal judgements about the author, and interactive readings fostered by digital media, like Goodreads. Drawing on scholarship in literary studies, cultural studies, and reception (e.g., Amireh, Jacquemond, Mehrez, English, Murray), I examine these “lay” reading practices and bring them into conversation with contemporary debates among local critics and scholars about prize culture and the problematic discourse of *kitābat al-banāt* (girls’ writing), in which al-Tahāwī frequently featured. I argue that the reading practices observed on Goodreads, far from being invalid, provide critical insight into transnational reception of the novel and, when examined alongside relevant literary critical debates, reveal concerns about audience, prizes, and translation to be consistent, underlying factors in how readers, regardless of language, profession, and location, have engaged with and interpreted al-Tahāwī’s novel. This paper is part of a wider call to incorporate more critical studies of readers and reception into literary studies, which traditionally has either neglected this aspect or privileged Anglophone readers and scholarly reading practices.

## Presentation 6

### Readings of the Revolution: The Transregional Reception of al-Aswany’s *Republic of False Truths* (2018) on Social Media

**Presenters:** Christian Junge & Sohaila Awad

#### **Abstract**

In the aftermath of the 25 January revolution in Egypt, no novel about the uprisings has received as much attention as Alaa al-Aswany’s *Jumhuriyat ka’anna* (*The Republic of False Truths*). Published in Lebanon in 2018 and banned in Egypt shortly afterwards, the book has been translated into many languages. It is a fictionalized account of the Egyptian revolution in 2011 that – despite and because of the ban – has found its way to many readers in Egypt, the so-called Arab world and the so-called West.

This paper looks at a wide range of book reviews by non-professional readers from Egypt, the Arab world and the West who post and discuss their literary and political readings of the novel and the revolution on the popular social media platform goodreads.com. Returning to the “horizon of expectation” (Jauß) as discussed in reader-response criticism and combining it with new insights from empirical and digital reader research (e.g., Rehberg Sedo), this paper seeks to understand the social function of literature for making sense of historical change. To this end, a qualitative content analysis (Mayring) of in total 60 Arabic, English, French and German goodreads reviews is conducted, which analyzes the main literary and political debates and highlights the diversity of interpretation and evaluation. To understand the common and different “uses of literature” (Felski) amongst readers, this paper, then, discusses in detail 5 reviews of Egyptian reviewers who have either actively participated in the revolution or been a witness of it and 5 reviews of non-Arab reviewers who presumably know little about the revolution.

To sum up, this study seeks to reinvigorate the classic debate about the relationship between literature and society by getting the word out to ‘ordinary’ readers and transcending the limitations of ‘national literature’. By using social media as an analytical tool and object for reader research, it also argues for bringing together empirical, hermeneutic and digital methods and developing a postcolonial approach to (trans-)regional communities.



## Keynote Lecture I

### Readers, Connected: On the Rise of “Bookish” Social Media

**Speaker:** Dorothee Birke

#### **Abstract**

The “Digital Literary Sphere” (Murray) offers new platforms for readers to connect around their love of books. While the “bookish” social media have so far mainly been discussed as a “new reviewing culture”, focused on the discussion of particular books, my contention is that we get a fuller and fairer impression of venues such as BookTube or Booktok if we understand them as sites where creators perform reading practices as well as their identities as readers.

In my talk, I will first introduce some of the main formats afforded by bookish social media and then explore the extent to which they can be said to engender new reading practices. Specifically, two common perceptions with regard to the new social reading culture will be considered: that it turns the solitary practice of literary reading into a social one, and that it signals an affective turn, foregrounding the emotional impact of reading. As I want to show, both of these claims capture some distinctive traits of digital reading culture, but they also fall short in that they proceed from a very narrow understanding of what it means to “do” literary reading. I will show how a diachronic perspective helps to identify long-standing strands of social and affect-oriented reading practices – and how looking to the history of novel reading in the eighteenth century in particular may help us to assess what is truly “new” about digital reading culture.

## Keynote Lecture II

### Reading for Normal: Young People and Fiction in the Time of Covid-19

**Speaker:** Alison Waller

#### **Abstract**

Young adult fiction often invites its readers to examine the nature of identity and selfhood: and recent novels such as Lisa Williamson’s *The Art of Being Normal* (2014) and Holly Bourne’s *Am I Normal Yet?* (2014) even seed questions about what it is to exist in relation to others in their provocative titles. In this talk, I will interrogate the notion of “reading for normal” and suggest ways that reading YA fiction in temporary online communities might help teen readers critically engage with potentially damaging ideas about social norms. I will discuss the Reading for Normal project, which worked with schools in England in 2020–21 in the context of the Covid pandemic. The project introduced a group of young people to British YA novels, including Alice Oseman’s *I Was Born for This* (2018) and Danielle Jawando’s *And the Stars were Burning Brightly* (2020), and asked them to discuss their own experiences before and during “lockdowns” in relation to these texts. I will argue that reading contemporary realist YA novels provided these young readers with recognisable versions of their own pre-pandemic worlds, and that talking about their everyday lives in relation to this fiction allowed them to explore moments of “ordinariness” together in various beneficial ways. These findings have implications beyond the Covid era, and I will end by considering the possibilities for cultural exchange and further gains for adolescent wellbeing through establishing international reading group programmes.

## Presentation 7

### Modern Arabic Literature and the General Education Classroom: A Case Study

**Presenter:** Katie Logan

#### **Abstract**

This paper addresses modern Arabic literature readership in the context of general education at American universities. Virginia Commonwealth University's new "ConnectEd" curriculum (2021) prioritizes core skills of creative and critical problem solving, communicative fluency and "global and cultural responsiveness". My Spring 2022 course, "Immigration Imagined", fulfilled these learning foundations by introducing underclasspeople to contemporary Arab and Arab-American literatures. The curriculum's call to consider the ethics of reading globally and cross-culturally prepared even students with no regional or linguistic experience to engage syllabus texts with nuance. In this paper, I'll introduce Miral al-Tahawy's *Brooklyn Heights* (2010; 2014) as a case study that demonstrates how I teach a contemporary Arabic novel in English translation to non-expert students. These strategies include early contextual work; discussion of translation and literary awards culture (Kaminsky and Kirsch, 2010; MacArthur, 2014; Gold, 2020; AUC Press, 2022); and assignment design that challenges student assumptions about Arabic literature while encouraging them to reflect on their own relationships to language, family, and place. Ultimately, I address these questions: What challenges and opportunities present themselves to scholars of modern Arabic literature incorporating these materials into a general education classroom? How can educators cultivate students' confidence to explore new materials while reminding them of the limits of that knowledge? And how do we encourage students to make connections across experience—one of the main goals of a general, liberal arts education—while remaining attentive to the specificities of those experiences?

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## Presentation 8

### "But this Novel is Full of 'Ammya!": Language Ideologies in the Responses of Lebanese High School Students to two Arabic Adolescent Novels

**Presenter:** Susanne Abou Ghaida

#### **Abstract**

In 2017, I carried out fieldwork with students at a public secondary school in Beirut, Lebanon, to examine their responses to two Arabic adolescent novels, Fatima Sharafeddine's *Cappuccino* and Taghreed Najjar's *Loghz Ayn As-Saqr* [Falcon Eye Mystery]. In addition to engaging with the characters and themes of the two novels, the research participants were highly sensitive to the

language variety used by the authors, in particular, what they perceived as the excessive use of colloquial Arabic. While the students, overall, appeared to be opposed to the use of colloquial Arabic, a closer look at individual responses reveals fissures, shifts and intriguing contradictions. These will be examined through a focused look at the attitudes of four female students, drawing upon the critical literature on Arabic diglossia, language ideologies, constructions of adolescence and the Brooke and Browne's (2012) concept of culturally situated reader response. For the most part, these four young women subscribe to binary conceptions regarding the use of colloquial versus standard Arabic in literature, with the standard variety viewed as more legitimate, sophisticated but also distancing. On the other hand, colloquial Arabic was seen as a gesture of rapprochement from the writer towards the young reader. In addition, the expression of their language ideologies contained reflections on the relationship between language and identity while being shaped by larger debates and discourses around the Arabic language, the position of Arabic in the educational policies of post-civil war Lebanon, student identities and notions of youth, youth language and youth culture.

## Presentation 9

### Book Clubs in Lebanon: A Particular Form of Sociability

**Presenter:** Maud Stephan-Hachem

#### Abstract

During the years 2018 and 2019, a certain proliferation of meetings of reading groups, visible on Lebanese social networks, raised the question as to the psycho-social functions of book-related sociability.

A questionnaire was sent to reading clubs' organizers, another one to their members. The latter aimed to analyze the socio-demographic characteristics of book clubs' members, their motivations for reading and for participating in book clubs, and the impact of the club on their reading practice. 33 book clubs and 224 participants answered. Interviews with the founders of 12 book clubs were furthermore conducted to discuss the history of the group and the relationships within the group, and the observation of nine sessions gave us an insight into the way texts are received by participants.

While the motivations for reading were found to be mainly cognitive, more varied psychological and social motivations lead readers to participate in book clubs. We suggest that, in the troubled social and political context, these motivations could be an aspiration to more harmony in interpersonal relationships, a desire to get out of the framework of imposed family and community relations and meet people from various backgrounds.

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## Presentation 10

### Modern Arabic Literature and the Reading Politics of Book Clubs

**Presenter:** Mounira Soliman

#### Abstract

Book Clubs are about communities of readers who come together to share their reading interests, discuss and contest ideas, seek knowledge, and connect intellectually, and socially, with other people. In that sense, book clubs are meant to make reading less of a solitary activity, and more of a communal one. Book clubs are also about space, in both its physical and metaphorical sense, where groups of people meet for a certain duration of time, and individuals find a safe space that encompasses, and may even welcome, their difference. These two major elements that define book clubs, that is community and space, were jeopardized after the January 2011 revolution in Egypt. Different forms of congregations were discouraged for fear of political mobilization, and access to public space gradually dwindled. How did this affect the reading practices of book clubs? Book clubs in Egypt mostly fall into two categories, independent book clubs, and those that are associated with publishing houses and bookshops. Each type is characterized by different readership, choice of books, and reading practices. They often overlap especially where book choices are concerned but readers who belong to both types tend to have different experiences. More recently, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, online book clubs became more popular as alternative platforms, and inadvertently managed to overcome some of the problems imposed upon book clubs post 2011. This paper is part of a larger project where I study the two types of book clubs and their digital formats. In this presentation, I will focus on independent book clubs, and share my observations on issues regarding physical and digital readership communities, book choice and censorship, and the relationship of book club admins and members.

## Presentation 11

### Who, Why and How Readers Perceive *Layla* Magazine (1923–1925)?

**Presenter:** Nadeen Abboud

#### Abstract

In *Reception*, Ilka Willis (2018) states that a literary text exists when it is read, so we cannot consider it alive without having readers (p.2). This approach to analyzing literature forces us to think about the readers of *Layla*; the first women's literary magazine in Iraq which was published between 1923 and 1925.

A magazine's episodic structure offers us a distinctive vantage point for grappling with the dynamic interaction between structure between readers and writers as it changes over time. This interaction comes to shape the magazine as writers respond to the readers' response as well as when articles sent by readers are published, turning the latter into writers. The extant

scholarship on *Layla* magazine does not tackle the issue of who, why, and how readers perceive, and interact with, the content of the magazine. This point is crucial in approaching *Layla* whose founder and editor-in-chief Pauline Hassoun adapts an overtly gendered approach to readership. In the preface to the first edition of the magazine, Hassoun explicitly states that her enterprise is addressed to the Iraqi girls and families with the goal of revolutionizing the community, promoting women's rights against traditional stereotypes.

In this paper, I address the question of gendered readership in *Layla*, comparing the magazine's mode of address of its readers across genders while also looking into how men and women interact with *Layla* using the readers' published correspondence. Therefore, analyzing the magazine from the readers' point of view may lead to a different understanding that is related to the effect of social and political structures authority on the magazine content.

## Presentation 12

### How to Write, How to Read and How to Critique Books? Debates on Literature and Criticism in Periodicals of the Nahda Period

**Presenter:** Barbara Winckler

#### **Abstract**

The periodical press of the Nahda period is considered one of the driving forces for the transformation processes of the late 19th/early 20th centuries. Reaching a much broader public than earlier media, the periodical press became the most influential medium of the time. The emergence of privately published journals, particularly in the last third of the 19th century, fostered the development of a new and lively debate culture. Encouraging their readers to submit their own letters and contributions, journal editors aimed at stimulating the exchange of knowledge and opinions.

My paper will focus on selected aspects related to the periodical press as a medium through which literature is published, distributed, advertised and discussed. Besides early examples of the emerging genre of the Arabic novel, typically published serially in journals, periodicals present short announcements of recently published books, review articles of individual literary texts as well as contributions that discuss the good and harm of reading and reading practices (What to read and how to read?) or the adequate form of literary criticism (How to critique books, and how to select them?). Assuming the mission of providing an authoritative selection of knowledge and culture, authors criticize, for instance, the way books are reviewed, blaming reviewers to shrink from providing critical readings and authors to accept them, often referring to Western models of (literary) criticism. While previous studies have analyzed, for instance, the opinions and criteria of literary criticism (Haist 2000) or social and medial structures of the debates, skating only briefly over the question of literary criticism (Glaß 2004, vol. 1, 307-313), my paper aims at exploring the way journal editors and authors (as writers and readers) as well as 'ordinary' readers interact on the pages of the journal (and maybe beyond), turning it into a forum for debate of questions related to reading and (offering and receiving) criticism.



## List of Speakers

**Nadeen Abboud** is currently a master's student at the American University of Beirut. Her research interests include 19th and 20th century literature, especially topics related to women, the development of literature, as well as literature and society. She has a BA in Arabic language and literature from the Lebanese American University.

**Emad Abdul-Latif** is a professor at Qatar University. He studied Arabic rhetoric and political discourse analysis at Cairo University (Egypt) and Lancaster University (England). He has published nearly 35 articles, co-authored 17 books, translated, and reviewed six books from English to Arabic. Dr. Abdul-Latif was awarded the 2011 international Al Muhajir Award of Thought and Literature and Arts, Melbourne, Australia, and Cairo University's award for best PhD thesis in 2008. He also received the 2010 Taha Hussein Award for Linguistics and Criticism in Egypt and the Arab World from Egypt's Supreme Council for Culture. In 2013, he won the prize for best Arab book in Social Sciences from the Egyptian Ministry of Culture for *The Rhetoric of Liberation*.

**Susanne Abou Ghaida** is an independent researcher specialized in Arabic children's and adolescent literature. She has a PhD in Education from the University of Glasgow where she conducted doctoral research on the Arabic adolescent novel and constructions of adolescence. She has researched and written about a number of subjects, including oral history and memory; multicultural picture books; disability; and sexuality in Arabic children's literature.

**Shahd Alshammari** is a Kuwaiti-Palestinian author and academic. She is the author of *Notes on the Flesh* (Faraxa Press, 2017) and *Head Above Water* (Neem Tree Press, 2022). Alshammari teaches English literature at the Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait, and has written numerous stories and creative nonfiction. Her research areas include illness narratives and disability studies. She is a member of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA).

**Sohaila Awad** holds a master's degree in Politics and Economics of the Middle East. She took up studying law in Alexandria/Egypt and then moved to Germany in 2013, where she studied Middle Eastern & Gender Studies in Marburg. Since 2019, she has been working as a subject-matter expert in political extremism and radicalization prevention.

**Jaber Baker** is a researcher who specializes in the Syrian prison field and co-author of *The Syrian Gulag* (published in Dutch 2022; English and Arabic translations forthcoming). He is also a filmmaker, cultural and human rights activist, and novelist.

**Dorothee Birke** is professor of Anglophone Literatures at the University of Innsbruck, Austria. She has held research fellowships at the Freiburg Institute of Advanced Studies and the Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies. Among her research interests are the history of the novel and studies of reading and reception, particularly in the context of the eighteenth century and of the digital age. On these subjects she has published a monograph (*Writing the Reader: Configurations of Reading as a Cultural Practice in the English Novel*, de Gruyter 2016) as well as book chapters (e.g., in the forthcoming *Routledge Companion of Literary Media*) and journal articles (e.g., in a special issue on Modes of Reading in *Poetics Today*, 2021).

**Reham Hosny** is an Assistant Professor at Minia University, Egypt, and previously, she was a Lecturer at the University of Leeds, UK. Her research focuses on creating links between the well-established Western electronic literature communities and the growing digital culture innovators of other underrepresented communities. She is particularly interested in investigating the cultural, social, and political contexts of Arabic and Anglo-American electronic literature. Additionally, she is a creative writer and her co-authored novel, *Al-Barrah* [The Announcer] (2019, 2021), the first Arabic artificial intelligence novel, won the 2022 Robert Coover Award's Honorable Mention and her short story collection *Amma Ba'd*

[And thereafter] (2012) won the Ihsan Abdel Quddous Literary Prize for short story writing. She is the first Arab and African to be elected as a board member of the international Electronic Literature Organization (ELO) and she works as an international consultant for the Electronic Literature collection 4 issued by the ELO. She manages arabicelit, the first initiative focused on globalizing Arabic electronic literature in the English language. She is a reviewer and co-editor of various academic journals and a member of various international research networks such as the Intersections, Feminism, Technology & Digital Humanities network (IFTe) and the Global AI Narrative (GAIN) network in the MENA region.

**Christian Junge** is a senior lecturer and researcher in the field of modern Arabic literature and culture at the Center for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Marburg. He studied comparative literature and Arabic studies in Berlin, Paris and Cairo and was visiting professor of “Cultural Studies of the Middle East” at Bamberg University in 2021/22. He received his PhD from the Freie Universität in Berlin with a work on the 19th century writer and thinker Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (*Die Entblöbung der Wörter*, 2019). His recent book project “Affective Readings” deals with society and emotion in/of Egyptian literature from 1990 to 2020. His recent publications include the co-authored monograph *Arabistik: Eine literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Einführung* (2021). He is a member of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) and co-director of the international summer school program “Arabische Philologien im Blickwechsel / Nahwā dirāsāt 'arabiyyah bi-ru'ā muta'addidah”.

**Ildiko Kaposi** is a social scientist whose work focuses on issues of democracy from the perspective of media and communication. Employing mainly qualitative methods, she specializes in in-depth explorations of the intersections of democratic principles and their interpretations in specific social, legal, political, and cultural contexts. She teaches at the Mass Communication and Media department of the Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait.

**Nancy Linthicum** is Assistant Professor of Arabic Studies at the University of South Carolina, where she currently also serves as Arabic Program Director. Her research bridges sociology of literature and literary criticism and focuses on contemporary Arabic literature and literary culture. Her current book project investigates how key cultural institutions (e.g., publishing houses, literary journals, prizes) influenced the production, circulation, and reception of Egypt's “nineties generation” of writers and their experimental literature over the 1990s and up to the 2011 revolution. It is a revised expansion of her dissertation, which won the Middle East Studies Association Kerr Award (Humanities) in 2019. She holds a PhD and Master's in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan and obtained her BA from Barnard College, Columbia University. She was a Center for Arabic Study Abroad I and II Fellow in Cairo, and her work appeared recently in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*.

**Katie Logan** is currently an Associate Professor of Focused Inquiry, Virginia Commonwealth University's interdisciplinary, general education program. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Texas at Austin, with a focus on Middle Eastern Studies and Women's and Gender Studies. Her work has appeared in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*; Brill's *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*; *Memory Studies*; and the collected volume *Cultural Productions and Social Movements after the Arab Spring*. A member of VCU's Collaborative 5x5 Humanities project, she co-chairs the Humanities Research Center's working group on memory and monuments.

**Anne-Marie McManus** is principal investigator of the ERC-funded grant SYRASP (The Prison Narratives of Assad's Syria) at Berlin's Forum Transregionale Studien. She is a comparative literary scholar of Arabic, French, and English literatures, and her recent writing appears in *Critical Inquiry*, *The Cambridge History of World Literature*, *Books & Ideas*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, and *The Journal of World Literature*. She is a member of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA).

**Mohamed A. Nasef** is an Assistant Professor of Geographical Information Science (GIS) at Minia University, Egypt. He earned a PhD in GIScience from the University of Leeds, UK, 2020 and a MSc degree in GIScience and Systems from the Salzburg University, Austria, 2011. He is the co-author of the first Arabic artificial intelligence novel, *Al-Barrah* (The Announcer) (2019, 2021), the winner of the 2022 Robert Coover Award's Honorable Mention. Dr. Nasef teaches geospatial technologies courses at Minia University, and he is a web and mobile applications developer. He has developed a number of digital applications in different fields.

**Mounira Soliman** is a Professor in the Department of English at Cairo University. She is the co-editor of *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook* (2013). Her most recent publication is a co-edited special issue on *Artivism, Culture and Knowledge Production for Egalitarian Citizenship in the Middle East and North Africa* (Brill, 2020). Dr. Soliman was a visiting fellow at the John F. Kennedy Institute at Freie Universität in Berlin (2019). Her research interests focus on Popular Culture and Middle East Studies. She is the joint recipient of the 2021-2022 Research in the Arts Program grant from the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) and the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS) for her current project on Egyptian culinary literature.

**Maud Stephan Hachem** is a retired Professor of Information and Libraries Sciences at the Lebanese University (1979-2015). Her main fields of research are publishing, reading practices, libraries and information management. In the past, she has also served as a scientific advisor, and one time Head of the Lebanese National Library Rehabilitation Project, an advisor to the Minister of Culture on books and reading policies and Head of the program for the establishment of the Centers for Reading and Cultural Animation (CLAC) Network of the Lebanese Ministry of Culture in cooperation with the Francophone International Organization (OIF). She is a member of the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers, the administrative committee of the ASSABIL Association and the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee of Shamaa Arab Educational Information. Her publications include the books *Tijārat al-harf al-matbū'* (Trading the Printed Letter) and *al-Kitāb nashran wa-intishāran* (The Book as Publication and Dissemination) and various book chapters and academic articles on reading, libraries and the cultural practices of various groups.

**Alison Waller** is a researcher, writer, and educator with interests in young adult literature and reading studies. She was Principal Investigator on the British-Academy-funded project Reading for Normal: Young People and Fiction in the time of Covid (2020-21) and has since established the Reading4Normal Book Club ([www.reading4normal.com](http://www.reading4normal.com)). Alison is author of *Constructing Adolescence in Fantastic Realism* (Routledge 2009) and *Rereading Childhood Books: a Poetics* (Bloomsbury 2019), as well as many articles and chapters on YA and children's literature, arts participation, and reading methodologies. She is General Editor of *The International Journal of Young Adult Literature* (IJYAL) and has edited several collections and special issues, including a Palgrave Casebook on Melvin Burgess (2013) and an issue on "Life Stages" for *International Research in Children's Literature* (2021). She is Honorary Reader at the University of Roehampton.

**Barbara Winckler** is a senior lecturer of modern Arabic literature and culture at the University of Münster. Her research interests cover modern and contemporary Arabic literature and arts (particularly war and post-war discourses in Lebanon), Arabic periodicals and cultural history of the Nahdah period, and recent developments in Arabic studies as an academic discipline. She has published numerous articles and two books, *Grenzgänge: Androgynie–Wahnsinn–Utopie im Romanwerk von Hudā Barakāt* (Moving Across/Along Borders: Androgyny–Madness–Utopia in Hudā Barakāt's Early Novels, 2014) and *Al-Dirāsāt al-'arabiyyah wa-intifādāt al-rabī' al-'arabī* (2019, coauthored), and co-edited several volumes and special issues, including *Arabic Literature–Postmodern Perspectives* (2010), *Thinking through Ruins* (2022), *Media Transitions and Cultural Debates in Arab Societies* (special issue MEJCC, 2022) and *The Humanities in the 21st Century: Perspectives from the Arab World and Germany* (English/Arabic, 2022). She is an AGYA alumna and co-director of the international summer school program "Arabische Philologien im Blickwechsel / Nahwā dirāsāt 'arabiyyah bi-ru'ā muta'addidah" ([arabic-philologies.de/en](http://arabic-philologies.de/en)).