

MULOSIGE Reading List: Egypt, Narrative Tradition and the *Arabian Nights*

Reading List Description

Professor Marina Warner guides us through a partial list of the books that she has been reading. This reading list originates from books that Warner found enlightening while reading for her book *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (Vintage: 2012). This reading list has also informed the “unreliable memoir” of Warner’s childhood in Egypt, which she has been writing for nearly two decades.

Reading List contributor:

Professor Marina Warner is a Professorial Research Associate at SOAS University of London, Professor of English and Creative Writing at Birkbeck College, University of London, and a Distinguished Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. She was awarded the Holberg Prize in 2015. Since 2016, she has been working on the themes of sanctuary and culture in times of dislocation and diaspora, developing the international [Stories in Transit project](#), which aspires to work with displaced individuals, whatever their status, asking: “What role can imaginary narratives play in contemporary conditions?” and “Can make-believe help make-truth?”

[Readings](#)

Aciman, André. *Out of Egypt*. Faber & Faber: New York; Main Edition - Republished (2019).

- A work of literature, this memoir captures the character of life in Alexandria after the war with exceptional powers of recollection and deep affection.

Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg: Volumes One and Two* (paperback), translated by Humphrey Davies. New York: Library of Arabic Literature; Reprint edition (2015), {The dual language hardback is in 4 vols}.

- Hugely entertaining, astonishing erudite and inquisitive, this is a pioneering work of autobiographical fiction first published in 1850 in Paris.

Ahmed, Leila. *A Border Passage: From Cairo to America - A Woman's Journey*. Penguin Books: New York; Reprint edition (2012).

- The eminent feminist professor recalls her life as a child in Egypt under Nasser and a young woman in Cambridge, England.

Al-Nuwayri, Shihab al-Din. *The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition*. Trans Elias Muhanna. London: Penguin Classics. (2016).

- The learned, entertaining encyclopaedist’s summary of knowledge in his time has been brilliantly selected and rendered by the historian Elias Muhanna; the book presents us with

wisdom, lore and fantasy in areas ranging from scripture to entomology. The detail is exquisite , the overall impression fabulous.

Al-Sai, Ibn. *Consorts of the Caliphs: Women and the Court of Baghdad*. trans, Shawkat M. Toorawa, Julia Bray, Marina Warner, The Editors of the Library of Arabic Literature NYU Press; Reprint, Bilingual edition (2017).

- As the Abbasid empire was nearing the end, the historian Ibn al-Sai collected memories about the many remarkable women – queens, concubines, lovers slaves - who had composed poetry and songs and sometimes danced at the court, from the 8th to the 12th centuries. Many of them were dazzlingly accomplished individuals, who survived by their wits, and even risked all with their tongues. This pioneering translation gives a glimpse of a memorable and unexpected side of Abbasid culture.

Ballaster, Rosalind. *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785*. Oxford University Press: Oxford (2005).

- A sparkling overview of the writers and works influenced by the Nights: a feast of erudition and enjoyment.

Barghouti, Mourid. *Midnight and Other Poems*. Trans Radwa Ashour. Arc Publications (2008).

- A sensitive rendering of Barghouti's poignant songs of loss and hurt, by the late novelist Radwa Ashour, his wife.

Fanon, Frantz. *Les Damnés de la Terre*, (The Wretched of the Earth). La Découverte Editions (2002).

- A seminal work, which has not unfortunately become outdated by history.

Golia, Maria. *Cairo: City of Sand (Topographics)*. Reaktion Books: London (2004).

- The city, ancient and modern, gracious and chaotic is evoked vividly and lovingly by the writer, who has lived in Egypt since the Seventies.

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Himmich, Bensalem. *A Muslim Suicide*. (Middle East Literature in Translation). Syracuse University Press; Translation edition (2012).

- A powerful novel, in which Himmich dramatizes the life and death of the Sufi philosopher and through the history of his troubles, reflects on current hostilities.

Hodgkin, Thomas. *Letters from Palestine, 1932-36*. Trans. E.C. Hodgkin Quartet Books; First edition (1986).

- Not sufficiently widely read, these reports from the turbulence in the region make exceptionally vivid and thoughtful reading: the future husband of the scientist Dorothy Hodgkin was a young official in the Foreign Office who resigned when he saw where British policy was going.

Irwin, Robert. *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. Tauris Parke Paperbacks: New York (2004).

- This invaluable , high-spirited and wide-ranging exploration of the stories was given to me to review in the TLS when it first came out and set me on the path to discovering the riches of Arabic storytelling.

Kennedy, Philip F. *Recognition in the Arabic Narrative Tradition: Discovery, Deliverance and Delusion* (Edinburgh Studies in Classical Arabic Literature) by Edinburgh University Press (2016).

- Incomparable in-depth reading of stories in the Qur'an and the Maqamat: with detailed comparative analysis Kennedy picks out recurring patterns and motifs across sacred and secular literature.

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Kilito, Abdelfattah. *Arabs and the Art of Storytelling: A Strange Familiarity* (Middle East Literature In Translation) Trans Mbarek Sryfi and Eric Sellin/Syracuse University Press; Reprint edition (2017).

- Kilito is a witty and incisive scholar with very wide interests and inspiring enthusiasm for his subject. This book is a good place to begin reading him, but don't stop there.

Marzolph, Ulrich and Richard van Leeuwen. *The Arabian Nights: An Encyclopedia* (Two Volume Set) ABC-CLIO (1727).

- An indispensable aid to the stories, the themes and characters, variants and media versions, scholars and critics who have responded to the *Arabian Nights*.

Reynolds, Nancy. *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt*. Stanford: Stanford University Press (2012).

- Stanford University Press (2012) In-depth research, original analysis and powerful engagement with the political complexity of postwar Egypt make this scholarly work exceptionally illuminating and lively.

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