

غرفة في روما (A Room in Rome)–Hassan Najmi
 صلصال الشاعر (The Poet's Clay)–Mahmud Sobh
 الشراع الحر (Free Sail)–Mahmud Sobh
 رمال (Sands)–Hassan Najmi
 نورس (Seagull)–Hassan Najmi
 ساحة القطار (The Station Square)–Hassan Najmi
 تقاسيم (Taqasim)–Mahmud Sobh
 الكمنجات (The Violins)–Hassan Najmi
 هميسيس (Whispers)–Hassan Najmi
 النافذة (The Window)–Hassan Najmi

THALIA PANDIRI

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As our guest editors Mohamed ElSawi Hassan and Nahla Khalil say in their introduction, this special issue has been long in the making and the road has often been a bumpy one. Very soon after the publication of the 2007 special issue dedicated to literature from the Arab world, broadly defined (edited by Moroccan native Meriem Pagès with Mohamed ElSawi Hassan), we began to plan a sequel. Work on the issue began while Mohamed and Nahla were still teaching at Smith and Amherst colleges, respectively, but we had barely gotten under way when they returned to Cairo. The hurdles of long-distance collaboration, as well as technical difficulties, have increased the gestation period of this issue, and we have all learned much in the process. We are happy to add to the relatively small sample of Arabic literature accessible to Anglophone readers. Contemporary literature from the (controversially termed) “Arab world” has for some time attracted a reading public in quite a few European countries, whether translated from Arabic into French, German, Italian, Greek—for instance—or from French (in the case of francophone Arab writers) into other European languages. While in countries like Italy and Greece translations of contemporary literature account for a very large percentage of new books published each year, translated books, especially literary works, have become increasingly hard to publish in the USA as large, commercial publishers have in recent decades become indistinguishable from other kinds of corporations. Fortunately, in recent years more works of poetry and especially of fiction from Arabic-speaking countries have become available in English, most often published by pioneering small publishing

houses such as Interlink Books (Northampton, Massachusetts). We offer in this issue poets and fiction writers from different countries and different periods, many if not most of whom are unfamiliar to Anglophone readers. Our hope is to whet our readers' appetites for more texts from a long, rich and varied literary tradition.

The editors, contributors and readers of *Metamorphoses* also care about the practice of literary translation: what are the challenges a particular text poses for the translator, and how does the translator choose to solve problems of idiom, meter or prose rhythm, sounds, syntactic differences between the source text and its translation? How can the translator bridge the gap between very different cultures? How is a target audience identified, and to what degree should the translator make concessions to the expectations of that audience? What theoretical frameworks or assumptions help shape the translator's approach? In short, while the product is of paramount importance, the process of translation is also very much a focus of this journal. The challenges of translation from Arabic into English have not as yet been the focus of much serious study, so we welcome the opportunity to contribute modestly to a discussion that is bound to become very important in the near future.

I am particularly grateful to the interns—students at Smith, Hampshire, and Mount Holyoke colleges, particularly Nimisha Bhat and Elizabeth Brasington who wrestled with the Arabic texts, and to Erica Zhang, on whose invaluable assistance I have come to rely. Many thanks to Martin Walkow, a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts who stepped in during our last push to help solve technical challenges, and to my colleague Lara Matta who graciously proofread the Arabic texts at the busiest time in the academic year. I would also

like to thank Joanne Cannon, who enabled us to acquire, in the nick of time, the software that made layout of Arabic fonts possible, and Frank Citino for mastering the audio CD of poetry read by Nahla Khalil, and designing the label.

I would like to thank all the contributors who have given us their work and who have collaborated with us, and in some cases waited patiently for years to see their work in print. Smith College, Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, the University of Massachusetts, Five Colleges, Inc. and the Translation Center at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst also continued their support of *Metamorphoses* despite budget cuts in these parlous times. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the Betty Hamady Sams '57 and James F. Sams Fund (administered through the Louise W. and Edmund J. Kahn Liberal Arts Institute, Smith College) for a very generous grant that has made the publication of this issue possible. As always, we thank you, our subscribers and readers, for your continued support.

In closing, I would like to offer a quick preview of the spring 2012 general issue, which is already taking shape, and will include fiction from Denmark, Germany, Poland, France, Mexico, Argentina, Switzerland, the Ukraine, Bulgaria and Georgia, as well as poetry translated from Urdu, Spanish, Italian, Finnish, Danish, Occitan, Hebrew, Russian, and more. As always, we encourage you to submit your own work, to introduce others to the journal, and to encourage your institutional or town libraries to subscribe.

We hope you enjoy the texts and photographs in this issue, and the audio CD of Arabic poetry read by Nahla Khalil.

*Northampton, Massachusetts
March 2011*