

AGENDA

LEBANON

THEATER

'How Nancy Wished that Everything Was an April Fool's Joke'
Masrah al-Madina, Saroulla Building, Hamra Street, Hamra, Beirut December 19-23, 26-30, 8:30 p.m.
+961 1 753 010
Rabih Mroue brings his latest creation, "How Nancy Wished that Everything Was an April Fool's Joke," about four fighters from Lebanon's Civil War who never learn and refuse to die, to Masrah al-Madina for a 10-night engagement.

FILM

'Khalass'
Metropolis Art Cinema, Saroulla Building, Hamra Street, Hamra, Beirut Until January 6, 6 p.m., 8 p.m. and 10 p.m.
+961 3 793 065
Borhane Alaouié's latest film, about art and alienation along with frustration and betrayal in reconstruction-era Beirut, is open for a month-long run at Metropolis.

Just a thought

The secret story is the one we'll never know, although we're living it from day to day, thinking we're alive, thinking we've got it all under control and the stuff we overlook doesn't matter. But every single damn thing matters! Only we don't realize. We just tell ourselves that art runs on one track and life, our lives, on another, and we don't realize that's a lie.

Roberto Bolano (1953-2003), Chilean novelist, poet

INTERVIEW: INSIDE LITERATURE

Nothing lost in translation

Margaret Obank and Samuel Shimon discuss the ins and outs of running a magazine bringing Arabic writers to Western readers

Editor's note: The following interview with Margaret Obank and Samuel Shimon of the literary magazine Banipal is the fifth in a series for which The Daily Star periodically seeks out and sits down with various, established cultural figures who work behind the scenes, provide a vital link between artists and audiences and are more often than not the unsung heroes of their fields. The point of the "Inside Interview" series is to delve into the mechanics of specific disciplines through the insights and experiences of people who work tirelessly to bring creative expression in the Arab world to a broader and often international public. Those mechanics may be political and financial as well as artistic. Interview subjects in the series include curators of contemporary art, literary translators, film festival programmers and producers and promoters working in dance, theater, music and more.

Olivia Snajje
Special to The Daily Star

LONDON: It's the day after the second annual award ceremony for the 2007 Saif Ghobash-Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, won by Farouk Abdel-Wahab (aka Farouk Mustafa) for his translation of Khairy Shalaby's "The Lodging House," published by the American University of Cairo Press. Margaret Obank and Samuel Shimon, couple extraordinaire and founders of *Banipal*, are at their home in London talking about their magazine. Shimon, an Iraqi-born writer and the assistant editor of *Banipal*, jumps up intermittently to serve champagne and chop garlic and parsley for the fowl he is preparing. *Banipal* was founded nearly a decade ago for the purpose of bringing modern Arabic literature to a wider, Western audience. Published three times a year and edited by Obank, it runs Arabic-to-English translations of short stories, excerpts from novels and poetry by authors from across the Mideast. It

counts Anton Shammas, Sinan Antoon and Issa Boullata among its contributing editors. In 2004, *Banipal* also began publishing books, such as "Sardines and Oranges," a collection of North African short stories, and Jad al-Hage's novel "The Myrtle Tree." It's not an exaggeration to say the magazine has become a quintessential bridge between Arab writers and readers in the West, giving unrivaled insight into the region's tremendously varied cultures. As Saadi Youssef, an Iraqi poet and author, once said of *Banipal*: "How did it come [to be] that a young English lady, i.e. Margaret Obank, shoulders virtually the ultimate responsibility of saving and promoting a doomed culture: Arab modern writing in general? A culture, ignored by its own people (no readers), and gagged by the Arab rulers (the heavy hand of censorship) ... With *Banipal*, we are a resistance movement!" Margaret Obank and Samuel Shimon like to say that *Banipal* is an old-fashioned labor of love.

Q: How did *Banipal* begin?

MO: I've always been into literature ... and I was keen to read Arabic literature. I kept going to bookshops and [after] I met Samuel, I began to meet Arab authors who were well known in the Arab world but their books weren't available here. There was literature in translation from everywhere in the world but not the Arab world. Samuel was a part of the literary scene and we both had the skills to design and produce a magazine. We wanted it to be an up-market publication for discerning readers, like the *TLS* [*Times Literary Supplement*] or *Harper's*. We wanted the actual writings, not a commentary on the writings. We still feel that way.

Q: What was the reaction to *Banipal* when it first came out in 1998?

MO: Authors thought it was

fantastic and so did the translators. Many of them were working in academia and really wanted this project to bring Arab literature into the Western world. There was a great thirst to be quenched.

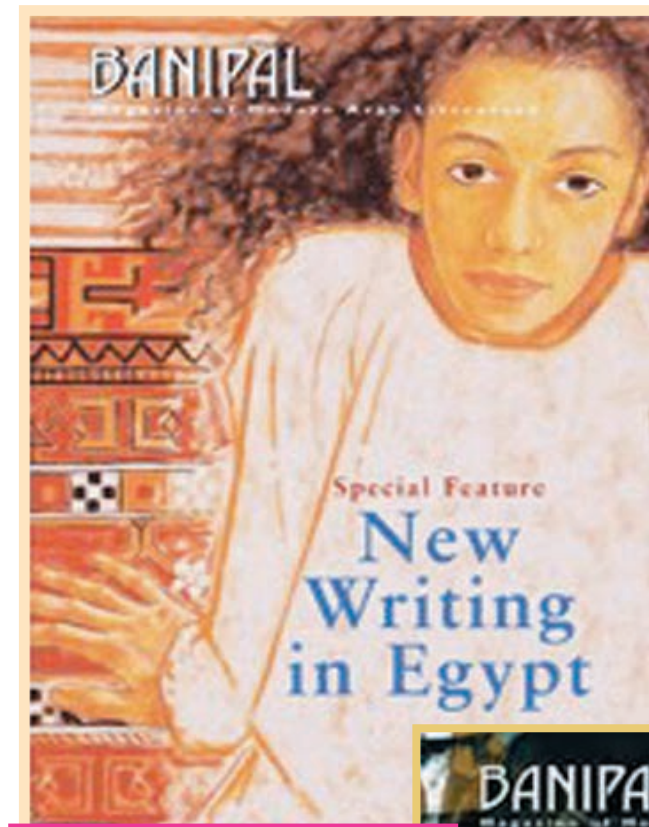
Q: How do you find translators and what is the translation process before final versions go into the magazine?

MO: Many of the translators find us. Most of them are European or based in the US, while translators for poetry are from Arab countries. Three years ago we started getting enquiries from recent graduates in Arabic or PhD students. It's an excellent collaboration because they get feedback and connections and we get top quality translations. A translation comes to me, then it goes to a copy editor, then I do some editing, it goes back to the copy editor and then to the translator. Our translators really try to get what the meaning is into English. They're not free translations. We're conscious of the fact that the reader is getting a glimpse of a novel or a small selection of poems and we want them to come back for more.

Q: You just awarded the Saif Ghobash-Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, worth just over \$4,000. When was this established?

MO: I noticed there wasn't a single prize for an Arabic translation of a book. Translating is not an easy task; it needs a special insight into the particular writer and their style of writing, and painstaking patience as well as meticulous linguistic skills. We set about raising funds. Omar Saif Ghobash [from the United Arab Emirates] generously sponsored the prize in memory of his late father who was passionate about literature. This is our second year and we have funds to continue for another five years.

Q: How do you select authors for *Banipal*?



MO: Samuel reads them in Arabic first. The writing has to be interesting and modern, particularly with poetry, because there are still problems in the Arab world in terms of accepting prose poems and non-rhyming poems. We look for quality, for new writers, young writers who have something to say. We want to show what's happening in the Arab world, that this is the literary scene today.

SS: Sometimes I choose writing I don't necessarily like but it has gotten good reviews in the Arab world and is respected so I feel that it is important because it is part of this scene. *Banipal* isn't a club or a magazine where we only publish friends' work.

Q: What has the reaction to *Banipal* been like in the Arab world?

MO: Arab authors regard *Banipal* as their magazine. It's a gateway for them. Many authors say we need a *Banipal* in Arabic.

Q: How about in the West?

MO: Reactions are sometimes more muted. People just accept that we're there. That said we're very much appreciated by the literary magazine fraternity. Our kitchen is like a cultural center that people turn

Banipal, which publishes three times a year, is a labor of love shared by Shimon and Obank, along with contemporary Arab authors, poets and translators, who want to expose Western readers to Arab literature.

to when they need someone to bridge the gap between the Arab and the European worlds.

Q: Did you ever think *Banipal* would become so successful?

MO: We want it to become much more. One of the things we've discovered is that people like to see and hear authors. With the help of Arts Council England we've organized author tours and we regularly do events. We're also very conscious of the fact that we need to develop more on the Internet. But there are only two of us.

SS: We are thinking of putting video and audio on our Web site so people can hear writers and poets reading out loud. But it's not easy. We've been working at it for 10 years and turned our home into a 24-hour publishing house. We really need an office. We really need a secretary. I'm tired. She's not!

For more information on *Banipal*, please see www.banipal.co.uk



Celebrate THE HEART OF DOWNTOWN BEIRUT DECEMBER 15-27, 2007 WITH BANKMED

Win LL300,000,000 worth of prizes just for being in Downtown as Christmas, Adha and New Year's festivities take off!

In celebration of the holidays, all visitors to Downtown Beirut can win exciting prizes, including lunch, dinner and shopping vouchers for use at various establishments Downtown.

Kids can enjoy the festive season just as much as their parents at the Downtown Holiday Village, situated between Foch and Allenby streets and featuring fun-filled entertainment by the Club des Deux Clowns.

And that's not all! Kids can also get a wonderful present from Santa Claus, who'll be distributing thousands of gifts!

Visit the BankMed stand to be entered into the daily lottery draws absolutely free. The draws take place every day at 6pm.

Free parking at An Nahar, Martyrs' Square and Foch-Allenby upon presentation of the lottery slip. The event is insured by MedGulf.

AISHTI



HOROSCOPE

Aries (Mar. 21 - April 19) Health problems will prevail if you don't get the rest you need. You may be confused about the direction in which your career is headed. Consider volunteer work if you are feeling unfulfilled.	Taurus (April 20 - May 20) Open up to an old friend and tell this person what's been bugging you lately. You need to be more articulate when it comes to your emotional, interior life. Use your intellect to get what you want.	Gemini (May 21 - June 21) Romance will be yours if you get out and do things with large groups of friends. Refrain from any form of reckless behavior today. Bad luck is lurking just outside your orbit. Changes at home are likely.	Cancer (June 22 - July 22) Don't count on your friends to be loyal when push comes to shove. Caustic language may cause a bitter argument at work today. New relationships will surface through charity events.
Leo (July 23 - Aug. 22) You need to be active. Sedentary lifestyles don't suit you at all. Spend time with friends whose company you enjoy and seek out adventure. You will have a tough time keeping secrets today.	Virgo (Aug. 23 - Sept. 22) Make plans to do something special with your partner or best mate. Two people you care about could be on a collision course. You can see this more clearly than either of them.	Libra (Sept. 23 - Oct. 22) Don't go overboard when it comes to shopping or you will soon find yourself short on funds. A relative you are not especially close to may be recovering from a series of traumatic events.	Scorpio (Oct. 23 - Nov. 21) Don't let the mood swings of people you live with get you down. Your temper may get the better of you if a colleague tries to take credit for your work. Seek reassurance if you need it.
Sagittarius (Nov. 22 - Dec. 21) You may want to make alterations to your home for the sake of being more productive there. Ask questions if you aren't certain about the issues that are confronting you.	Capricorn (Dec. 22 - Jan. 19) Sudden changes within your circle of friends could be destabilizing and confusing for you now. Plan for an adventure that will change how you see things in life. Avoid lending money today.	Aquarius (Jan. 20 - Feb. 18) If you want to get back on top of your game, you need to reassert your self-confidence. Your nerves have become frazzled. Get some rest and then start all over. Don't be afraid to take a few risks.	Pisces (Feb. 19 - Mar. 20) Get involved in a group whose members will not only enjoy your company but share your interests as well. Travel will be satisfying and intellectually stimulating for you now.

su do ku

Sudoku is neither a mathematical nor arithmetical puzzle. It is a logic puzzle. Each sudoku puzzle consists of a 9 x 9 grid that has been subdivided into 9 smaller grids of 3 x 3 squares. To solve the puzzle, fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3 x 3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9. In each row, column and box the numbers 1-9 can only appear once. To make a start, look at each of the boxes and see which squares are empty, at the same time checking that square's column and row for a missing number. Every sudoku has a logical and unique solution.

3	6	9						
		7						4
	4			7			6	5
	1			6				
		3				7		
			9				8	
2	8	5					4	
9						1		
			8	5			6	

Solution to Saturday's puzzle

9	1	2	5	8	3	4	7	6
8	6	7	9	2	4	3	1	5
4	3	5	6	7	1	8	9	2
5	7	9	2	6	8	1	4	3
1	4	8	7	3	5	6	2	9
6	2	3	4	1	9	7	5	8
3	5	4	8	9	7	2	6	1
7	8	6	1	5	2	9	3	4
2	9	1	3	4	6	5	8	7