Translator’s Note

The video classes you are about to watch were part of an IWP MOOC that was run in 2016 as an international class. At that time, viewers around the world were watching the videos and participating in discussions with online moderators and peers, as well as logging in to turn in their assignments to the moderators for feedback. You will occasionally hear the presenters in the videos make reference to this online community of writers, which came together for a few weeks during the summer of 2016.

As you watch the videos, keep in mind that they were recorded in Iowa City—you’ll sometimes hear presenters make reference to the cornfields of the Midwest, or specific locations in town such as the Bread Garden Market. And yet, in the process of translating these videos, our goal was not just to translate the words from English into Arabic, but to translate the *context* of this material, as well. Thus, I want to explain several points.

First, knowing that the videos were to be used in the Arab world, I tried to use neutral standard Arabic, avoiding in the process academic terminologies. In the subtitled videos and their transcripts, I have used book and short story titles of the available Arabic translation of these texts with reference to the translator in brackets so that you can locate them if you like to read more. When no Arabic translation was available for a text, I provided literal translation of the title with a note stating that this was my own translation of the title.

Second, in writing assignments and reading list, I “localized” the material by providing two required and optional reading texts, originally written in Arabic to highlight the tradition of women writers and characters in Arabic. Readings included writers from different Arab countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria, Bahrain, Saudi and others.

For example, instead of excerpt from the Canadian Margaret Atwood’s *Handmaid’s Tale*, you will be reading from excerpt from Egyptian Nawal El Saadawi’s *The Death of the Only Man* in the World (1974).[[1]](#footnote-1) Both writers use physical details as essential part of the narrative and sometimes the environment becomes a character in the story. While Atwood used the physical details to confirm the reader’s sense of unstable world through a sense of contrast between past and present, Saadawi uses description of the sunrise and the quiet start of the day in the countryside to give the reader a sense of aging and stagnant world.

As I hope that the assigned and optional readings will provide with opportunities for thinking about Arabic literary environment and where do you find yourself in its trajectory, I would like to highlight one of the challenges I faced in the process of localization.

In the process of localization, it has been difficult finding literary texts written in Arabic by established Arab women writers and available online without breaching the copyrights of the text. This poses a difficulty for creative writing teachers and students to access for free texts written in Arabic by Arab writers, and introduce themselves to the tradition of storytelling in the Arab world. Hence comes the limited reading lists of texts written by Arab women writers given for every lesson, in comparison to much longer lists of texts in English.

Thus, I hope that this project inspires literary originations and universities in the Arab world to create online collection of short story texts and excerpts from novels written in Arabic by Arab writers. Such collection can benefit both readers and students of Arabic literature to follow and immerse themselves in the tradition of fiction across the Arab world.

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1. The novel was translated and published in English as *God Dies by the Nile* by Sherif Hetata in 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)