



The American University in Cairo Press

Judges' Citations

The 2016 Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature

presented to

Adel Esmat

for his work

Hikayât Yûsuf Tadrus

This is a novel of Yusuf Tadrus's youth and art in an Egyptian provincial city. There is a subtlety to the flow of events and a delightful luminosity in moments where he contemplates his craft. Thus he apprehends the efforts of Dostoevsky as he prepared his manuscripts and contemplated encounters that he didn't know when and how he could rework in his novels. Esmat evokes the creation and epiphany that belong to any form of art. The tales and self-portraits offer a study of esthetics, the evocation of youth, and the solitude of the artist.

—Tahia Abdel Nasser

The artistry of the novel is in a Coptic character who lives in Tanta, a small city compared to Cairo or Alexandria, which allows for intensely detailed accumulations of emotions that are trampled by any large city. It is fear in its absolute terrifying forms, fear in all its abstraction and brutality, the fear that was born in Yusuf Tadrus from his boyhood. The novel recalls Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, written in 1916. Just as Stephen Dedalus revolts against his rigid society and announces his complete rejection of all esthetics and written rules, Yusuf Tadrus refuses all traditions and rules, and just as Dedalus refuses absolute conformity to institutions such as the Church, Yusuf Tadrus does the same but with a difference with respect to the context and the character, and just as Dedalus chooses self-imposed exile at the end of the journey, Yusuf chooses to emigrate to his son Michel in America to be "peaceful far away from the darkness in which I have lived. . . . Tell me, when will light reach this country?"

—Shereen Abouelnaga

This story of a man's struggle to remain true to his calling as an artist, despite the obstacles, some self-created, that block his path, is absorbing. A special and rare pleasure are the passages in which the author describes, with great beauty and delicacy, the play of light and shadow on objects and colors, passages that give the work a dimension of lived esthetic experience that makes it convincing.

—Humphrey Davies

This is a serious work of fiction. Multi-thematic but with clear authorial control and a developing storyline. The intimate glimpse into Egyptian Christian life, rare in Egyptian fiction, is fascinating. The candid depiction of the worsening situation of Egyptian Christians and their alienation in their own country is touching and sensitively written. A contemplative, introspective novel with a well-executed rendering of the age-old theme of salvation or self-discovery through art.

—Rasheed El-Enany

This is a journey in search of light, not undertaken by a Sufi or a priest but by an artist, who does not long for loss of self in light, but strives to capture what flows of its rays and shadows, clusters and spaces, luminosity and dissipation in the self, creatures, and still lifes. This impossible journey is uniquely expressed by the author's style, as he renders the words into melodies and colors and breaths, short poetic sentences, read as letters and heard as hymns and created as portraits. It is a text that addresses all the senses, and ventures into the examination of sentiments, their contradictions and ends.

—Mona Tolba