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Abdelkader Benali

Home country: Morocco

Language: Dutch

In brief: Abdelkader was born in Morocco but has spent most of his life in the Netherlands, where he has been hailed as one of the most important young writers in the Dutch language today. His first novel, published when he was only 21 years old, was recognised with a Geertjan Lubberhuizen Prize for best literary debut. Its successor received the Libris Prize for Dutch literature. He is also a published playwright and essayist. He was recently selected for the Beirut39 project, organised by the Hay Festival and Beirut World Book Capital 2009 to honour the top 39 Arab authors under the age of 39.

Works include: 'Wedding by the Sea', 'The Long-Awaited'

Adam Haslett

Home country: the United States

Language: English

In brief: With a best-selling debut short story collection that was a finalist for the 2003 Pulitzer Prize, was nominated for a National Book Award and has been translated into 15 languages, Adam is one of America's most sought-after young authors. His work has appeared in The Atlantic, The Nation, The New Yorker and Esquire, and in 2002 he was named New York Magazine's Writer-of-the-Year. He has been a visiting professor at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and at Columbia University. His highly anticipated first novel will be released in the US in early 2010.

Works include: 'You Are Not a Stranger Here', 'Union Atlantic'

Ahlam Mosteghanemi

Home country: Algeria

Language: Arabic

In brief: One the Arab World's few truly best-selling novelists, Ahlam was recognized in Forbes magazine as the most widely published writer in the Arab World, with sales of her books exceeding 2.3 million copies. She has been a powerful presence on the Arabic literary stage for over 25 years. Her novel 'Memory in the Flesh' sent shockwaves throughout the literary establishment upon its publication in 1993, and has been included in the curricula of many high schools and universities in the Arab World and worldwide. Her texts were used by the French Ministry of Education in the 2003 French baccalaureate exams in 15 francophone countries. She is known for her poetic language and the philosophical-historical dimensions and emotional impact of the writing in her novels.

Works include: 'Memory in the Flesh', 'Nessyane.com'

Alawiyya Sobh

Home country: Lebanon

Language: Arabic

In brief: This novelist, poet and outspoken feminist has been hailed internationally for the way she has used writing to fearlessly confront some of the region's most difficult contemporary social issues. She authored numerous critical sketches aired on Lebanese radio during the Lebanese Civil War, and she is the founder and editor-in-chief of one of the Arab World's most important women's magazines. In 2006 Alawiyya was awarded Oman's Sultan Qaboos Prize for Cultural Innovation in the category of literature. Her novels have been translated into many languages.

Works include: 'Maryam of the Stories', 'World'

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Alia Yunis

Home country: the United States

Language: English

In brief: This Arab-American author's debut novel has caught the attention of readers and critics alike from the US to the UAE, with glowing reviews in The Washington Post and The Boston Globe and a flurry of interviews and reviews in Middle East media outlets in the aftermath of its release. Alia is a PEN Emerging Voices Fellow and has received awards both for her writing and her film work. She currently teaches film and television at Zayed University.

Works include: 'The Night Counter'

Amara Lakhous

Home country: Algeria

Language: Arabic/Italian

In brief: Amara was born in Algiers in 1970. He graduated from the Philosophy Institute at the University of Algiers in 1994, and later obtained an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Rome. He has resided in Rome since 1995, where he is involved in diverse pursuits including translation, journalism, studying and lecturing. His first novel 'The Bedbugs and the Pirate' was published in Rome in Arabic and Italian (translated by Francesco Leggio) in 1999. His second novel 'How to Be Suckled by the Wolf without Getting Bit' was published in Algiers in 2003 (Ekhtelaf editions), and a second edition appeared in Beirut in 2006 in partnership with Dar Al Arabiya Lil Ulum. He re-wrote the novel in Italian and published it in 2006 with great success. It has been translated into French, English, Dutch and German, and was made into a film by the director Isotta Toso. Amara won the international Flaiano Prize for literature in 2006 and the Algerian Librarians' Prize in 2008.

Works include: 'The Bedbugs and the Pirate', 'How to Be Suckled by the Wolf without Getting Bit'

Amit Chaudhuri

Home country: India

Language: English

In brief: One of India's most celebrated modern writers, Amit has published five novels and many short stories, essays, poems and works of literary criticism. He served on the judging panels for the 2001 IMPAC Dublin International Literary Prize and the 2009 Man Booker International Prize, and has lectured extensively at universities across the UK and US. He has received numerous awards for his fiction, including the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book, the Los Angeles Times Book Award for Fiction and India's prestigious Sahitya Akademi prize. Amit currently serves as Professor in Contemporary Literature at the University of East Anglia. His newest novel, 'The Immortals', was the Critics' Choice for Best Books of 2009 in The New Yorker and The Boston Globe. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and an acclaimed musician.

Works include: 'A New World', 'The Immortals'

Anouar Benmalek

Home country: Algeria

Language: Arabic

In brief: The Algerian and French novelist, mathematician and journalist Anouar Benmalek is the author of 14 books, mostly novels, which have been translated into more than 10 languages. His latest novel, 'The Kidnapping', on the Algerian war of independence, was very well greeted in Algeria and in

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France, with some critics even speaking of it as a “masterpiece” (E. Charles-Roux of the Goncourt Academy in France, for example, as well as the influential daily newspaper El Watan in Algeria).

Works include: ‘The Kidnapping’, ‘The Lovers of Algeria’

Bapsi Sidhwa

Home country: Pakistan

Language: English

In brief: In a career spanning more than three decades, Bapsi has become recognised as one of Pakistan’s premier diaspora writers. She has published five novels, collaborated closely with the Canadian-Indian director Deepa Mehta on two films and taught courses at some of America’s top academic institutions, including Columbia University. Among her many accolades, she has received the Lila Wallace-Reader’s Digest Writer’s Award, the Sitara-i-Imtiaz (Pakistan’s highest national honour in the arts) and the 2007 Primo Mondello Award in Italy.

Works include: ‘Cracking India’, ‘The Pakistani Bride’

Gilbert Sinoué

Home country: Egypt

Language: French

In brief: Born in Egypt, Gilbert immigrated to France as a young man and has since published nearly 20 books in French. He is best known for his numerous works of historical fiction, many of them set in the Middle East. His awards include the Booksellers’ Prize for best novel of the year in 1996 and the Grand Prix de littérature policière for best detective novel in 2004. His books have been translated into 15 languages and sold around the world.

Works include: ‘The Egyptian’, ‘The Silences of God’

Hamdy El-Gazzar

Home country: Egypt

Language: Arabic

In brief: A relative newcomer to the literary scene, Hamdy’s debut novel made a splash when it captured the 2006 Sawiris Foundation Prize in Egyptian Literature. His second novel, published in 2008, was an instant best-seller, establishing him as an important voice in contemporary Arabic literature. He is also the author of several plays and short stories, as well as numerous screenplays for Egyptian television. He was recently selected for the Beirut39 project, organised by the Hay Festival and Beirut World Book Capital 2009 to honour the top 39 Arab authors under the age of 39.

Works include: ‘Black Magic’, ‘Secret Pleasures’

Laila al-Othman

Home country: Kuwait

Language: Arabic

In brief: One of Kuwait’s most internationally acclaimed authors, Laila has been active on the Kuwaiti literary scene for more than four decades. As a journalist, columnist, radio presenter, short story writer, novelist and leading member of the Kuwaiti Writers Guild, she has devoted herself tirelessly to the promotion of culture and literature within her native country. She is an outspoken opponent of censorship in Arabic literature and a prominent voice for women’s rights in the Arab World. Her work has been translated into many languages.

Works include: ‘Wasmiyya Gets Out of the Sea’, ‘The Silence of Butterflies’

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M. T. Vasudevan Nair

Home country: India

Language: Malayalam

In brief: One of the most varied and prolific writers of modern Malayalam literature, M.T. has written numerous short stories, novels and screenplays narrating the struggles of daily life in contemporary Kerala society. He received the prestigious Jnanpith literary award in 1995 and is a four-time recipient of India's National Award for Best Screenplay.

Works include: 'The Funeral Procession', 'Bear with Me, Mother: Memoirs and Stories'

Mathias Enard

Home country: France

Language: French

In brief: A native French speaker, Mathias spent many years studying Arabic and Persian in the Middle East, and his passion for the region is apparent in many of his works. His latest novel, which has generated significant international buzz for being composed of a single sentence more than 500 pages long, was awarded the Prix Décembre and the Prix du Livre Inter in 2009. He is currently at work on a new novel.

Works include: 'The Perfection of the Shot', 'Zone'

Pankaj Mishra

Home country: India

Language: English

In brief: A master in the art of social, political and literary commentary, Pankaj's work has appeared in more than 20 prominent media outlets throughout India, the UK and the US, including the Financial Times, the Guardian, the London Review of Books, The New Yorker, The New York Times and The Washington Post. He has taught at Wellesley College in the US and was a visiting fellow at University College, London. His debut novel won the Los Angeles Times' Art Seidenbaum award for first fiction.

Works include: 'Butter Chicken in Ludhiana', 'The Romantics'

Peter Smith

Home country: the United Kingdom

Language: English

In brief: Better known under the pseudonyms 'James Barrington' and 'James Becker', Peter spent 21 years in the Royal Navy as a covert operative before becoming a full-time novelist and creative writing teacher. His bestselling books include historical fiction as well as spy novels that draw on his experiences serving in Yemen, Russia and Northern Ireland. His latest book is a fast-paced contemporary thriller set in Dubai.

Works include: 'Timebomb', 'The First Apostle'

Qaisra Shahraz

Home country: Pakistan / the United Kingdom

Language: English

In brief: Born in Pakistan and raised in the UK, Qaisra has been widely acclaimed by critics for producing novels, short stories and television screenplays that offer particularly human characterizations of life in her native country and of the experiences of Pakistani immigrants in the West. She is also an educator and creative writing instructor, and has led workshops and seminars on

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these subjects abroad and in the UK. Her debut novel received a Golden Jubilee Award , and she has won several Pakistan Television Awards for her screenwriting.

Works include: ‘The Holy Woman’, ‘Typhoon’

Ramsey Nasr

Home country: the Netherlands

Language: Dutch

In brief: This multi-talented and highly decorated young author, actor, director and poet of Dutch-Palestinian heritage has accomplished in less than two decades on the literary scene what most never achieve in a lifetime. Among his many achievements, he has translated and directed two Mozart operas, performed his poetry in places as diverse as Indonesia and Bethlehem and staged a travelling English-Arabic production of one of his own monologues. He is currently the Poet Laureate of the Netherlands.

Works include: ‘27 Poems and No Song’, ‘Awkwardly Flowering’

Sinan Antoon

Home country: Iraq

Language: Arabic/English

In brief: Sinan is an Iraqi-born poet, novelist and filmmaker. His poems and essays (in Arabic and English) have appeared in various journals and publications in the Arab world, including as-Safir, al-Akhbar, al-Adab and Masharef, as well as The Nation, Middle East Report, al-Ahram Weekly, Banipal, Ploughshares and World Literature Today. He has also contributed numerous translations of Arabic poetry into English and vice versa. His co-translation of Mahmud Darwish’s poetry was nominated for the PEN Prize for translation in 2004 and his translation of Darwish’s last prose book, ‘In the Presence of Absence’, is forthcoming from Archipelago in 2010. Antoon returned to his native Baghdad in 2003 as a member of InCounter Productions to co-direct/produce the documentary ‘About Baghdad’ about the lives of Iraqis in a post-Saddam occupied Iraq. Antoon is currently an Assistant Professor at New York University.

Works include: ‘I’jaam’, ‘One Night in all Cities’

Tarun Tejpal

Home country: India

Language: English

In brief: Five years ago Tarun was best known as the founder of Tehelka, an Indian media outlet with a reputation for groundbreaking public interest journalism. Now with two critically acclaimed novels under his belt, the first of which won the Prix Millepages in France and was lauded by Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul as “a new and brilliantly original novel from India,” he has earned himself a place as one of India’s leading contemporary authors.

Works include: ‘The Alchemy of Desire’, ‘The Story of My Assassins’

Yann Martel

Home country: Canada

Language: English

In brief: One of Canada’s most important authors, Yann is beloved in dozens of countries for his novel ‘Life of Pi’, which won the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in 2002 and has sold more than 7 million copies worldwide. Known as a writer of rich imagination—‘Life of Pi’ tells the story of a boy trapped on a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean with a Bengal tiger and a menagerie of other zoo animals—he is currently

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engaged in a project to send books “known to expand stillness” to the Prime Minister of Canada on a biweekly basis. His forthcoming novel ‘Beatrice and Virgil’ will be released in April 2010.

Works include: ‘Life of Pi’, ‘Beatrice and Virgil’