

opposition activists by the security forces. Siavoshi shows how Montazeri's support for Hizbullah in Lebanon eventually brought him into confrontation with the more pragmatic approach of the rest of the establishment. As contacts between the Regan Administration and the Iranian leadership came close to opening the doors for a new era of relations, elements associated with Montazeri exposed the contacts to the media. As a result, the Iran–Contra ordeal began and a close relative of Montazeri was executed. Perhaps more importantly, Montazeri's takeover of Iran's prison system in 1985 and his confrontation with Khomeini over the prison massacre in the summer of 1988 point to his eventual downfall. In both cases, Montazeri stood by his principles, supporting likeminded movements and treating prisoners humanely. But it was the latter issue that put him on a collision course with Khomeini.

After his fall, Montazeri had plenty of time to reflect on his past and that of the revolution he had played a significant role in creating. The second part of the book provides the reader with translations of some of Montazeri's key writings and Siavoshi's analysis of his legacy. Siavoshi includes writings that discuss Montazeri's influence as a religious and as a political leader, providing insight to his impact on the reform movement in Iran. In these writings we see Montazeri's ability for self-criticism, and his criticism of the ruling establishment after his fall from power. Perhaps most importantly, Siavoshi notes Montazeri's willingness to accept the will of the people and even a secular state if it came about democratically.

Had Montazeri decided to maintain his silence for a few months in 1988 (that is the distance between the opening of his confrontation with Khomeini and his death in 1989), he would have certainly become the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran with near unlimited influence. But this was not to be, in the age-old dichotomy between power and principle, he chose the latter. Siavoshi's book shows the making of this unique revolutionary personality in detail and is a most welcome addition to the study of the 1979 revolution in Iran.

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The topic of Arab autobiography has enjoyed something of a renewal in the years since the publication of Dwight Reynolds' key edited volume *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001). In *Autobiographical Identities in Contemporary Arab Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), for example, Valerie Anishchenkova examines contemporary articulations of Arab identity in various media, from autobiographical novels to film, video, and cyber-writing. Yasir Suleiman's *Arabic, Self and Identity: A Study in Conflict and Displacement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), meanwhile, combines sociolinguistic and qualitative research methods to explore

how questions of selfhood and identity interact with language in contemporary Arab culture.

Tahia Abdel Nasser's *Literary Autobiography and Arab National Struggles* offers a more straightforward literary approach to the question of writing the self by focusing primarily on book-length works by Arab authors both well-established and new. The book's argument consists of four interwoven strands. First, Abdel Nasser explores the tension between the "solitude" of writing the self and the imperative to write the collective in the context of "anticolonial and anti-imperialist movements" across the Arab world (p. 9). Second, she examines how writers from Sonallah Ibrahim to Mona Prince "reworked existing literary forms and rethought the genre from the perspective of the colonized," thereby "revitalizing the form" of autobiography "by elaborating postcolonial subjectivity" (p. 8). Third, Abdel Nasser wishes to refute Eurocentric approaches to Arab autobiography by highlighting the influence of "local" and "indigenous traditions" on 20th- and 21st-century autobiographical texts (p. 4). (These traditions might include, for example, the *khabar* or snippet of biographical "information" attached to an oral text; the *sīra* or "exemplary life story," often of the prophet Muhammad; the *ṭabaqāt* or "biographical dictionaries"; and the *tarjama* or "biographical notice," to name only a few [Reynolds pp. 36–48].) This interest in working against Eurocentric approaches to Arab autobiography also extends into the fourth strand of Abdel Nasser's argument: she aims to highlight how "transnational encounters" with literatures of the "global South" influenced the development of Arab autobiography in the 20th and 21st centuries (p. 4).

Working simultaneously toward these four goals is certainly an onerous task, but for the most part Abdel Nasser carries it off. Throughout the book's six chapters, she demonstrates a firm commitment to reading across not only national but also linguistic boundaries, examining Arab autobiographical texts written in French and English as well as in Arabic. Each chapter of *Literary Autobiography* innovatively pairs texts from different historical eras to reanimate "canonical" works through comparisons with contemporary, experimental ones and—vice versa—to place newer texts on equal critical footing with their revered literary forebears. The first chapter, for example, reads Taha Husayn's seminal 1929 *al-Ayyam* (*The Days*; Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010) alongside Sonallah Ibrahim's 2007 *al-Talassus* (*Stealth*, New York: New Directions, 2014) and notes—in one of the book's most insightful moments—that whereas "*The Days* offers the model of an original autobiography whose protagonist is blind and solitary," Ibrahim's novel "appropriates [Husayn's] model by focusing on a young narrator whose spying and stealth are diametrically opposed to his literary antecedent" (p. 28). Likewise, in the book's second chapter, Abdel Nasser draws attention to the revolutionary feminism of Latifa al-Zayyat's 1992 *Hamlat Taftish: Awwaq Shakhshiyya* (*The Search: Personal Papers*; London: Quartet Books, 1996) by reading it together with Francophone Algerian author Assia Djebar's widely taught *L'Amour, la fantasia* (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*; Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1993). One can only hope that al-Zayyat's oft-neglected work will begin to make more appearances on syllabi in "Postcolonial Literature" or "Postcolonial Feminist Writing" thanks to Abdel Nasser's comparative gesture. Finally, by reading Arabic-language Palestinian memoirs—specifically, Mahmud Darwish's 1986 *Dhakira li-l-Nisyan* (*Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press,

2013) and Mourid Barghouti's 1997 *Ra'aytu Ramallah (I Saw Ramallah)* (New York: Anchor, 2003)—alongside English-language Palestinian memoirs such as Edward Said's *Out of Place* (New York: Vintage, 1999) and Najla Said's *Looking For Palestine: Growing Up Confused in an Arab-American Family* (New York: Riverhead, 2013) in Chapters 3 and 4, Abdel Nasser makes an implicit case for reading Palestine transnationally and translanguistically, creating literary community and continuity in this context despite the ongoing exiles and dispossessions of settler colonialism.

Overall, *Literary Autobiography*'s illuminating comparative structure offers new insights on well-established texts and deals seriously with recent works by emerging authors. A few issues do remain unresolved, however. The first is the book's tendency to devote far less analytical space to the works of new and contemporary writers than it does to those of more "canonical" figures. Thus, Barghouti's memoirs receive five and a half pages of analysis to Darwish's seventeen, Najla Said's memoir receives four pages to Edward Said's twenty, and Mona Prince's receives three pages to Radwa 'Ashur's thirteen. This imbalance is understandable, as there is much more secondary material to work through in the cases of Darwish, 'Ashur, and Edward Said, for example, than with a new text like Prince's 2012 *Ismi Thawra (Revolution is My Name)* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2015). Still, the disparity is noticeable and has the potential to undermine Nasser's otherwise groundbreaking approach.

Additionally, the rubric under which *Literary Autobiography* unites its multifarious texts—"Arab national struggles"—holds up better in the case of some writers' autobiographies than in others. For Djébar, al-Zayyat, Darwish, and Barghouti, the framing makes good sense: all of these authors wrote in contexts of anticolonial national struggle, and the independence movements with which they were affiliated (Egyptian, Palestinian) were based, at least at one time, around pan-Arab solidarities. However, the idea that Communist-affiliated authors, such as Iraqi Haifa Zangana (examined in Chapter 5), were part of "Arab national struggles" seems somewhat misplaced. A similar issue holds for the Egyptian Radwa 'Ashur, whose support of Third World liberation movements—including African-American, Latin American, Caribbean, African, and Palestinian struggles for justice under one banner—is only imprecisely described as "national."

Finally, the readings contained in each chapter of *Literary Autobiography* do not always follow through on the promises made in the book's introduction and conclusion. The question of "transnational encounters" oriented on a South–South axis, for example, is treated only in passing: by listing the national origins of literary works that Sonallah Ibrahim read in prison (p. 28), or elsewhere, listing the names of poets whom Mahmud Darwish cited as "influential" to his work (p. 63). To validate claims about non-traditional networks of influence—between the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Egypt, in the case of Ibrahim, or between Latin American and Palestinian poetry, in the case of Darwish—more substantial readings of primary texts in each language would be required, or else more historical and archival work chronicling the journeys of texts across oceans, continents, and languages, readings which are notably absent from *Literary Autobiography*.

Despite these issues of argumentation and structure, however, students of Arabic literature will likely benefit from the creative approach of *Literary Autobiography*. Abdel Nasser invites readers to remember the central contributions of women and non-Arabic

language authors in the articulation of, for example, Palestinian struggles for justice, or transnational solidarities against racism, political oppression, and other forms of discrimination (as in 'Ashur's work). The book may well inspire future scholars to engage in the kind of much-needed comparative work toward which Abdel Nasser gestures.