

# hoopoe

Fiction | Spring 2016





Founded in 1960, the American University in Cairo Press has been the leading publisher of Arabic fiction in English translation for many years.

Our authors are world renowned and include **Naguib Mahfouz**, the only writer of Arabic to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Mahfouz was followed to the Press by uniquely talented writers who received wide critical acclaim in English translation **Ibrahim al-Koni, Sahar Khalifeh, Alaa Al Aswany, Betool Khedairi, Bahaa Taher, Hala El Badry, Gamal al-Ghitani, Miral al-Tahawy, Ibrahim Nasrallah, and Yusuf Idris** among them.

**The AUC Press proudly launches Hoopoe, Spring 2016.**



## *Stories from the Middle East*

Hoopoe is an imprint for engaged, open-minded readers hungry for outstanding fiction that challenges headlines, re-imagines histories, and celebrates original storytelling.

Through elegant paperback and digital editions, Hoopoe will champion bold, contemporary writing from across the Middle East alongside some of the finest, groundbreaking authors of earlier generations.

This Spring, we proudly publish remarkable writing from Egypt, Morocco, and Palestine: the satirical tale of a TV preacher embroiled in a scandal bigger than his celebrity; a compelling story of despair and lost liberty from Morocco; a fast-paced murder investigation from the North African coast; and the powerful saga of a Palestinian family crushed by occupation.

Enjoy.

# The Televangelist

Ibrahim Essa

Meet Egypt's top TV preacher Hatem el-Shenawi: a national celebrity revered by housewives and politicians alike for delivering Islam to the masses. Charismatic and quick-witted, he has friends in high places.

But when he is entrusted with a secret that threatens to wreak havoc across the country, he is drawn into a web of political intrigue at the very heart of government.

Can Hatem's fame and fortune save him from this unspeakable scandal?

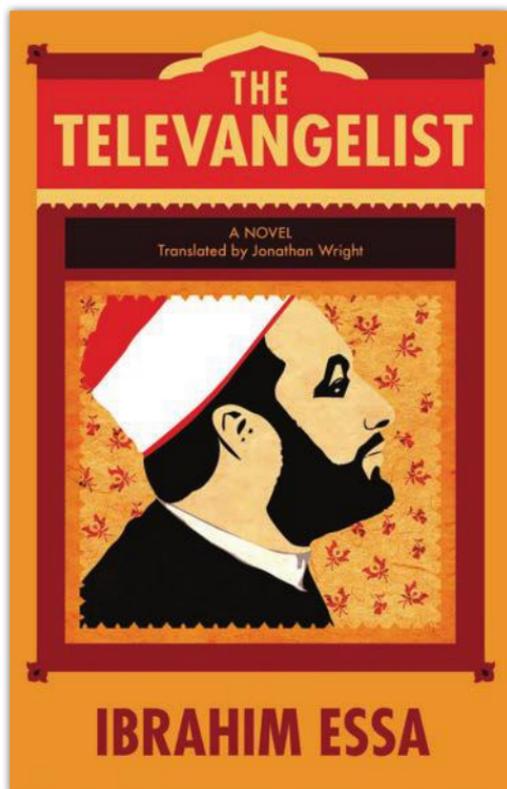
**Shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction**



Bestselling Egyptian author **Ibrahim Essa** is a renowned journalist, TV personality, and political commentator. He lives in Cairo, Egypt.

Translator of the winning novel in the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize and winner of the Saif Ghobash–Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation, **Jonathan Wright** was formerly the Reuters bureau chief in Cairo. He has translated Alaa Al-Aswany, Youssef Ziedan, Hassan Blassim. He lives in London, UK.

*The bestselling political thriller from one  
of Egypt's most outspoken journalists*



\$17.95 • £12.99

512pp • Paperback Original

978 977 416 718 8

March 2016

**BISAC:** Fiction / Thrillers /  
Political; Fiction / Literary

**BIC:** Fiction in Translation,  
THRILLER / SUSPENSE

**Sales points:**

- Bestseller in Arabic
- Shortlisted for the "Arab Booker"
- Critiques organised religion

**Rights:** World ex. Arabic



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*Praise for **The Televangelist**:*

"A master of the Arabic language ... [Essa] delivers a double dose of wit, humor, and political satire, combined with painstaking knowledge of religion and the media world ... Fascinating."—*Egypt Independent*

"We're in the presence of masterful storytelling ... [Essa] tells the story of Egypt, its society and state, culture and superstition, virtues and sins, love and intolerance ... with skilful plotting, surgical social and psychological analysis."—*Saad El Din Ibrahim, El Watan*

"The novel of the season ... a compelling testimony about this era."  
—*The Egyptian Daily*

## Excerpt from *The Televangelist*

Hatem wasn't in the least surprised when Nader asked him, earnestly and sadly, if acting was forbidden, or haram.

"Strange question," Hatem replied. "The question should be, 'is acting permissible?' 'Is it halal?' Why did you start with whether it's haram?"

"You're right. I never thought of that," said Nader.

"And does it matter to you to know whether it's halal or haram?"

"My God, why would you ask me this difficult question, Mawlana? You mean you think I could do something haram if I knew it was haram?"

Hatem smiled and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Yes, my friend, all humans are like that. We all know there are haram things that we do, and we do haram things that we know are haram, and that's very different. Someone who drinks alcohol and denies it's haram can be sentenced to death, according to some jurists, whereas someone who drinks alcohol in the knowledge that it's haram can only be flogged. In other words, it's the same act yet two different sentences."

"Really?" said Nader.

Hatem laughed. "Really really," he said.

Nader was deep in thought, as he examined the pattern on the sofa covers and the paintings on the wall.

"Okay," he finally said. "Answer me as though I'm Shaaban Abdel-Samie el-Sayed and not Nader Nour. Is acting halal? There you are, see, this time I put halal first."

"Okay," said Hatem. "You want me to give you an answer as Shaaban and not Nader. Okay, but should I answer as Hatem el-Shenawi the sheikh at the mosque, or as Hatem el-Shenawi the sheikh on television?"

Nader was startled. "Does it matter?" he asked.

"It sure does," said Hatem, "because the sheikh in the mosque tries to please God, while the television sheikh tries to please the customer, either the producer or the company that sponsors the program, or the audience, and if he manages to

please God in the midst of all that, then all's well and good and it's a miracle."

"Is that what you're like, Sheikh Hatem?" asked Nader.

"Just like that."

"Come on now, there's no need for that feeble sheikhly humor. Tell me, on your honor . . ."

"It's haram."

"What's haram?"

"Acting."

Nader was taken aback, so shocked that he looked like a driver who'd just survived an accident on the desert highway and found out that all of his passengers were dead. Hatem felt that he had to explain.

"Hang on and don't just take the fatwa without thinking. In Islamic law there's a process the jurists call dissection, which means we take the subject we're interested in and break it down into pieces, exactly like Meccano, and then we can see what the pieces are made of and how they fit together and how they stand in relation to sharia law and what sharia law has to say about them. In this case we're talking about acting. For a start, in the time of the Prophet Muhammad . . ."

"May God bless him and grant him peace," Nader mumbled audibly.

Hatem gave a broad smile. "May God strengthen your faith, but don't think that this blessing-the-Prophet business will make me change my opinion about you or about acting," he said sarcastically. "I tell you, even if you acted like Omar ibn al-Khattab right now in front of me my analysis wouldn't change."

"Sheikh," Nader replied affectionately, "you make me feel as though we're in the Center for Islamic Research. But we're just having a nice chat and I've just smoked a couple of joints, so take it easy on us actors."

"Okay, then perhaps you'd better ask me if hashish is haram or halal. That's a much easier question than the acting question."

# A Rare Blue Bird Flies with Me

Youssef Fadel

Spring, 1990. After years of searching in vain, a stranger passes a scrap of paper to Zeina. It's from Aziz: the man who vanished the day after their wedding almost two decades ago. It propels Zeina on a final quest for a secret desert jail in southern Morocco, where her husband crouches in despair, dreaming of his former life.

Youssef Fadel pays powerful testament to a terrible period in Morocco's history, known as 'the Years of Cinders and Lead,' and masterfully evokes the suffering inflicted on those who supported the failed coup against King Hassan II in 1972.

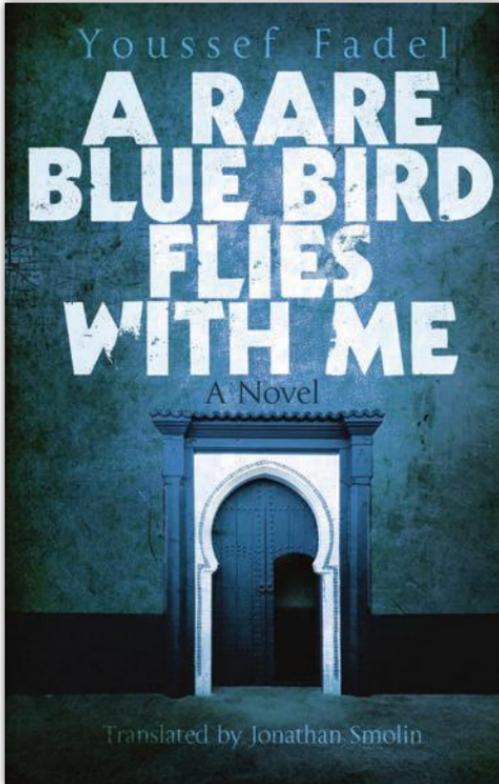
**Shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction**



Award-winning *Moroccan* novelist and screenwriter **Youssef Fadel** was born in Casablanca in 1949. During Morocco's 'Years of Lead' he was imprisoned in the notorious Moulay Chérif prison (1974–75). *A Rare Blue Bird Flies with Me* is his ninth novel. He lives in Casablanca, Morocco.

Translator **Jonathan Smolin** is the author of the critically acclaimed *Moroccan Noir: Police, Crime, and Politics in Popular Culture* (2013). He lives in Hanover, NH.

*A masterful history of love, loss, and modern Morocco*



\$16.95 • £10.99

304pp • Paperback Original

978 977 416 754 6

April 2016

**BISAC:** Fiction / Literary; Fiction / Political; Fiction / Romance / Historical / C20th

**BIC:** Fiction Modern & Contemporary, Fiction in Translation

**Sales points:**

- Shortlisted for the "Arab Booker"
- Concerns a pivotal period in Morocco's recent history
- Well respected, prize-winning author actively engaged in promotion

**Rights:** World ex. Arabic, French



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"[Fadel is] a valued asset of modern Moroccan literature."

—*Aujourd'hui Le Maroc*

## Excerpt from *A Rare Blue Bird Flies with Me*

Standing in front of the bar, a man I don't know has been acting as if he wants to tell me something. I ignore him. I prefer to ignore what goes on in men's minds. As I approach he seems about to open his mouth, but he stops when I move away again. I avoid getting too close so I don't have to hear what he wants to say. I pass him from behind the bar and whenever I open a bottle for a customer, I am conscious of not getting too near to him. Or of staying far enough away so that I can't hear him. I look at the watch on my wrist. It's eight o'clock. I open another bottle and put it in front of another customer, without him asking for it.

But this won't change the words in the man's mouth into water. Or make his ravenous stares less insistent or decrease my caution. Finally, as I pass, the man I don't know leans on the counter, while playing with his glass, and asks me, through the commotion of the bar, the loud music, and the noise of the pin-ball machine, do I like flowers? I don't respond. I've got enough of my own problems. I have learned how to hide my thoughts from people, to keep things to myself. For a day when the weather's clear. And besides, I don't know if I like flowers or not.

I move away again, uninterested in him and his question. I'm not someone who likes starting conversations for no rea-son. Customers are busy with their drinks and talking about the drought. His question doesn't interest anyone. No one cares about flowers in a season without rain. The man is wear-ing a thick djellaba striped with black and tan, even though it's May. It is as if he has sprouted up here in the middle of the bar at the wrong time and place. He's wearing black sun-glasses that don't hide the traces of smallpox dug into his face. He follows my movements with his gaze and waits for me to come close so he can start talking again, but I don't pass in front of him. He plays with his glass, waiting for me to go by. I count the words he might say. It may be only four words, like the last time: Do I like flowers? It seems he isn't waiting for me to respond. He came to speak, not to listen. That's what I read

in the movement of his fingers playing with his glass of water. And in a faint smile emerging on his lips.

Then I pass him: There's a flower festival in the south this time every year. Single women go there to get married. It takes me longer to pass this time, because I listened to all these words. As if the game had started to entice me. Will I go by a third or fourth or fifth time to listen to more of the man's prattle? I'm not single and I don't care there's a time every year for single women to get married. I'm interested in the man's words like I'm interested in the chatter drunks let out every night in every bar. There's a gravedigger who only likes talking about the number of dead people he buried that day. And there's the carpenter who dreams every night of a wardrobe he escapes with in the forests where the wood he uses comes from. When you stand behind the counter at Stork Bar, you're ready for every kind of chatter that pounds on the door of your head. My sister Khatima, on the other side of the counter in front of the register, talks and raises her hands chuckling, not caring what this or that customer might say. She doesn't put a red rose in her hair like Madame Janeau, the former owner of the bar, used to but she gives customers a free drink or two from time to time.

I approach him when I see him take a piece of paper out of his pocket and put it on the counter. I look at the paper and see it doesn't indicate anything. This time, the man starts looking around him like he's going to say something illicit. The man's face looks like he wouldn't know how to laugh. I put a bottle in front of him and he says, am I drinking it on your tab or are you drinking it on mine? He looks around him again. Neither. Men like women who drink with them but I don't drink. My sister Khatima doesn't drink either. I see now he's laughing. As if he's reading what's on my mind. I discover he has glimmering gold teeth and this makes his appearance here stranger. I hear him say: At the top of the mountain overlooking the village that welcomes loud wedding parties, there's a Kasbah where widows and married women who lost their husbands in the coups go.

# Whitefly

Abdelilah Hamdouchi

When a fourth corpse in three days washes up in Tangier with a bullet in the chest, Detective Laafrit knows this isn't just another illegal immigrant who didn't make it to the Spanish coast.

The traffickers. The drug dealers. The smugglers. They know what it takes to get a gun into Morocco, and so does Laafrit. As his team hunts for the gun, Laafrit follows a hunch and reveals an international conspiracy to unlock the case.

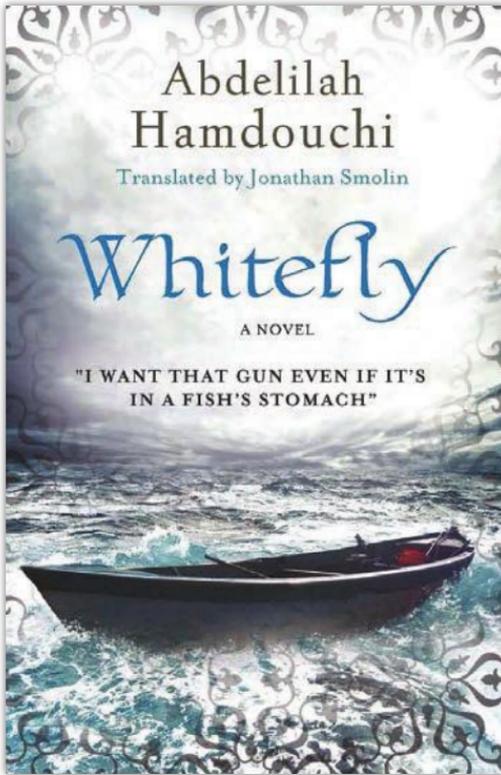
*Whitefly* is a fast-paced crime thriller from the Arab west.



Born in Meknès, Morocco in 1958, **Abdelilah Hamdouchi** is one of the first writers of police fiction in Arabic and a prolific, award-winning screenwriter of police thrillers. Many of his novels, including the acclaimed *The Final Bet*, address democracy and human rights issues. He lives in Rabat, Morocco.

Translator **Jonathan Smolin** is the author of *Moroccan Noir: Police, Crime, and Politics in Popular Culture* (2013). He lives in Hanover, NH.

*"I want that gun, even if it's in a fish's stomach."*



\$14.95 • £9.99

144pp • Paperback Original

978 977 416 751 5

March 2016

**BISAC:** Fiction / Crime; Fiction /  
Mystery & Detective /  
Police Procedural; Fiction /Thrillers /  
Political

**BIC:** Crime & Mystery,  
Fiction in Translation

**Sales points:**

- The first Arabic detective author translated into English
- Accessible style with broad commercial appeal
- Contemporary, topical backdrop of illegal immigration to Europe

**Rights:** World ex. Arabic



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Praise for *Whitefly*:

"Abdelilah Hamdouchi seems to have found the formula for the emergence of the Moroccan detective novel."—*Libération Kaleidoscope*

## Excerpt from *Whitefly*

When they reached the beach, they drove out to the farthest dry point opposite the sandy shore. It was a hill of rocky ground with gaps full of thistles. Despite the wetness of the area, strong winds were blowing sand and pebbles all over the place. The waves made a sound like slamming doors. The beach was empty except for the outlines of some people standing far away, under the wooden awning of Café Rif, which was practically abandoned.

The body tossed up on the beach was a male of about thirty. His features were clear and his clothes were distinctive. He had on a leather jacket with big pockets and dark khaki pants, like those soldiers wear. His shoes were authentic new Nikes, as if the guy had bought them just to drown in them. The corpse was laid out on its back and the tracks where it had been pulled from the water were visible on the sand.

Laafrit turned toward Café Rif and saw the bystanders had taken off.

“No doubt they’re the ones who pulled him from the water,” said the inspector.

“I hope they weren’t messing with the body before we got here,” said Laafrit.

Before he finished his sentence, a taxi pulled up and someone from forensics got out. He hurried over with a leather briefcase under his arm. Humpbacked, with a face concealed under thick glasses, this was the shortest cop in Tangier. His name was Abdellah, but when he wasn’t around they called him “the Dwarf.” Panting, he stopped in front of the body without paying it the least bit of attention.

“All our cars are busy with the demonstrations,” he said bitterly. “That bastard wanted to charge me.”

“Did you take down his plate number?” Laafrit asked, laughing.

“Of course. I’ll make his life hell with the traffic cops. He’ll rue the day he became a taxi driver.”

Inspector Allal moved away from the two. He snuck his prayer beads out of his pocket and gazed humbly at the sea.

“This guy and the others were duped,” said Abdellah, looking down at the drowned body. “Human smugglers take them out from the Atlantic coast and toss them into the Mediterranean just opposite Tangier, telling them they’ve made it to Spain.”

“If it’s like you say, other bodies will definitely turn up,” said Laafrit.

“Who pulled him from the water?” asked Inspector Abdellah.

“We don’t know. Maybe the guy who reported it. There were some people in front of Café Rif but they disappeared as soon as they saw us.”

“Don’t worry about them. They’re just hash smokers.”

Abdellah pulled a black camera with a big flash out of his bag and took a wide-angled photo of the body. He took pictures of the face and then shots from the front, side, and back. Laafrit walked over to Inspector Allal.

“God be praised,” Laafrit said to him.

Allal quickly put the beads back in his pocket. He seemed to be having a hard time leaving his inner thoughts behind.

“The ambulance is late,” said the inspector absentmindedly.

“Why don’t you radio them again?” asked Laafrit.

Allal lowered his head and walked toward the car. Laafrit leaned over the corpse.

“No need to dirty your hands,” said Abdellah. “They call themselves harraga, the people who try to cross illegally, because they burn their IDs before setting out on the patera so that no one will know who they are or where they came from if they get caught. This guy isn’t any different from the rest.”

“Everyone knows that,” said Laafrit, continuing to inspect the body. “At any rate, this poor son of a bitch and his buddies took a wrong turn. Maybe they had a crooked compass or just some bad luck. They should’ve washed up in Algeciras. They’d have made it to paradise, even if they got there DOA.”

# Time of White Horses

Ibrahim Nasrallah

Spanning the collapse of Ottoman rule and the British Mandate in Palestine, *Time of White Horses* is the story of three generations of a defiant family from the Palestinian village of Hadiya before 1948.

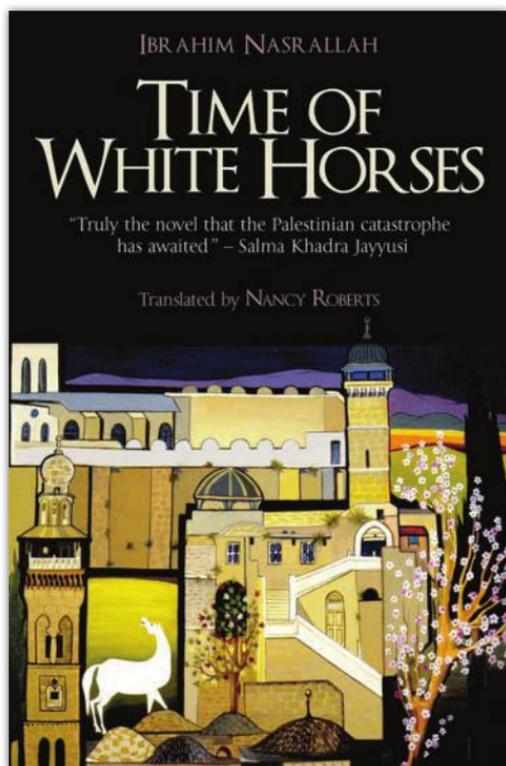
Through the lives of Hajj Mahmud, elder of Hadiya, his son Khaled, and Khaled's grandson Naji, we enter the lives of a tribe whose fate is decided by one colonizer after another. Khaled's remarkable white mare, Hamama, and her descendants feel and share the family's struggles and as a siege grips Hadiya, it falls to Khaled to save his people from a descending tyranny.



**Ibrahim Nasrallah** is considered one of the most influential voices of his generation. Raised in a refugee camp to Palestinian parents, he became a journalist before turning to creative writing. His work includes fourteen novels. He lives in Amman, Jordan.

An award-winning translator of Naguib Mahfouz, Ghada Samman, and Mohamed EL-Bisatie, **Nancy Roberts** also lives in Amman, Jordan.

“Truly the novel that the Palestinian catastrophe has awaited” – Salma Khadra Jayyusi



\$19.95 • £12.99

624pp • Paperback Original

978 977 416 757 7

April 2016

**BISAC:**

Fiction / Literary; Fiction / Sagas

**BIC:** Fiction in Translation, Sagas

**Sales points:**

- Shortlisted for the “Arab Booker”
- A work of noted political importance for the Israeli Occupation of Palestine
- World-renowned author and critically acclaimed novel

**Rights:** World English



### Praise for *Time of White Horses*:

“Nasrallah’s intensely eloquent voice gives Western audiences an insight into the lives of the marginalized without rattling off numbers.”

–Tam Hussein, *New Statesman*

“Men are murdered or executed, demolitions and collective punishment meted out, ancestral lands taken at a stroke. One learns the lesson that the behavior of any oppressor is the same, regardless of time or circumstance.”

–Norbert Hirschhorn, *Banipal*

“The measure of the greatness of this book is its humility in approaching a people’s vast experience. . . . Nasrallah’s writing evokes this epic grandeur in discrete, alluring, lyric chapters.” – Benjamin Hollander, *Warscapes*

## Excerpt from *Time for White Horses*

Khaled's wound had yet to heal. The sudden loss he'd suffered still perplexed and galled him. How had she slipped through his fingers? How had death snatched her away from him when he'd been clinging to her so tightly?

He'd fallen in love with her during a season when they'd left Hadiya for Jerusalem. Hajj Mahmud had known her father for a long time.

And no sooner had they reached home again than he grabbed a plate and broke it.

His mother Munira heard the sound of shattering porcelain. "The evil's been broken!" she exclaimed.

He grabbed another plate and broke it.

"The evil's been broken!" said his mother.

Turning to her son, she said, "What's wrong with you today?"

Yet before she had a chance to finish her question, another of her rose-colored china plates, which Hajj Mahmud had bought from a Turkish military policeman, had come crashing to the floor.

Seeing her son picking up still another one, she shouted, "Hajj Mahmud, do something about your son before he breaks the whole house!"

Hajj Mahmud came running, realizing that the longing for a woman was pulsing in his son's veins.

Costly as it was, this was the way the young men of that region's villages used to announce that they'd been bachelors long enough.

Truth be told, Munira had been anxiously awaiting the day when she would hear the sound of a plate shattering in her house. But she didn't wish to sacrifice more of her china plates than she had to, no matter what the reason. Consequently, the minute she realized the danger her precious plates were in, she started bellowing.

With one plate over his head and the rest of them cradled between his left hand and his waist, Khaled stood poised to carry on with the operation, when Hajj Mahmud walked in.

*Hoopoe is an imprint of the American University in Cairo Press*

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### **Spring 2016**

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*A Rare Blue Bird Flies with Me*, Youssef Fadel  
*Whitefly*, Abdelilah Hamdouchi  
*Time of White Horses*, Ibrahim Nasrallah

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*Otared*, Mohamed Rabie  
*No Knives in the Kitchens of This City*, Khaled Khalifa  
*The Longing of the Dervish*, Hammour Ziada  
*A Beautiful White Cat Walks with Me*, Youssef Fadel  
*The Final Bet*, Abdelilah Hamdouchi  
*The Time-Travels of the Man Who Sold Pickles and Sweets*,  
Khairy Shalaby

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