

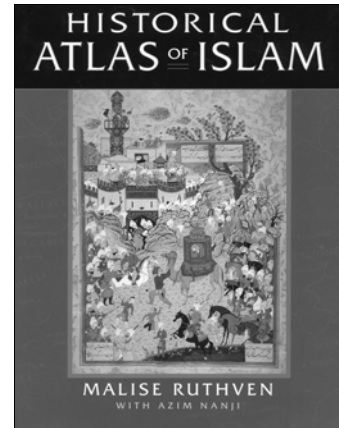
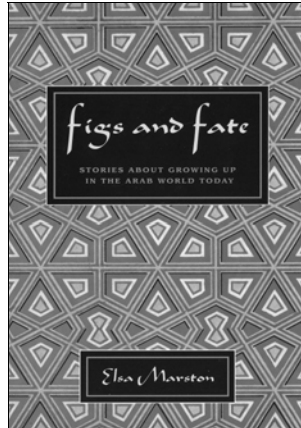
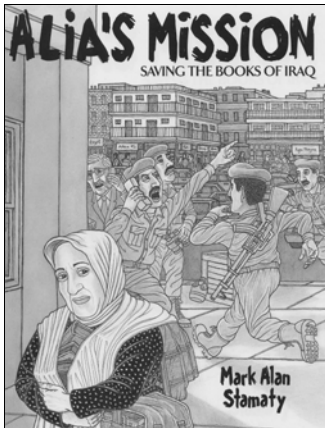
THE MIDDLE EAST CENTER

The Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington, Seattle WA

Winter 2006

Vol. 31 No. 2

Awards Announced for Literature on the Middle East for Children and Young Adults



THE WINNERS of the annual Middle East Outreach Council's book awards for children's and young adult literature are:

PICTURE BOOK CATEGORY

Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq by Mark Alan Stamaty (Alfred A. Knopf, 2004)

YOUTH LITERATURE CATEGORY

Figs and Fate by Elsa Marston (George Braziller, 2005)

REFERENCE CATEGORY

Historical Atlas of Islam by Malise Ruthven and Azim Nanji (Harvard University Press, 2004).

The Middle East Outreach Council established these awards in 1999 to recognize books for children and young adults that contribute meaningfully to an understanding of the Middle East. Books are judged on the authenticity of their portrayal of a Middle Eastern subject, as well as on their characterization, plot, and appeal for the intended audience.

Alia's Mission: Saving the Books of Iraq was inspired by a true story, book recounts the heroic efforts of Alia Muhammad Baker—the chief librarian of the Central Library in Basra, Iraq—to preserve her country's history and culture in the midst of war. When government officials ignored her pleas for help, Alia and her neighbors smuggled over 30,000 books to safety, where they remain until peace returns to her country. Her story—told here in graphic-novel style—will inspire children as well as

adults. Honorable mention in the picture book category was awarded to *The Librarian of Basra* by Jeanette Winter (Harcourt, 2005)—a colorfully illustrated telling of the same story for younger children, and *The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela* by Uri Shulevitz (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005)—an account of the twelfth-century journeys of a Jewish traveler, including travels to Constantinople, Jerusalem, Baghdad, Persia, and Egypt.

Figs and Fate contains five short stories about growing up in the Arab world today told from the perspective of young Arab teens living in Syria, Lebanon, a Palestinian refugee camp, Egypt, and Iraq. Marston beautifully details the rich culture of these youths and their families, in the process helping to dispel negative stereotypes associated with young adults living in these societies. Readers will discover that their personal struggles, ideals, goals, and dreams are surprisingly familiar.

The *Historical Atlas of Islam* is a beautifully illustrated history of Islam, which provides a broad overview of the economic, social, political, and cultural history of the Islamic world from the birth of the Prophet Muhammad to the present. Brief essays address pivotal moments and movements and eras, and color maps and photographs effectively complement the text throughout. Clear and concise, The *Historical Atlas of Islam* serves as an excellent introduction to Islamic civilization—*Leslie Nucho, Chair, MEOC Book Awards* ☺

From Language to Language (Misefa Lesafa)

A Film by Nurith Aviv

Reviewed by Naomi Sokoloff

IN *Language to Language*, film-maker Nurith Aviv interviews writers, performing artists, and scholars in Israel who carry out their creative work in Hebrew, a language that is not their native tongue.

The ten individuals interviewed reflect on how they acquired multiple languages and how those languages have shaped their thinking. Poet Meir Wieseltier analyzes the influence of German and Russian on his Hebrew verse. Agi Mishol, with her background in Hungarian, Yiddish and German as well as Hebrew, suggests that being caught between languages makes her more self-conscious, more aware of language itself, and so helps her to craft poetry. Rabbi and philosopher Daniel Epstein, born in Switzerland, turns to Hebrew for expression of his religious convictions and ethics, but he cherishes the nuances, the subtleties, and the poetic qualities of French. He regards his teaching and scholarship as a constant attempt to mediate between languages, to pass along messages from one world to another.

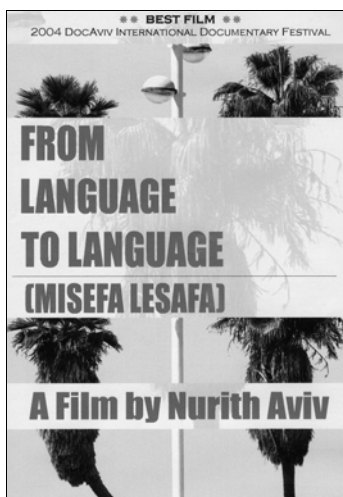
Some segments of the film emphasize linguistic obstacles to acculturation. For example, singer Haim Uliel charts the circuitous path he took toward embracing his Moroccan Jewish heritage. He recalls that, as a child, he was ashamed of his Arabic-accented Hebrew. In his teenage years he began singing English-language rock music as a way to escape stigma. Later, as he matured, he applied his rock 'n' roll skills to traditional North African materials. He now performs in both Hebrew and Arabic, helping *mizrabi* audiences reconnect with their past and take pride in their origins. Haviva Pedaya, whose parents were born in Iraq, also moves between Hebrew and Arabic. She, too, felt like an outsider during her childhood, but subsequently her understanding of Arabic came to enrich both her poetry and her work as a professor of Jewish Thought.

Special issues face Palestinians who view Hebrew as a language imposed on them by the Jewish State. Author Salman Masalha, who publishes in Hebrew, arrives at a conclusion not unlike the one Anton Shammas promoted in the 1980s: in this view, Hebrew is now no longer a Jewish language, but a language that belongs to all who write in it. Singer Amal Murkus, baffled and disappointed that many Jewish Israelis seem indifferent to learning

Arabic, nonetheless performs in both languages as a way to work for cross-cultural understanding.

The best known writer featured in the film is Aharon Appelfeld, author of numerous novels that have been translated to English. Born in Central Europe in 1932, Appelfeld was a young child during the Holocaust. He survived by wandering in the forests and occasionally taking refuge with peasants on the outskirts of villages. The extreme conditions left him with a smattering of several languages and a chaotic inner life.

He never had formal schooling till after the war. At that time, learning Hebrew systematically was redemptive and healing, but also a source of alienation. Integral to a Zionist ideology intent on negating the Diaspora, Hebrew was a language that distanced him from his past. For this he considers Hebrew a "step-mother tongue." Most movingly, he explains that since 1946 Hebrew has been the language of his daily life, his work, and his dreams, yet he still fears losing it, for it is not fully his -- not a mother tongue. Finally, completing the collection here, actress Evgenya Dodin represents the recent wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union. Like many of the almost 1 million Russian-speaking immigrants who have arrived in Israel since 1989, she wants to hold onto her native tongue and to celebrate Russian arts and culture, even while learning Hebrew and performing in it. Her outlook and (*continued on page 3*)



FIROOZEH PAPAN-MATIN

Persian Language and Literature Specialist Joins Faculty



Firoozeh Papan-Matin

JOINING the faculty of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization this past fall as an assistant professor is Firoozeh Papan-Matin, a specialist in Persian languages and literature. Before coming to the University of Washington, she was the coordinator of the Persian program at the University of California-Santa Barbara. She also established the Persian program at Santa Monica College in 1998. She received her Ph.D. from UCLA in 2003 writing a dissertation titled “Death, Vision, and the Self in ‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadhani,” which

makes extensive use of classical Arabic and Persian primary sources. Her academic interests are wide ranging and include pedagogy of modern language teaching, modern and classical Persian and Arabic literature, Islamic mysticism, literary theory and post-structural critical studies. Her published books include: *The Unveiling of Secrets (Kashf al-Asrar): The Visionary Autobiography of Ruzbihan al-Baqli, 1128-1209* (Brill, 2005); and *The Love Poems of Ahmad Shamlu, 1925-2000* (IBEX, 2005).

From Language to Language (Continued)

experiences are strikingly different from those of previous generations, when societal pressures to acculturate were higher and when newcomers were expected fit in, absorb Hebrew, and leave other languages behind.

Every one of these individuals recounts fascinating anecdotes and raises a host of worthwhile questions about the relationship of language to memory, creative process, and the construction of identity. The uneven quality of the soundtrack occasionally detracts from the overall production value of the film, but the interviews are nonetheless riveting (and many viewers will be reading the English subtitles, anyway, rather than relying on the Hebrew voices). Highly recommended, this award-winning film will be of interest for anyone studying multilingual experience, whether in the context of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, ethnicity and nationalism, or Israeli culture.

From Language to Language (2004), directed by Nurith Aviv. First Run/Icarus Films. Run time 55 min. Hebrew with English subtitles. Available for classroom use from the Middle East Center Resource Center.

Naomi Sokoloff is Professor, Near Eastern Languages and Civilization.

FORUM ON THE ISRAELI ELECTIONS

MARCH 7, 2006
7:00 P.M., KANE 110
UW CAMPUS

Free and open to the public

Speakers include: Joel Migdal, and Gad Barzilai, Jackson School, UW. Moderated by Ellis Goldberg, Political Science, UW.

Sponsored by the Middle East Center, and Jewish Studies, Jackson School. Contact: 206.543.4227; mecuw@u.washington.edu.

The Middle East Center's sponsorship of this event does not imply that the Center endorses the content of the event.

CALENDAR OF SELECTED UP-COMING EVENTS

February 10, 2006

Between Coercion and Privatization: Academic Freedom in the 21st Century.

12:30 p.m., Law School, Rm. 118. Speaker: Beshara Doumani, University of California-Berkeley. Contact: 206.543.6398

February 12, 2006

Justice, Purity, and Sexuality in Modern Iranian History. 4:00 p.m., Kane Hall, Rm. 120.

Speaker: Janet Afary, Purdue University. 2006 Afrassiabi Lecture. Contact: 206.543.6033.

February 25, 2006

K-8 Mosaic: Storytelling, Puppetry, and Masks from around the World. 8:30 a.m.

to 3:30 p.m., Thomson Hall. Registration required (*see form inside*)

March 7, 2006

Forum on the Israeli Elections. 7:00 p.m., Kane Hall, Rm. 110. Speakers: Gad Barzilai,

Joel Migdal, Jackson School; Ellis Goldberg, Political Science, UW; and others. Contact: 206.543-4227; mecuw@u.washington.edu

March 10, 2006

The Politics of Deliberation: Qat Chews at Public Spheres in Yemen. 12:30 p.m.,

Law School, Rm. 118. Speaker: Lisa Wedeen, University of Chicago. Contact: 206.543.6398.

April 19, 2006

Yemen and the Spread and Control of Global Jihad and Terror. Speaker: Robert Burrowes,

Jackson School. Part of the Hot Spots in Our World Series. \$15 registration required.

Call: 206.897.8939 to register.

The Middle East Center Newsletter

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