

Youssef Rakha

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Education

B.A. IN ENGLISH AND PHILOSOPHY (FIRST CLASS) | 1998 | UNIVERSITY OF HULL, U.K.

AWARDED PHILIP LARKIN PRIZE IN ENGLISH, CHRIS AYERS PRIZE IN PHILOSOPHY

Experience as a Journalist

CULTURAL EDITOR, COPY EDITOR | AL-AHRAM WEEKLY | 2009 – PRESENT

- Revise, fact-check, rewrite and translate reviews, interviews, features and opinion pieces.
- Commission, assign, and supervise in-house and free-lance work.

FEATURES WRITER | THE NATIONAL, ABU DHABI | 2008 – 2009

- Was a founding staff member, working for The Review and the daily arts section.
- Wrote interviews, reviews and long-form pieces on the state of the Arab press and the poets of the Emirates, among other topics.

CULTURAL REPORTER | AL-AHRAM WEEKLY | 1999 – 2008

- Reviewed books, films, plays and exhibitions.
- Interviewed prominent cultural figures (including the late Youssef Chahine and the late Naguib Mahfouz).
- Covered events such as the Cairo International Film Festival, the Cairo Book Fair, and the opening of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina.

Other Experience

EDITOR | THE SULTAN'S SEAL WEBSITE | 2013 – 2023

- Founded the website using wordpress.com, conceptualizing, designing, managing, and updating it.
- Sought out, commissioned, and communicated with writers and artists both in the Arab world and beyond to publish their work on a voluntary basis.
- Coordinated with coeditors who commissioned work in English.
- Edited and curated images for pieces published.

PROJECT MANAGER | EL WARSHA THEATRE COMPANY | 1998 – 1999

- Wrote and revised project proposals and other administrative documents.
- Took minutes and acted as a simultaneous interpreter during conferences and meetings.

RAPPORTEUR/STAGE PROMPT | EL WARSHA THEATRE COMPANY | 1993 – 1995

- Took meeting minutes and kept a record of rehearsal activities.
- Prompted the actors during performances.

Freelance Work

WRITING | 1999 – PRESENT

- In addition to the Arabic press, I have contributed fiction and nonfiction to, among many others, *3:AM Magazine*, *The Adroit Journal*, *Aeon*, *Asymptote*, *The Atlantic*, *Bidoun*, *BOMB*, *The Collagist*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Chimurenga*, *The Common*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Dial*, *Doek!*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Quarterly*, *GQ Middle East*, *Guernica*, *Internazionale*, *The Kenyon Review*, *KGB Bar*, *Jadaliyya*, *Lettre Internationale*, *Literary Hub*, *The London Magazine*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Mada Masr*, *The Markaz Review*, *Mashallah News*, *McSweeney's*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Middle East Eye*, *Discovery*, *Mizna*, *New Lines*, *The New York Times*, *Parnassus*, *Ploughshares*, *Reportagen*, *The Rumpus*, *SALZ*, *Shenandoah*, and *The White Review*.

CREATIVE WRITING TEACHING, MENTORING | 2009 – PRESENT

- I've been a Periplus mentor since 2025.
- I've conducted creative writing workshops in both Arabic and English at, among other Cairo institutions, Al Kotob Khan bookstore, Darb 1718, and Cultograph. I've also conducted workshops online.

PHOTOGRAPHY | 2002 – PRESENT

- My exhibition "Cairo-Alexandria/Berlin" was held at the Goethe Institute, Cairo in 2006.
- Published photo stories/series on Panorama Mada Masr, *Berfrois*, *Bidoun*, *Edge of Humanity* and *Mashalla News*.
- Published individual images on *F-Stop Magazine* and *P1xels*, among others.
- Provided cover art for books including the English edition of Abdellah Taïa's *Infidels* (2016).

LITERARY TRANSLATION (INTO ARABIC) | 2019 – PRESENT

- Truman Capote, *The Complete Stories*, Rowayat, forthcoming
- Leo Damrosch, *The Club: Johnson, Boswell, and the Friends Who Shaped an Age*, Al-Tanwir, 2023
- John Banville, *The Book of Evidence*, Rowayat. 2020

Literary Honors and Distinctions

- I have been selected for a Yaddo fellowship to work on my new novel (2027).
- *The Dissenters*, my first novel to be written in English, was named a most anticipated book of 2025 by *Harper's Bazaar*, *Lit Hub*, and *The Millions*. It was a *New Yorker*, *BOMB*, and CLMP book of the year and a Dublin Literary Award nominee.
- I received the AFAC grant to complete and publish *And Yet My Heart: Third Millennium Mutanabbi*, a book of 20 poems and a personal essay, with illustrations by Walid Taher in 2021.
- My third novel, *Paulo*, was on the long list of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction and won the Sawiris Award in 2017.
- My first novel, *The Book of the Sultan's Seal*, won the Banipal Seif Ghobash Prize for Paul Starkey's translation in 2015.
- I was among the 39 best Arab writers under 40 selected for the Hay Festival Beirut 39 Festival in 2010.
- My 2006 photo travelogue *Beirut Shi Mahal* was nominated for the Lettre Ulysses Award for the Art of Reportage in 2006.
- My work has prompted appearances at, among other events, the Hay Festival in the UK (2011), the Ritratti di Poesia in Rome (2015), the Internationales Literaturfestival Leukerbad in Switzerland

(2016), La Comédie du livre in Montpellier, France (2017), and Dubai's Emirates Airlines Festival of Literature's anniversary round (2018).

- I am on the permanent Arab jury of the True Story Award for investigative journalism, and I've judged film as well as writing competitions.

Books Published

- *Postmuslim: A Testimony*, essays, Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2026 ISBN 978-1-64445-415-2. London: Peninsula Press, 2026. ISBN 978-1-91351-289-7.
- *The Dissenters*, novel, Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2025. ISBN 978-1-64445-319-3; London: Peninsula Press, 2025. ISBN 978-1-91351-267-5.
- *Inaka dhahib ila al Bar* (Arabic: إنك ذاهب إلى البار; You Are Going to the Bar), novella, Milan: Al-Mutawassit, 2024. ISBN 979-1-2559-1029-9
- *Emissaries*, short stories, London: Barakunan, 2023. ISBN 978-1-3999-3363
- *Walakinna Qalbi: Ma ba'd al Mutanabbi* (Arabic: ولكن قلبي: ما بعد المتنبي; And Yet My Heart: Post Mutanabbi), essays and poems, with illustrations by Walid Taher, Dammam: Dar Athar, 2022. ISBN 978-603-91904-5-5
- *Walakinna Qalbi: Mutanabbi al Alfiya al Thalitha* (Arabic: ولكن قلبي: متنبى الألفية الثالثة; And Yet My Heart: Third Millennium Mutanabbi), 20 poems and a personal essay, Cairo-Beirut-Tunis: Dar Al-Tanwir, 2021. ISBN 978-977-828-060-9
- *Barra and Zaman: Reading Egyptian Modernity in Shadi Abdel Salam's The Mummy*, essay, Palgrave Macmillan (Pivot): Arab Cinema Series, 2020. ISBN 978-3-030-61353-2
- *Arab Porn*, essay (ebook only), 60Pages (long-form collective), 2016. ASIN B01J4YMPZK. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2017. ISBN 978-3-95757-382-7
- *Paulo* (Arabic: بالولو), novel, Cairo-Beirut-Tunis: Dar Al-Tanwir, 2016. ISBN 978-977648-358-3
- *The Crocodiles* (Arabic: التماسيح), novel, Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi, 2013. ISBN 978-1-85516-878-7. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2015. ISBN 978-160980-571-5
- *The Book of the Sultan's Seal: Strange Incidents from History in the City of Mars* (Arabic: كتاب الطغرى: غرائب التاريخ في مدينة المريخ), novel, Cairo: Dar Al-Shorouk, 2011. ISBN 978-9-77092-988-9. Beirut: Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 2018. ISBN 978-6-14419-868-1. USA: Interlink, 2015. ISBN 978-1-56656-916-3. Geneva: Éditions Zoé, 2016. ISBN 978-2-88927-378-2
- *Kull amakinina* (Arabic: كل أماكننا; All Our Places), poems and essays, Cairo: Dar Al-Ain, 2010. ISBN 978-9-77490-022-8
- *Shamal al qahira gharb al filibbin* (Arabic: شمال القاهرة غرب الفلبين; North of Cairo, West of the Philippines), travel essays, Beirut: Riyad El-Rayyes, 2009. ISBN 978-9-95321-422-1
- *Bourguiba ala madad* (Arabic: بورقيبة على مضض; Bourguiba Reluctantly), part two of Beirut shi mahal (without photos), Beirut: Riyad El-Rayyes, 2008. ISBN 995-3-21334-8
- *Beirut shi mahal* (Arabic: بيروت شي محل; Beirut Some Place), photo travelogue, Alexandria: Amkenah Books, 2006. Beirut jest gdzieś tam, Warsaw: Dobra Literatura, 2012. ISBN 978-83-935437-0-0
- *Azhar ash-shams* (Arabic: أزهار الشمس; Flowers of the Sun), short stories, Cairo: Dar Sharqiyat, 1999