



DICTIONARY OF
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BIOGRAPHY

EDITORS IN CHIEF

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VOLUME 1

- by Muhammad 'Abduh. London: Oxford University Press, 1933. Reprint, London: Routledge, 2000.
- Haj, Samira. *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009. Includes a "close reading" of the works of 'Abduh.
- Kedourie, Elie. *Afghani and 'Abduh: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam*. London: Frank Cass, 1966. Reprint, London: Routledge, 2008. Argues, not entirely convincingly, that 'Abduh held esoteric beliefs incompatible with orthodox Islam.
- Kerr, Malcolm H. *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

GEOFFREY ROPER

Abdul-Hayy, Muhammad (1944–1989), Sudanese poet, critic, and academician, was born in Ad Damer on 1 January 1944, after which he moved across Sudan with his family. His father was Abdul-Hayy Mahmoud, an architect who studied country planning in Britain. His mother, Aziza Ismael Fawzy, was a daughter of an architect as well. Abdul-Hayy married Dr. Aisha Moussa and had four children. He graduated from Khartoum University and obtained his PhD in comparative literature from Oxford University. He published many important volumes of poetry and produced many books and critical essays in both Arabic and English. In the 1970s he held some cultural and academic posts. For his last nine years, a series of ailments caused his health to decline and his linguistic memory to die until he was completely paralyzed. After a long struggle with illness, he died on 23 August 1989 in Sopa University Hospital.

Abdul-Hayy was among those who called for a national literature that highlighted the cultural, geographical, and historical specificity of Sudan. Some scholars have dealt with his literature as belonging to the school of "forest and desert." This school of poetry highlights the combination of the Arab cultural component (symbolized by the desert) and the African cultural component (symbolized by the jungle).

Abdul-Hayy's awareness of Sudan's cultural specificity was a motive for him to write about the kingdom of Sennar. This kingdom was founded in 1504 after some Arab and African tribes were united. It ruled large parts of Sudan until its fall in 1821. This kingdom was always presented in his poetry as a symbol of the perfect coexistence between races and cultures incarnated in the Arab

and African cultures. His poem "The Return to Sennar" received huge acclaim when it was first published in 1963 and provided him with widespread popularity around the Arab world even though he was still an adolescent. Despite the fact that Abdul-Hayy himself denied that his poetry belonged to the "forest and desert" school, the issue of Sudanese identity dominated his poetry. His poetic works include *Moa'alakat al isharat* (The Signals, 1977); *Al-samandal yughanni* (The Newt Sings, 1977); *Hadiqat al-ward al-akhirah* (The Last Rose Garden, 1984); and *Allah fizaman al'unf* (God in the Time of Violence, 1993). His *The Return to Sennar* (1973) received the most popularity and attained great interest from critics.

Abdul-Hayy not only produced volumes of poetry but also wrote a play, *Ru't al-malik* (The King's Vision, 1973), and translated selections of African poetry into English and published them under the title *Tribal Masks*. His writings on comparative literature in general and on the relationship between Arabic literature and Western literature in particular were of extreme significance in the field of Arabic studies.

Abdul-Hayy was not only a distinguished poet but also a distinguished scholar. As soon as he completed his studies in the Department of English, University of Khartoum, in 1967, he traveled on a scholarship to England in 1968. Two years later, he obtained his MA degree from Leeds University. His thesis revolved around the works of the British poet Edwin Muir (1887–1959); it was published by the University of Khartoum under the title *The Angel and the Girl: Necessity and Liberty in Edwin Muir's Works*. In 1973 he obtained his PhD from Oxford University in comparative literature; his dissertation was published in London in 1982 under the title *Tradition and English and American Influence in Arabic Romantic Poetry: A Study in Comparative Literature*.

Having obtained his PhD, Abdul-Hayy returned to Sudan and taught English and comparative literature in the Department of English, University of Khartoum, serving as head of the department from 1978 to 1980. Before that, he established the journal of the faculty of arts and was its editor in chief. Throughout his academic life, Abdul-Hayy wrote a number of scholarly works in Arabic and English, including *Conflict and Identity: The Cultural Poetics of Contemporary Sudanese Poetry* (Khartoum, 1967), *The Greek Myth in Contemporary Arabic Poetry (1900–1950): A Study in Comparative Literature* (in Arabic) (Cairo, 1977), *English Poets in Arabic: The Arab Romantics' Knowledge of English*

Poetry (1900–1950): A Study in Comparative Literature with a bibliography of Arabic translations of English and American poetry, 1830–1970 (Khartoum, 1980), and *Vision and Words: A Reading in al-Tijani Yousuf Basheer's Poetry* (Khartoum, 1985).

Abdul-Hayy did not indulge in political activity. When he attempted to join the National al-Ummah Party, he was rejected; subsequently, he joined the National Unionist Party instead. He was a member of the Sudanese Socialist Union for a short time when he accepted the post of director of the Department of Culture in the Ministry of Culture and Information from 1976 to 1977. During this short period he established the Child Culture Centre and tried to strengthen cultural ties with the Arab world by inviting Arab writers to Sudanese cultural festivals.

Since his death Abdul-Hayy's presence on both the academic and the literary levels in Sudan has not waned. His academic works are being translated into Arabic and what has been released is getting republished, and his poetry is receiving increasing levels of critical attention.

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EMAD ABDUL-LATIF

Abdulla, Muhammed Said (1918–1991), Swahili novelist, was born in Makunduchi village in Zanzibar (now part of Tanzania) in 1918. Even though he was a Muslim, he was educated in a missionary school. After completing his secondary education in 1938, he worked for the Civil Health Department and edited the *Swahili Bulletin* in the Department of Agriculture on his island. His complete biography remains obscure. He lost all his family in January 1964 during the bloody revolution that overthrew the sultan of Zanzibar and his mainly Arab government but took a heavy toll of victims among the population as well.

Abdulla's first novelette, *Mzimu wa watu wa kale* (Graveyard of the Ancestors, 1960), aroused lively interest among the critics for its innovations: the abandonment of the folktale tradition, omnipresent in Swahili fiction of those days, and the concern for literary style. It won first prize in the East

African Literary Competition of 1957–1958, and this fact was a great encouragement for Abdulla's literary career.

The novelette is the first of a series of detective stories linked through the character of Bwana Msa ("Msa" being an acronym of the author's name), an amateur detective, and his friend Najum, who have been labeled by the critics the African Sherlock Holmes and his Watson. The grim mystery of a corpse found in a graveyard with his head chopped off is resolved with incredible ease by Bwana Msa, and such is also the case in his subsequent stories. In *Kisima cha Giningi* (The Giningi Well, 1969) the richest woman of a village is murdered by her greedy uncle. *Duniani kuna watu* (There Are People in the World, 1973) is a story of unintentional incest between a tender heiress and her father's driver; only after their secret wedding do they discover that they are sister and brother. In *Siri ya sifuri* (The Secret of Zero, 1974) the fiancé of another rich heiress is killed by his rival. *Mwana wa Yungi hulewa* (Even the Devil's Child Is Brought Up, 1976) is the story of two illegitimate children of an Arab princess and a rich Goan, entrusted to a wicked servant who steals the children's money and, on top of that, engages a killer to murder them. Finally, in the last novel, *Kosa la Bwana Msa* (Bwana Msa's Fault, 1984), the famous detective commits a mistake when investigating a case of bigamy. The protagonist marries a rich woman and, secretly, another one, younger and prettier. The first wife discovers the deceit and sends two killers after the husband, but it is she who eventually dies. Rather than a thriller, it is a sentimental story with some suspense.

A great shortcoming of Abdulla's novelettes is their unconvincing, overcomplicated plots. All the stories are situated in prerevolutionary Zanzibar among extremely rich people, for the most part wealthy Arab landowners. Their present is intertwined with the past; in fact, crime or any other mystery on which the plot is built derives from the complex relationship that brings together the various characters in the story. Vengeance and greed are the most powerful motives for the criminal actions.

For some critics Bwana Msa is a black European with a job or hobby that does not exist in Africa. Other characters, however, especially village people, are without doubt truly Zanzibarian and so is the setting of all the stories. Abdulla's philosophical attitude appears distinctly in his later works. While solving an entangled problem, Bwana Msa finds