



# Women and the 19th-Century Emergence of the Arabic Novel: Female Authors, Feminine Characters, Feminist Narratives

Guest Lecture by  
Prof. Marilyn Booth (University of Oxford)

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University of Zurich, Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies, Room RAA G15,  
Rämistrasse 59, 8001 Zürich

## Abstract

Women's engagement in producing the early Arabic novel was not just about authoring texts or reading them. In Arabic capitals as elsewhere in the world, the novel emerged as part of an ongoing process of socio-political transformation, particularly changing configurations of male-female social relations and new ideas about masculinity and femininity. Early Arabic novels reflected the fact that gender politics were central to debates on modernity, political freedom, sociality and nation formation amongst an expanding Arab intelligentsia. This lecture discusses the shared themes and narrative strategies of novels authored by Arab women between 1888 and 1909 in the cultural hubs of nineteenth-century Arab life: Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, and New York. In the process, it touches on issues of audience; linkages between fiction and issues of gendered behavior, education and who should read; perceived links between morality, reading, and behavior; and the creation of female readerships.

**Marilyn Booth** is the Khalid bin Abdallah Al Saud Professor for the Study of the Contemporary Arab World, Oriental Institute and Magdalen College, Oxford University. Her most recent scholarly book is *Classes of Ladies of Cloistered Spaces: Writing Feminist History in fin-de-siecle Egypt* (Edinburgh, 2015). She has translated numerous novels, short story collections and memoirs from the Arabic.

