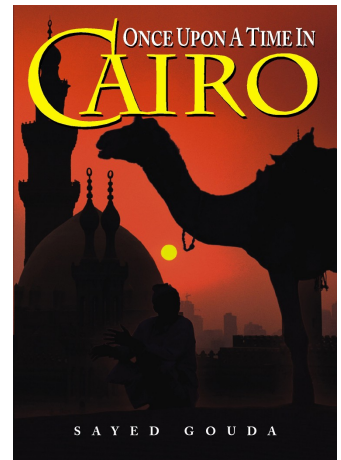


Once Upon a Time in Cairo

FICTION by Sayed Gouda

Themes of conflict, family loyalty, love and betrayal are woven into a convincing and colourful picture of working-class life in Egypt. Ostensibly a story about an ongoing struggle between two families over three decades, the book is also a carefully constructed allegory of the wider Middle East conflict.

The story opens in the Cairo of 1948. Two families lay claim to a plot of land on which they share a house. The strongman of the district takes the side of one against the other, and a man dies defending his property. Three generations live through conflict, celebration, betrayal and murder until love finally blossoms between young members of opposing sides. This poses new dilemmas. Can young lovers rise above 'an eye for an eye'? Will they choose peace – or seek a just revenge?



About the Author

Egyptian-born Sayed Gouda is a well-known figure on the Hong Kong literary scene, hosting a monthly writers' salon at the Fringe Club. Three of his books have been published in Egypt, and the author's website www.arabicnadwah.com has become well known throughout the Middle East. His writing style has been compared to that of Naguib Mahfouz. What drives him to write?

"When I was fifteen I read a quotation by Tolstoy saying that a man's soul is like a patch of earth," he said. "You never know what treasures it hides until you dig deep and search. I have applied this advice throughout my life. When I started writing this novel, I was only trying to discover what else my soul was hiding from me."

Looking at current world events, he feels this is an important time to try to bridge the obvious gulf between cultures. "It has never been so important as it is now," he said. "If we do not have understanding, then only the laws of the jungle apply."

Gouda has been interviewed by the *South China Morning Post* and *Cairo Community Times*, and has appeared on RTHK Radio 3. He was chosen to read from this book at the 2006 Hong Kong International Literary Festival.

Book Details

ISBN-13: 9789628673247
 Format: 304 pages, 128mm x 185mm, paperback
 Publication date: March 2006
 Cover price: US\$11.95
 Purchase link: <http://www.blacksmithbooks.com/9628673246.htm>

Sample pages are available for download at the above link.

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