



The Diaries of Waguih Ghali: An Egyptian Writer in the Swinging Sixties Volume 2: 1966--68

By May Hawas

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In 1968 Egyptian novelist and political exile Waguih Ghali committed suicide in the London flat of his editor, friend, and sometime lover, Diana Athill. Ghali left behind six notebooks of diaries that for decades were largely inaccessible to the public. *An Egyptian in the Swinging Sixties* is the first publication of its kind of the journals, casting fascinating light on a likeable and highly enigmatic literary personality.

Waguih Ghali (1930?-69), author of the acclaimed novel *Beer in the Snooker Club*, was a libertine, sponger, and manic depressive, but also an extraordinary writer, a pacifist, and a savvy political commentator. Covering the last four years of his life, Ghali's *Diaries* offer an exciting glimpse into London's swinging sixties. Volume 2 of the Diaries covers the period from 1966 to 1968. Moving from West Germany to London and Israel, and back in memory to Egypt and Paris, the entries boast of endless drinking, countless love affairs, and of mingling with the dazzling intellectuals of London, but the *Diaries* also critique the sinister political circles of Jerusalem and Cairo, describe Ghali's trepidation at being the first Egyptian allowed into Israel after the 1967 War, and confess in detail the pain and difficulties of writing and exile.

Including an interview conducted by Deborah Starr, with Ghali's cousin, former director of UNICEF-Geneva, Samir Basta.

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- Rank: #818160 in Books
- Published on: 2017-08-01
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x .70" w x 9.10" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 272 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Certainly a must-read for anyone interested in Ghali's work and perhaps of wider interest."--**Marcia Lynx Qualey**, *Arabic Literature (in English)*

"Waguhi Ghali's widely acclaimed novel 'Beer in the Snooker Club' has become a classic of Arabic literature. Ghali, like other once marginalized authors and artists, has become an intellectual reference in and outside the Arab world for current attempts to re-articulate the terms of the debate on culture, nation, and the world in times of painful transition from an old order to something unknown. The publication of his diaries is an important contribution to this endeavor, for it enables us to learn more about the author and his context. Ghali was a non-conformist socialist, a political dissenter, an avant-garde figure, haunted by alienation, depression, nostalgia, and by being a little too fond of the good life, and by contradictions that still mark our times."--Georges Khalil, Forum Transregionale Studien

"The diaries give us a clearer picture of Ghali and the nature of his life in exile, and help to correct some misconceptions about him. They constitute an important document of confession in which we can trace and reflect on the difficulties of writing and the alienation of a writer who lost his home in his childhood and his country in his youth."--Iman Ali, *al-Hayat*

"Meticulously edited by May Hawas. . . . The diaries cover, and shed much light on, the last four years of Ghali's life as well as, through reminiscences, aspects of his youth."--Paul K Lyons, *The Diary Review*

"The author clearly imagines-or at least hopes-the diary will one day be published in book form. As he hopes it, he also worries that we, who will read his once-private thoughts, will laugh at him. 'This, to me, is one of the cruelest things I am experiencing.' He needn't have agonized over this. While a reader who admires 'Beer in the Snooker Club' might be disappointed at the Diaries' very different tone, it would take a stone-hearted reader to laugh at the author's suffering."--Marcia Lynx Qualey, Qantara.de

"An account of a daily struggle to avoid 'sinking', to fight the 'cafard', not to succumb to 'the disease'--all the different names Ghali finds for his depression. His every romantic relationship (and there were many: he was attractive to women) is doomed by his terror of being humiliated and abandoned."--Ursula Lindsey, *London Review of Books*

"The diary is compulsive. It is (or seems to be) scathingly honest in his treatment of himself, and there are episodes that are almost too painful to read . . . But against all the odds he is likeable, almost a little admirable, and brave in his contorted way."--Martin Rose, Mercurius Maghrebensis blog

About the Author

May Hawas received her PhD in literature from Leuven University in 2014. In addition to her editorial experience she has worked in various NGOs concerned with women's issues and youth employment. Some of her short stories have been published in *Mizna Journal*, *Yellow Medicine*, and *African Writing*. She currently teaches English literature at the University of Alexandria.

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