Iraqi literature has attracted in recent years a growing number of general readers, not only because Iraq has been at the center of world events. The literature itself reveals a fairly impressive range of styles and themes, with notable modernist trends, particularly in poetry. It is with this interest in mind, and the need for a guide to Iraq’s literature that this bibliographical survey was undertaken. The bibliography covers Iraq’s modern Arabic literature as published in English translation during the last fifty years—1950-2003. It includes also relevant studies and interviews, but no attempt was made to cover book reviews.

Iraqi literature written in other languages such as Kurdish, Turkmen or Hebrew, is not included in this survey. Jewish Iraqi writers who were noted for their literary efforts during the pre-1950 period are cited only if their translated works were originally written in Arabic and published before their departure from Iraq (e.g. Ya’qūb Balbul and Anwar Shā’ul). It should be pointed out that their writings are recognized, often in positive terms, as an integral part of Iraq’s Arabic literature. The 1988 anthology of Iraqī Short Stories, a government-sponsored publication, refers, for example, to “the sincere earnest efforts made by writers of that period [the 1930s], namely Mahmūd Ahmed Al-Sayyid, Anwar Shaouil, Dhul-Noun Ayyoub, Abdul-Haq Fadhil, Yousif Matti, Shalmon [Shalom] Darweesh and others.” (p. 10). Other works written by Iraqi writers in different Western languages and their translations into English were also excluded.

1 A shorter and incomplete version of this bibliography appeared in Arab Studies Quarterly 19 (1997): 131-172. The earlier version inadvertently left out most of al-Sayyab’s poems and all entries following his name. In addition, it did not include studies or other writings which cover Iraqi literature.

As the various parts of the bibliography suggest, both English translations and studies have focused on the significant contribution which Iraqi poets have made, especially since the 1950s, to contemporary Arabic poetry. Hence the prominence given to the leading modernist poets who have enriched Arabic poetry in techniques and thematic orientation: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (1926-1964), Nāüzik al-Malāʿikah (b. 1923), ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayāṭī (1926-1999), Buland al-Ḥaydārī (1926-1996) and Saʿdi Yūsuf (b. 1934). On the other hand, Muḥammad Mahdi al-Jāwāḥīrī (1900-1997), who stands out as the greatest neo-classicist, is represented only by fragments of his rich legacy in English translation. Likewise, other leading traditional poets are either excluded or underrepresented. There is no doubt that the current literary taste, in targeted Western languages, is not receptive to such traditional poetry. However, it is also important to keep in mind another restraining factor, i.e., the demanding task of translating al-Jāwāḥīrī’s poetic form, its wealth of allusions and usages spanning more than fourteen hundred years of Arabic literature, and the rhetorical expressions which the poet uses extensively in his works.

The other genres (drama, novel, and short story) are marginally represented primarily because they are, on the whole, more concerned with sociopolitical themes, current issues or revolutionary causes than with the artistic requirements. The bibliography lists only a few items, mostly individual short stories, by pioneering and prolific, writers, such as Ayyūb (1908-1988), Jaʿfar al-Khalīli (b. 1902), Muḥammad al-Sayyid (1937) Yūsuf al-ʿĀnī (b. 1927) and others. Apart from al-ʿĀnī’s play (1995), there are seven other books of fiction by individual authors: five novels by Muʿalla, 1979-1982, Mamdouh [Mamdūh], 1996, Takarli, 2001, Khedairī 2001 and al-Ramlī, 2003 and two short story collections by Daisy [Dayzi] al-Amīr (1994) and Buthaynah al-Nāsīrī, 2002.

It is obvious that these seven works give us only very limited access to a fairly rich literature of Iraqi fiction. Among the contemporary writers who deserve greater attention because of the artistic quality of their works are