

# Osama meanin

Saeed Saeed

A deftly structured psychological novel has won the Sheikh Zayed Book Award's literature category. Osama Alaysa scooped the prestigious go for his latest work *The Fools of Bethlehem*.

The Palestinian is in the capital to receive his Dh750,000 cash prize in a ceremony to be held at the Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Centre tomorrow at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair.

"A lot of people have asked me would I change now that I won this award," says Alaysa.

"I don't think so, as this is my 15th novel and so far I am enjoying the process. But I am aware now that I am under a big spotlight as a result and more people are reading my works, so I will be paying more attention to that important relationship I have with my readers."

*The Fools of Bethlehem* stands out for its narrative style, which blends vignettes and reportage with a hefty dose of magical realism. Alaysa says the novel's structure was devised as a means to keep the story interesting.

"My rule of writing is that no matter how many books I write I should not repeat myself," he says. "So I really wanted to try new techniques in this work and introduce new concepts and ways to explain things."

Osama Alaysa  
won the Sheikh  
Zayed Book  
Award for  
literature.  
Ravindranath K /  
The National



# Alaysa finds new gems in madness

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Osama Alaysa author

One of the key ideas Alaysa explores in the novel is widening the concept of "madness".

"It's not just about people who are suffering from a condition," he says. "But also a sickness when it comes to intellectual thought."

Alaysa is scathing in his view of the present state of Palestinian literature. "It used to be much better, but everything went down after the [1993 Palestinian-Israeli] Oslo Accords," he says.

"Before that, and due to the issue of Palestine being so central in the region, we had great writers, such as the late great Mahmoud Darwish, who spoke with passion. After Oslo, I feel a new generation has arrived who don't write with the same passion and skill. Politics replaced culture and, as a result, the writing has diminished."

Ironically, despite the newfound expectations that come with winning the Sheikh Zayed Book Award, Alaysa says he has postponed the release of his next book.

"I have been working on it and it's nearly done, but the award has given me a bigger responsibility to make sure the book is of a high standard," he says. "I will revise it again and put it out once I am satisfied."

● For more details, visit [www.zayedaward.ae](http://www.zayedaward.ae)

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