



Clare Roberts reviews

Telepathy
by Amir Tag Elsir

Translated by William Hutchins
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Building blocks of fate

“I’m a free writer and write only what I want and what I can. The experiences of other people don’t appeal to me or excite me.” Such are the words of *Telepathy*’s protagonist to an aspiring writer friend and admirer. Self-importance aside, however, this protagonist’s creativity depends much more on the lives of others than perhaps even he realises. Never more so than when he puts pen to paper in order to describe the life of his own novel’s supposedly imagined, but in fact horrifyingly real, main character.

Telepathy is not the first of Sudanese novelist Amir Tag Elsir’s novels to take up the theme of the responsibility of the writer, or even the very process of writing itself. Whether the “novel within a novel” device adopted in *Telepathy* is wholly original is debatable, but it is certainly sufficient to stir questions. This novel’s disturbing resonance is indisputable.

Telepathy’s protagonist, a successful writer based in Khartoum, is well-travelled and followed by a large readership. Despite his popularity and his own interest in the literary progress of successful and aspiring writers around him, he considers himself an independent and free-thinking writer, unswayed by the creative ideas of others. Whilst finding inspiration in people he meets, he is careful never to use them directly in his writing, so much so that he doesn’t even use the real names of cities “for fear a city will come forward one day to claim [he has] depicted it”. He writes when inspiration hits him, and often ideas appear to him as if out of nowhere. Such writing methods, he believes, represent the building blocks of his liter-