

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

**"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of
Literary Borders by "Merit"-Based Egyptian Fiction Writers**

By
Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman
**Associate Professor of English Literature, Department of
English, Faculty of Arts, Menoufia University, Egypt**

“We are the autistic generation.”
Ahmed Alaidy, *Being Abbas el Abd*

Prior to the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, "Merit Publishing House" had spearheaded a mounting fiction revolution in Egypt by gambling on a new wave of young writers that took the Arab cultural landscape by storm. Founded in 1998 as an alternative to what its director, Mohammed Hashem felt was a stifling and unimaginative book market, Merit Publishing House had unearthed a string of star names that virtually dominated Arabic fiction. These include Alaa al-Aswany, who's *Yacoubian Building*, rejected by government-run publishing houses before being picked up by Merit, became a worldwide bestseller in Arabic and English, as well as a critically acclaimed film. The novel reflects the life of different individuals, living in the heart of Cairo, Egypt, from different walks of life trying to overcome various social, political, and personal complex issues. The characters are traced through a soap opera story of the people living in old Cairo.

All live in the Yaccubian Building, a once – elegant temple of Art Deco splendor slowly decaying in the smog and hubbub of downtown Cairo, Egypt. In the course of this unforgettable novel, these disparate lives converge, careening inexorably toward on

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman

explosive conclusion. Tragicomic, passionate, shockingly frank in its sexuality, and brimming with an extraordinary, embracing human compassion, the Yacoubian Building is a literary achievement of the first order. (Online, release 2018)

Merit continued to publish literary works of socialist political analysis and commentary, focusing on works that raised the level of freedom of expression, rejecting different shapes and forms of restrictions; social or political.

Merit's willingness to take a gamble on inconspicuous writers has helped fuel a new wave of Egyptian literature that brought some of the country's most marginalized communities to the forefront. "We can't compete with the big firms in terms of profits, but the new wave of authors will always be sitting here,"⁽¹⁾ says its director, Mohammed Hashem. "I feel valued here," says Ahmed Al-Aidy, a then, prominent on-comer on the Merit-Scene. "I had offers from bigger publishing houses

but chose Merit because they offered me the freedom to write in my own way."⁽²⁾ Hamdi Abu Golayyel, a former manual labourer from a Bedouin family who bagged the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz prize in 2008, remarks: "Merit has changed the way pioneering literature emerges in Egypt. It has the drive and ambition to support and distribute new and younger authors properly."⁽³⁾

Bringing some of Egypt's most marginalized communities to the forefront, these renegade writers have given poorer social

¹Jack Shenker, "Pioneering Publisher Reshapes Egypt's Literary Landscape," *Guardian.co.uk*, (Friday 30 April, 2010), 1.

²Jack Shenker, "Pioneering Publisher Reshapes Egypt's Literary Landscape," *Guardian.co.uk*, (Friday 30 April 2010), 2.

³*Ibid.*, 2.

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

groups room to expand in the nation's cultural consciousness. They came of age with the arrival of the internet and digital technologies and in the wake of the shift of global discourse about controversial issues like democracy, Islam, and war.⁽⁴⁾ Their pronouncements were more muted and ironic, cynical about the sublime role of art and its social commitment. In their fiction, the social commentary of older literary generations succumbs to a critique of the apathy and immobility of young Cairenes chained to their satellite TV channels, SMSs, video games, or consumed by insignificance and constant marginalization in a city's substrata of uncontrollable sprawling urbanization.⁽⁵⁾

Publishing a barrage of novels through "Merit," this contemporary generation had turned to a largely minimalistic language peppered with Arabic pop culture and the styles of the internet, often stripping a work to its bare essentials by using a limited vocabulary and short sentences. As a movement, Minimalism arose in the 1950, after World War II, as a new style or technique in music, literature, and design. It is characterized by the use of simple forms, promoting focus on inherent values, and the stripping down of extraneous, superfluous material. Minimalist art uses a minimum number of elements, aiming at creating the maximum effect through a deceptively simple style.

Minimalist Artists reject abstract expressionism, focusing on the true essence of the medium to form the art itself; thus, aiming to direct their audience to experience pure visual responses to their art:

⁴Brian T. Edwards, "Cairo 2010: After Kefaya" in *A Public Space*, Issue Nine, ed. Brigid Hughes (Brooklyn, NY: A Public Space Literary Projects, 2009), 130.

⁵*Ibid.*, 131.

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman

Considered an extension of abstract art, minimalism removes all essential forms in order to expose the purity and beauty of art object. It is a genre that has been widely associated with conceptual art, which during the 1960s, was extremely radical in that it challenged pre-existing structures of making, viewing, and understanding art. With minimalist artists focusing primarily on the surface of the canvas and the aesthetic quality of materials, their works have been closely linked with notions pertaining to truth and honesty. Artists did not pretend to represent anything other than what it was. (The Artling Team, 2018)

As such, Minimalist art is effective in that it draws the viewer's vantage point to the most essential aspects of an object, reflecting the subjectivity of the artist towards the artwork.

The effect of Minimalist Art on literature was extensive. In *Minimalism and the Short Story*, Cynthia Hallett names five well-known, highly influential writers as precursors to the 1960s minimalist movement:

The seeds of artifice that inform both minimalism and the short story can be traced to such otherwise diverse writers as Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Ernest Hemingway—all of whose conscious codes of omission were designed to make an audience feel more than they understood: Poe's notion of unity and singleness of effect; Chekhov's maxim that he must focus on the end of a short story and 'artfully' concentrate there an impression of total work; Joyce's minimal dependence on the traditional notion of plot, renouncing highly plotted stories in favor of seemingly static episodes and 'slices' of reality;

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

Beckett's efforts 'to present the ultimate distillation of his inimitable world-view . . . to compress and edulcorate [purify] traditional genres;' and Hemingway's method of communicating complex emotional states by seemingly simple patterning of concrete detail, what he called the 'tip of the iceberg' effect. (Hallet 12)

Minimalism, in its laconic form, cuts across both poetry and prose:

Minimalist fiction often straddles the boundary between prose and poetry, primarily because it is laconic yet highly implicative. Prose-poems, as well as pieces sometimes referred to as "micro-fiction" and "short-short stories," fit within the category even though they are more condensed than representative tales and novels. Regardless of length, Minimalistic works often achieve a level of profundity generally associated with verse. The reason for this is that both forms necessarily omit relevant information as a means to create a heightened sense of implication. (Clark7)

Clark also refers to the effect of popular culture in enhancing the setting of the text: "In Minimalistic fiction, allusions to popular culture help provide details about setting that often play an important role in the development of plot, characterization, and theme" (Clark 8).

In *Small Worlds*, Warren Motte discusses why minimalist writers might choose to address "simple" things in their works, such as straightforward plotlines, ordinary characters, and plain, even laconic dialogue between characters. Motte attempts to counter the anti-minimalist argument that "simplicity" in and of itself

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman
might suggest that a work is less complete or perhaps even unfinished:

Simple things are free from complexity, devoid of intricacy or ruse, unembellished, unaffected, plain . . . [S]imple things are apparently artless, and indeed the accusation of artistic vacuity is one of the dangers that awaits any minimalist undertaking. It is important to understand, however, that the minimalist aesthetic does not valorize vacuity as such. Rather, vacuity is the surface effect of a deliberate process of eschewal and restriction intended to clear away conventional rhetoric in an attempt to approximate the essential. (Motte 4)

The omission of seemingly important details is often the first issue opponents of minimalism address when considering works of literary minimalism. Without question, minimalist writers consciously omit what they consider to be “bulky,” unnecessary details to focus on the most important ideas expressed in a story. In a non-fiction book titled, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), Hemingway first introduced his “Theory of Omission,” a theory also known as the “Iceberg Principle:”

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Hemingway 192)

Ahmed Alaidy's *Being Abbas el Abd* (2003), for example, is written in the mode of literary minimalism verging on the limits of self-destructive nihilism, resonant of Chuck Palahniuk's

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

novel, *Fight Club* (1996). Palahniuk, an American renegade novelist too, has written novels that are characterized by a limited vocabulary, short sentences, and repetitions of certain lines or phrases in the way that any ordinary person is telling a story. The chapters of his novels often reflect philosophical asides either by the narrator to the reader or spoken to the narrator himself through dialogue offering different odd theories and opinions, exposing critical complex issues such as death, childhood, sexuality, and morality in a highly restricted language form. Exposing his Minimalist approach, Palahniuk remarks:

I think that young people are less attached to items and objects now. They're less attached to consuming things and accruing things because they see it as a system that doesn't necessarily work and give them a sense of adulthood and fulfillment. They're much more in tune with wanting to achieve a skill, a form of self – expression, or a body of knowledge that fulfills the same function, fulfills their adulthood. (Interview 2017)

Palahniuk has his own style of writing, depicting the inherent values of hope and beauty in a highly nihilistic and existential world. This is evident in *Fight Club & Choke* (2001):

I'm always looking for context in which people tell stories. In "Fight Club" it's these support groups for dying people, and then in "Choke" it's 12-step recovery groups. In one novel it's artists' colonies, in another novel it's a diary form that submariners' wives typically keep so that when their husband comes back from serving on a submarine, they have an accounting of their spouse's time. So,

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman

I'm always looking for, number one, a non-fiction context - because you can tell a more outrageous story if you use a non-fiction form. (Palahniuk, 2008)

Palahniuk established a new literary genre, the fiction of self-destruction: fight clubs, explosions, bombs, and Car Crashes. His novels cure philosophically through self-destruction in high irony and twist endings.

Palahniuk's novels deal with scientific principles at an inconspicuous, almost subconscious level representing the general acceptance and assimilation of these principles into everyday culture. Phenomena from contemporary scientific thought, such as noise in information systems (entropy), non-linear dynamics (chaos theory), fractal geometry, and the complex binary paradoxes of quantum physics inform the most basic language and conceits in Palahniuk's fiction. For example, in *Fight Club*, Tyler Durden's quest to destroy the infrastructure of society and build something anew from the resultant anarchy is predicated on the vocabulary and concepts of emerging from Chaos theory as well as those essential to an understanding of thermodynamic and information entropy. (Sartain 2005)

Fight Club "presents social commentary about consumerist culture especially the feminization of American culture and its effect on masculinity." So, Tyler Durden, the alter ego of the unnamed protagonist of the novel, rejects weakness, and embraces masculinity as the unnamed narrator looks for an emotional outlet and emotional support in a dark comic style. Palahniuk, as such, "provides us with some brief and super-

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

effective writing advice...write stories to make sense of what happened around us." (Geroli np). Palahniuk believes that we, as humans, need to be tested and challenged, letting loose of our frustrations through a true honest fight. Jesse Kavadlo notes that in "combining violent surrealism, suspenseful noir, and psychological and narrative twists, the novels (of Palahniuk) depict middling men who find themselves raging against political, economic and social systems" (24-26).

Other "Merit" acclaimed experimentalists putting forth highly emphatic contemporary fiction reminiscent of other American minimalistic writing include Mansoura Ez-Eldin's *Maryam's Maze* (2004), Muhammad Aladdin's *Adam's Gospel* (2006), Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *The Labourer, or A Dog With No Tail* (2008), Mazen al-Aqaad's *Lost Anger* (2008), and Hamed Abd El Samad's *Farewell to Heaven* (2010). As such, and in light of the monumental Egyptian Revolution of January 25, 2011 which toppled an ageing, corrupt political regime, this paper addresses one facet lurking beneath the forces which brought about this upheaval; namely a young generation of Egyptian renegade writers that have similarly come to depose the literary idols of the past, and thus accrue an aesthetics platform of dissent that resonated with the underprivileged and fuming masses; and gradually fermenting, alongside other forces, towards the shifting of a whole country's political and social structure.

Unlike their predecessors, this expanding group of young Merit – based authors had grown bored with tackling big political issues, exploring the personal, day-to-day life and hidden ills of society, and writing candidly on taboo topics. And they turned to a more accessible language, peppered with Arabic pop culture and often infused with the writing styles of the Internet, building an audience among Egypt's younger middle class: "We are closer

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman

to everyday issues,... our works have dropped dealing with the big issues and shaken off the burden of attempting to write prose for posterity,"⁽⁶⁾ remarks Abu Golayyel, 44.

The Egyptian literary establishment has been virtually unanimous in disapproving these works. Led by the influential Cairo newspaper Al-Akhbar, and its weekly book supplement Akhbar al-Adab, mainstream critics conducted a sustained campaign against these new writers for several years. *Ibda'*, the major literary monthly, initially refused to publish their work. The young writers were accused of poor education, nihilism, loss of direction, lack of interest in public issues and obsessive concentration on the body; of stylistic poverty, weak grammar, inadequate narrative skills and sheer incomprehensibility.

Like the modernist novel, this new genre was preoccupied with its own textual deconstruction, seeking to lay bare the internal dynamics of its own artistic process; narrators are fallible, multiple, polyphonic. But unlike most modernist works, and keeping in line with contemporary American minimalist writing, these are intransitive narratives, concerned with existence, rather than the effects of deeds. It is a fiction that should be read as an attempt to offer aesthetics of fragmentation, based on the ruins of what was. These narrative platforms were created from the wreckage of official literary discourse.

Written by Ahmed al-Aidy, *Being Abbas el Abd* (2003) tells the story of a video store clerk whose job brings him into daily contact with Western culture. Much of his daily life revolves around his mobile phone and the SMS messages he sends. The title is a verb interrupted. *Being Abbas El Abd* [*An Takun 'Abbas al-'Abd*], describes a suspended state of being. The story performs a de-romanticisation that leaves no nostalgia

⁶M. Lynx Qualey, "Egyptian Fiction 'Bored' of Big Issues?,"

<http://quarterlyconversation.com> (March 24, 2010), retrieved (Feb. 1, 2012), 1.

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

and no regrets. Language itself is de-sacralized; this is the moment of the profane in Arabic literature, spewing a new aesthetic. The work employs metaphors of urine and spit, words that claim knowledge yet are hollow.

Al-Aidy, whose novel has been translated into English, Italian, Dutch and Turkish, remarks: "In today's world, books compete with a cinema ticket or a pack of cigarettes for entertainment. If you don't capture the reader from the first page, he's gone forever."⁽⁷⁾ In an acknowledgements page at the opening of this novel, Ahmed Alaidy thanks his "partners in crime" and the first of his "mentors,"⁽⁸⁾ Chuck Palahniuk, the 1962 American born minimalist writer, best known for his award-winning novel, turned movie, *Fight Club* (1996). Palahniuk has been instrumental on Al-Aidy's text. Similar to his mentor's technique, Al-Aidy's novel starts at the temporal end, with the protagonist recounting the events that led up to the point at which the book begins. In what Palahniuk refers to as a [minimalistic](#) approach, Al-Aidy's similarly uses a limited vocabulary and short sentences to mimic the way that an average person telling a story would talk. In an interview, Palahniuk remarks that he prefers to write in verbs instead of adjectives.⁽⁹⁾ Repetitions of certain lines in the stories' narratives (what Palahniuk refers to as "choruses") are one of the most common aspects of his writing style, found dispersed within most chapters of his novels. Alaidy remains faithful in this respect, earning,

⁷M. Lynx Qualey, "Egyptian Fiction 'Bored' of Big Issues?,"

<http://quarterlyconversation.com> / (March 24, 2010), retrieved (Feb. 1, 2012), 1.

⁸Ahmed Alaidy, trans., Acknowledgement. *Being Abbas el Abd* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2006).

⁹Filip Tomasek, "Introducing Generation X: The Main Themes in Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (Diploma Thesis, Jan Evangelista Purkyne University, Faculty of Education, Dept. of English, Czech Republic, 2003), 52.

<http://chuckalahniuk.net/files/papers/introducing-gen-x-filip-tomasek.pdf> . Retrieved (Feb. 9, 2012), 53.

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman
like his mentor, the label, "nihilist;" a "minimalist" whose work is stripped down to its most fundamental features, allowing context to dictate meaning.

Alaidy plays with form: an introduction (titled: 'An Introduction You Can Suck or Shove') is a brief scene that is then repeated (in its proper chronological place) later in the story. It is a novel of short paragraphs, fast dialogue, and many digressions. The narrator has spent almost ten years as a video store clerk. The films thrust foreign modern society in his face daily, but he is trapped in his empty, small job:

You're the computer technician with the loosened tie and a box of CDs in your hand. Unskilled labor in the mines of Digitalia.

An e-slave in Bill Gates' colony.

WATCH Sandra Bullock in *The Net*.

Then press Esc.⁽¹⁰⁾

Abbas is an intense personality. He says when he is feeling good: Don't fight things by resisting them because they'll strike back with a vengeance. Fight things by doing them - that way they lose their meaning.

Got a problem with smoking or eating chocolate?

Smoke till your lips turn into filters. Eat Cadbury bars till your teeth melt or the factory closes.

Do it till you lose your mind."

That's his philosophy, and he practices it to perfection.⁽¹¹⁾

The other dominant figure in the narrator's life is his uncle, Awni, a psychiatrist with some very unusual methods. Awni is

¹⁰Alaidy, *Being Abbas el Abd*, 17.

¹¹Ibid., 27.

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

Egypt personified. He is as entangled in all that is Egypt; but only Abbas, of course, knows better: "Destroy your pharaonic history." And: "We will only succeed when we turn our museums into public toilets. But they're still quite away from that."⁽¹²⁾ CF

Being Abbas el Abd is packed with ideas and issues, tackling identity, and adaptation to the contemporary world, rebelling, like contemporary American minimalist writers, against a consumerist culture.

Mansoura Ez Eldin (Born 1979) had her debut novel, *Maryam's Maze*, published by Merit in 2004. It won widespread acclaim for its depiction of a young girl's struggle to distinguish between dreams and reality. The protagonist, a young woman named Maryam, wakes from a disturbing, violent dream to find herself in a strange apartment in Cairo, rather than in her dormitory room where she fell asleep. With this enigmatic scene, the writer begins an eerie tale of a woman cut loose from her world and struggling to reconnect the tenuous links of her former life. Maryam's desperate attempts to recapture the familiar world she once inhabited reveal a Gothic tale reminiscent of Edgar Allan Poe and a minimalism reminiscent of Chuck Palahniuk.

The novel focuses on relations between dreams and reality, on the one hand, and on memory and forgetting on the other, with a particular focus on women. Concentrating on the internal life of her heroine, Maryam, Ez-Eldin seeks to capture the feelings and experiences of a young girl who has lost consciousness of time and space. The reader is then taken on a journey of Maryam's sparse memories in which she attempts to

¹²Alaidy, *Being Abbas el Abd*, 46.

Alaidy:17. CF in Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, Tyler remarks: "Burn the Louvre, and wipe your ass with the Mona Lisa. This way at least, God would know our names." (141)

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman

re-establish her past – "I'm nobody' said Maryam, [...] Maryam felt that she had been reduced to nothingness. She no longer had any physical existence to fill a space in the void. From this moment on, she had to face the world like someone experiencing life for the first time."⁽¹³⁾ This is the simultaneous strength and weakness of the novel: The reader, too, is trapped within Maryam's narrow past. We have several threads at our fingertips but cannot quite join them.

Muhammad Aladdin, an [Egyptian novelist](#), [short story](#) and script writer, has gained acclaim for his first published novel, [Adam's Gospel](#) (2006); hailed by writers like Baha Tahir and [Sonallah Ibrahim](#) to be among the best of a promising new crop. That novel breaks the conventional format of the novel, consisting, as it does, of a single 60-page-long paragraph that is written in a minimalistic, [stream of consciousness style](#).

In the novel, a young man walks a scorching Cairo Street. At the entrance to the city's pivotal main Tahrir square, he notices a succulent girl. Drawn into her magnetic field, and the swirling, pulsating square ahead, he starts to fantasize about how he would talk to her, seduce her, rape her, love her, abandon her, cherish her; were he, for example, a "Brazen Rake, a Brutal Bohemian, a Sensitive Painter, or a Bald Mechanic;"⁽¹⁴⁾ jumping from persona to persona as his imaginings become more and more feverish, while in his mind the girl goes through a similar series of transformations. *Adam's Gospel* reflects "a social reality that has lost all certainties."⁽¹⁵⁾ In keeping with other novels (such as Ahmed Alaidy's *Being Abbas el Abd*) of an emerging new school of writing in [Cairo](#), the work is a minimalistic taboo-breaking product verging on nihilism; of a

¹³Mansoura Ez Eldin, trans., *Maryam's Maze* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2007), 15.

¹⁴Muhammad Aladdin. *Adam's Gospel* (Cairo: Merit Publishing House, 2006), 24.

¹⁵Literary Review of Muhammad Aladdin's *Adam's Gospel*," *Al-Ahram Literary Page* (May 10, 2006). 12.

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

young writer without preconceptions of what makes a novel or how one should be written. The novel ends with the protagonist deconstructing all possible options of himself and the other (the girl), stressing a refusal to merge with the communal and an eventual return to the selfishness that characterizes his true self. *Adam's Gospel*, here, is not for a shared benign humanity, but for a bankrupt autistic generation; a generation that is to rise a few years later in the same Tahrir Square in retaliation for this cultural bankruptcy.

Hamdi Abu Golayyel's *The Labourer, or A Dog With No Tail* (2008), which received the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz medal in 2008, tells the semi-autobiographical, aimless story of a poor Bedouin villager who lives as a migrant construction worker in Cairo. Told with humor, it follows the protagonist through some of the darkest sides of living in the big city — prostitution, drug abuse, and a harsh class system: "My friends and I were almost completely shut out, walking the streets of Cairo like we were citizens of another, faraway country we yearn to go back to,"⁽¹⁶⁾ the protagonist remarks of the peripheral life of the city's underclass.

The novel jumps from anecdote to anecdote and is connected through the reappearance of characters and themes: family and Bedouin history, day labour, oppression, and failed relationships. There is no centralizing moment, a place where things would crystallize: (the 1992 earthquake, the narrator's desire to become an author, his time in prison), but none of these are highlighted. The narrator prefers to dally here and there. He is a day labourer after all, moving things from one place to another: bricks, sand, even prose. This is the story of the dispossessed and disillusioned, the anti-Arabian Nights.

¹⁶Hamdi Abu Golayyel, trans., *The Labourer, or A Dog With No Tail* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2010, 32).

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman

Sometimes, you are encouraged to resent the narrator for his selfishness, and ungratefulness:

I... resolved to overcharge him: if he agreed, he agreed. If he didn't he could go to hell. 'A meter's seven pounds,' I said, 'and seven sevens make forty-seven.'

'You mean forty-nine. Plus a pound from me makes it a square fifty.'

I wavered between delight at his generosity and resentment at his stupidity and regretted not charging him more.⁽¹⁷⁾

Once again, this novel is structurally fluid, the language is sparse and minimalistic, and chapters can replace each other without any serious damage to the overall structure. It is both a novel and a short story collection, connected by the barest of threads. The language fluctuates from the classical, to the colloquial, to the downright abusive, painting an underworld on the verge of nihilism.

Mazen al-Aqaad's (2009) novel, *Lost Anger*, dives into the world of the Internet, an important social gathering point for young Egyptians. The novel's disturbed young narrator, bereft of a cruel father and a dispassionate mother, administers a chat room for men and women who share his desire for suicide because of their traumatic lives. The participants eventually organize a party to celebrate the suicide of a young couple. The couple change their mind in the last-minute, and the disappointed revelers become angry and beat them to death.

The detailed content of the novel is dominated by a centralized, psycho pathetic "I" that lures would-be-suiciders into an internet chat room to discuss and eventually commit the ultimate deed. The deadly objective is facilitated by participants

¹⁷Hamdi Abu Golayyel, trans., *The Labourer, or A Dog With No Tail* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2010, 20).

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

who have fallen under the modern pressures of unemployment, family disintegration, and global and capitalist values. The alternative is social media that provides an outlet which can prove deadly.

The content of the novel is highly erratic, constantly shifting in register due to the sporadic nature of its protagonist. Again, it is a minimalistic experimentation revealed in the short, sporadic writing characters prevalent in internet chat rooms. Here, the imaginative and the real merge through constant flashbacks and linear narrative modes that demand the full attention of the reader. The character Manar, for example, lives a highly realistic life in the novel, but is discovered, to the amazement of the reader, to be no more than a virtual manifestation of the protagonist's disturbed psyche. This is reminiscent of the character of Tyler Durden in Palahniuk's *Fight Club* who is revealed at the end of the novel to be a figment of the narrator's imagination.⁽¹⁸⁾ In *Lost Anger*, the villa where two of the chat room participants are killed suddenly does not exist, yet there is all the evidence that the crime did happen. This is a highly fluid world, nihilistic not only on the physical, but more importantly on the psychological level.

A darker example is the 2010 novel, *Farewell to Heaven* by Hamed Abdel-Samad; the tale of a rural childhood defined by the narrator's repeated rape by older boys and the later discovery that the father he revered as a wise, religious leader was no different than any other man in his village. He settles in liberal and more forgiving Europe, but it does little to ease his scars, and he eventually enters a psychiatric hospital in Germany.

¹⁸Jesse Kavadlo, "The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist," *Stirrings Still* 2, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005): 8.

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman

The novel is a semi autobiography, vibrant with a relentless pace. It is steeped in setting the stereotypes between the east and the west face to face, often with striking, ironic overtones: "They say in Europe that women are oppressed, but a woman like my grandmother was able, singlehandedly, to oppress all the men of Egypt."⁽¹⁹⁾ The novel's mark, however, is that it exposes taboos often considered forbidden ground by Egyptian society. He attacks religion, and tradition, seeking redemption but in vain. He tries to pray, but seldom completes a prayer; tries to believe in God but is constantly distracted: "I can only believe in what I see or what I touch. The spiritual is beyond me. But isn't the desire to search for God in itself a proof that God exists."⁽²⁰⁾ He is oppressed by a religious and a patriarchal authority that he finds contradictory. His father is an Imam bent on giving religious sermons, yet smokes hashish and has his own clandestine company.

The novel is a painful self-exposure, written vibrantly and with minimum technical restrictions. The author bursts out words in minimalistic, sporadic jaunts that leave the reader gasping for breath. Linear and flashback techniques contend in the novel with minimum assistance as to where and when events are exactly taking place. Coupled with a minimalistic style that defines a world on the verge of collapse, this is a technique beyond the stream of consciousness, a distraught memory grappling in vain for fixation.

To Conclude, Merit Publishing House is a success story living in the shadows, waiting to receive the recognition it deserves. It has given literary voice to the voiceless young writers of Egypt's cultural substrata; just as the Egyptian Revolution of January 25th, has given voice to the voiceless

¹⁹Hamed Abdel-Samad, *Farewell to Heaven* (Cairo: Merit Publishing House, 2010), 61.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 195-96.

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders

crushed masses of Egypt. The comparison here cannot be truer. It has taken the daunting task of investing in the literature of young Egyptian writers that hammer readers and society, as such, with issues, language, and techniques never before explored. They have gambled for years, on what seemed, a lost cause, foretelling the socio-economic forces that sparked the Egyptian Revolution. The tides have changed, and hopefully history will eventually unravel a dominant generation that lurked behind the contemporary Egyptian fiction strata that flourished today.

Works Cited

- Al-Aswany, Alaa:** Books - Amazon.com, *The Yacoubian Building*. Trans. (2006). Amazon.com: International Version – Kindle Paper White (Previous Generation 2018 Release).
- Abdel-Samad, Hamed.** *Farewell to Heaven*. Cairo: Merit Publishing House, 2010.
- Abu Golayyel, Hamdi,** trans., *The Labourer, or A Dog With No Tail*. Cairo: AUC Press, 2010.
- Aladdin, Muhammad.** *Adam's Gospel*. Cairo: Merit Publishing House, 2006.
- Alaidy, Ahmed,** trans. *Being Abbas el Abd*. Cairo: AUC Press, 2006.
- Clark, Robert, C.** *American Literary Minimalism*. First edition. University Alabama Press, 2015.
- Edwards, Brian T.** "Cairo 2010: After Kefaya" in *A Public Space*, Issue Nine, 2010.
- Ez Eldin, Mansoura,** trans. *Maryam's Maze*. Cairo: AUC Press, 2007.
- Geroli, Robert.** "Writing Craft Essays by Chuck Palahniuk," May 22, 2019. www.robertogeroli.com 'biog' writing.
- Hallett, Cynthia Whitney.** *Minimalism and the Short Story—Raymond Carver, Amy Hempel, and Mary Robison*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000.

"That Is No Country for Old Men": Shifting of Literary Borders
Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon*. New York:
Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932.

Hughes, Brooklyn. *A Public Space Literary Projects*. NY 2009:
3-11.

Jesse, Kavadlo. "The Fiction of Self- Destruction, Chuck
Palahniuk, Stirrings Still," *The International
Journal of Existential Literature*, Fall/ Winter
2005: Vol. 2. No. 2-3.

Kavadlo, Jesse. "The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck
Palahniuk, Closet Moralist," *Stirrings Still*, Vol. 2,
No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2005):np.

Motte, Warren. *Small Worlds: Minimalism in Contemporary
French Literature*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press,
1999.

Qualey, M. Lynx. "Egyptian Fiction 'Bored' of Big Issues?"
<http://quarterlyconversation.com/> (March 24,
2010), retrieved (Feb. 1, 2012): 1-2.

"Literary Review of Muhammad Aladdin's *Adam's Gospel*," Al-
Ahram Literary Page (May 10,2006):1-2.

Palahniuk, Chuck, "On *Choke*." Interview with Cole Smithy,
www.colesmithey.com .September 24, 2008.

<https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/books/interviews/a35222/chuck-palahniuk-interview/>An
Interview, www.esquire.com, added Sep.3, 2017.

Dr. Hoda Soliman Mohammed Soliman Sartain, Jeffrey A. "Even the Mona Lisa's Falling Apart: The Cultural Assimilation of Scientific Epistemologies in Palahniuk's Fiction." *Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature*. Fall / Winter 2005: Vol. 2, No: 2 - 26.

Shenker, Jack. "Pioneering Publisher Reshapes Egypt's Literary Landscape." *Guardian.co.uk*. (Friday 30 April 2010): 1 - 3.

The Artling Team, Minimalism 101: "The Only Minimalist Art Guide You Will Need." December 13, 2018, by The Artling Team.
<https://theartling.com/en/artzine/minimalism-art-guide>

Tomasek, Filip. "Introducing Generation X: The Main Themes in Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* and Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*." Diploma Thesis, Jan Evangelista Purkyne University, Faculty of Education, Dept. of English, Czech Republic, 2003: 52.
<http://chuckpalahniuk.net/files/papers/introducing-gen-x-filip-tomasek.pdf>. Retrieved (Feb. 9, 2012).

Abstract

In light of the monumental Egyptian Revolution of January 25, 2011, which toppled an ageing, corrupt political regime, this presentation addresses one facet lurking beneath the forces which brought about this upheaval; namely a young generation of Egyptian renegade writers that have similarly come to depose the literary idols of the past, and thus accrue an aesthetics platform of dissent that resonated with the underprivileged and fuming masses. Sponsored for the past decade by the small, dissident "Merit Publishing House" in Cairo, these largely poor, marginalized fiction writers gradually galvanized a young readership in search of alternative interpretations of their current reality. Coming of age with the arrival of the internet and digital technologies, the literary pronouncements of these writers are more muted and ironic, cynical about the sublime role of art and its social commitment. The presentation investigates how American minimalist writers like Chuck Palahniuk, Bret Easton Ellis, K.J. Stevens, Amy Hempel, Sandra Cisneros, and Alicia Erian have impacted most of these young Merit-based writers. The largely minimalistic language, angrily peppered with Arabic pop culture and the styles of the internet that resonate in the Egyptian fiction of Ahmed Alaidy, Mansoura Ez-Eldin, Muhammad Aladdin, Hamdi Abu Golayyel, Mazen al-Aqaad, and Hamed Abd El Samad testify to a "young revolutionary literary generation," inspired by a parallel American movement. This presentation, as such, examines the ruptured Egyptian fiction aesthetics prior to the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, and that had its origin in American minimalistic writing, giving birth to a new genre that has shifted the literary borders of a nation's consciousness; and gradually fermenting, alongside other forces, towards the shifting of a whole country's political and social structure.

Key Words: Merit Writers - Minimalism - Political Structure- Social Structure- Corruption.

ملخص

" هذا ليس وطنًا لكبار السن": تحويل الحدود الأدبية عند كتاب الرواية المصرية

المعاصرين

لدى دار ميريت للنشر

خلال العقد الماضى من القرن الواحد والعشرين وقبيل اندلاع الثورة المصرية ٢٠١١، قادت دار ميريت للنشر بالقاهرة ثورة مذكورة للرواية فى مصر وذلك بالرهان على موجة جديدة من الكتاب الشباب قاموا بغزو الساحة الثقافية المصرية كالعاصفة. فقد دفعت هذه الحركة النابضة من الروائيين المنشقين بعضا من المجتمعات المصرية الأكثر تهميشا الى مركز الصدارة كما منحت بعضا من الفئات الاجتماعية الأكثر فقرا مساحة للتوسع فى رقعة الوعى الثقافى للأمة. نضج هؤلاء الشباب مع تغلغل الانترنت والتقنيات الرقمية وفى أعقاب تحول الخطاب العالمى نحو القضايا المثيرة للجدل مثل الديمقراطية والاسلام والحرب. يميل انتاجهم الأدبى نحو السخرية اللاذعة التى تجد صدى محدود بين جمهور الرواية التقليدية؛ سخرية وتهكم تنخران فى عظام المفهوم القديم للفن ودوره السامى فى المجتمع. وتختلف تجربة هؤلاء الروائيين الشباب من حيث كونها ترصد وتصور الفضاء المحلى المذموم لمدينة عملاقة كالقاهرة، فيتحول النقد الاجتماعى الذى رصدته الأجيال الروائية السابقة الى سهام حادة توجه الى اللامبالاة والجمود لشباب معاصر مقيد بالسلاسل الى القنوات التلفزيونية الفضائية ورسائل الهاتف المحمول القصيرة وألعاب الفيديو، تستهلكهم التفاهة والتهميش المستمر عبر الطبقات الاجتماعية السفلى لمدينة حضرية عشوائية مترامية الأطراف.

وقد قام هذا الجيل المعاصر من شباب الروائيين بنشر وابلا من الروايات أصدرتها دار ميريت للنشر فى فى تلك الحقبة الزمنية تنسم غالبيتها بلغة مقتضية موجزة كلغة التواصل الاجتماعى على الانترنت ورسائل الهاتف المحمول. فهذه اللغة مغلقة بثقافة شعبية عربية معاصرة تم تجريبها من الزخارف اللغوية والفنية التقليدية لتضحى فى الغالب الأعم مجرد جمل لفظية وعبارات قصيرة مقتضية. فعلى سبيل المثال، ركن أحمد العايدى فى روايته *أن تكون عباس العبد* (٢٠٠٣) الى استخدام اسلوب أدبى يتسم بالبساطة والايجاز يشارف فى حدته حدود الفلسفة العدمية المدمرة للذات. وهنا يحاكي العايدى بشكل دؤوب رواية *نادى القتال* (١٩٩٦) للكاتب الأمريكى تشاك بالانينك. وهناك أمثلة أخرى لروائيين واعدنين تبنت أعمالهم دار ميريت للنشر مثل *متاهة مريم* (٢٠٠٤) لمنصورة عز الدين، *انجيل الدم* (٢٠٠٦) لمحمد علاء الدين، *الفاعل* (٢٠٠٨) لعمدى أبو جليل، *الغضب الضائع* (٢٠٠٨) لمازن العقاد، *يوتوبيا* (٢٠٠٨) لأحمد خالد توفيق، *وداعا أيتها السماء* (٢٠١٠) لحامد عبد الصمد. وبالتالي ترصد هذه الورقة البحثية الجماليات الممزقة من الايجاز الى العدم لروايات هذا الجيل من الشباب الذى رأى نفسه فى ذلك الوقت نفسه يجلس على حطام خطاب أدبى سابق تمخض الان عن مولد شكل روائى معاصر وقد تشكل بفعل قواعد مرجعية جديدة متوافقة مع عالم خارجى لا يجد هؤلاء الروائيين الجدد الا السخرية والنيل منه. لقد راهنوا لسنوات على ما بدا أنها قضية خاسرة، أنبأت بالقوى الاجتماعية والاقتصادية التى أشعلت الثورة المصرية. لقد تغيرت أمواج المد والجزر، ونأمل أن يكشف التاريخ فى نهاية المطاف عن هذا الجيل المهيم الذى شيد قلاع ثورة الرواية المصرية المعاصرة التى تزدهر اليوم.