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

Prof. Osama Madany
Menoufiya University
osamamadany@yahoo.com

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 the majority 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 current ruptured Egyptian fiction aesthetics that has 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.