

Cairo's Inferno of Pollution: Ecocritical Reading of "The Breeze Hunter" by Egyptian Writer Mohammed Makhzangi

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Abstract : Cairo is the perfect modern representation of a living hell between rising temperatures and failing architecture. The works of Egyptian writer Mohamed Makhzangi may prove to add more depth to the debate that surrounds the topic of pollution in Arab literature. This Egyptian writer, who studied medicine and psychiatry before dedicating his life to writing, sheds indeed further light on the ecological condition of Cairo. In relation to this, the short story "The breeze hunter" (2018) tackles the topic of "environmental architecture", citing the research of Hassan Fathy in "Architecture for the Poor: An Experiment in Rural Egypt" which provides examples from history of inventions to counter the effects of the hot weather. Specifically, the main character of the story is a man living in Cairo in a small apartment, which turns into a living hell in the summer season because of the high temperatures. Catastrophic urban planning, therefore, prevents the mitigation of the torrid climate but rather worsens it. Makhzangi indeed refers to the environmental issue of pollution caused by the excessive number of air conditioners, which transform Cairo into an infernal island of heat while our country becomes warmer with the passing of time. His description of the city already intersects ecocriticism and environmental issues, tackling the topic of pollution inside of cities and the impact of climate change, of which Cairo is a perfect example. History has indeed provided ways in order to reduce the heat inside houses. Yet, these have all been ignored. As a result, through the teachings of Hassan Fathy, the narrator of the story builds an opening in the house to catch the natural breeze coming from the north. He, therefore, becomes the breeze hunter of Mansoura. However, polluted waves interrupt this brief rest, thus leading to a worsening of his conditions, leading to him suffering from the effects of crowding and the consequences of climate change and pollution. Makhzangi, therefore, reflects on how architecture and urbanism affect the psychological sanity of people and how the situation is worsened by the catastrophic consequences of climate change and pollution.

Keywords : ecocriticism, Arabic literature, pollution, environmental architecture, crowding

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