

Contemporary Arabic Novel Probing the Self and the Other: A Contrapuntal Study of Identity, Sexuality, and Fundamentalism

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Abstract : This paper examines the role played by Arabic novelists in revolutionary change in the Arab world, discussing themes of identity, sexuality and fundamentalism as portrayed in a selection of modern and contemporary Arabic novels that are either written in English or translated from Arabic into English. It particularly focuses on the post-Naguib Mahfouz era. Taking my cue from the current political changes in the Arab world, starting with 9/11/ terrorist attacks in the USA and the UK, the 'Arab Spring' revolutions, the rise of political Islam and the emergence of Isis, the Islamic state in Iraq and the Levant, the study analyses the differences in the ways contemporary Arab novelists from different Arabic countries represent the interaction between identity, sexual politics and fundamentalist ideas in the Arab world, with a specific focus on the overlap between literature, religion and international politics in the region. It argues that the post-Mahfouz era marked a new phase in the development of the political Arabic novel not only as a force of resistance against political-religious oppression, but as a call for revolution as well. Thus, the Arabic novel reshapes values and prompts future action.

Keywords : Arabic novel, Islam, politics, sexuality

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