

in the French press. Finally, the important late prose works (translated into both languages) in *HL* are the subjects of studies by Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy, Róbert Smid and Mária Bartal and of the contributions by Tibor Bónus and Sándor Kálai in *PM*.

Both these collections contribute to (re)initiating and establishing a discourse about Esterházy's aesthetics, his poetics and literature, his subjects, his cunning anecdotalism, in brief: about his works outside Hungary; these two volumes also lead to invite and to include scholars from other philologies or from comparative literature – that (in the West) very much needs to be “refreshed” and enlivened by Esterházy's and many more writers' (women writers, too!) works from East Central European literatures – because they assemble prominent voices and essential scholarship on Esterházy and

point the way ahead. Well-chosen different approaches thus highlight poetical, narratological, and comparative perspectives, both volumes showing the indispensable and sustainable importance of Esterházy's writing.

Both books examine almost the complete works of Esterházy, or at least aim at giving such a critical, yet comprehensive overview. Offering such high ranking discourses about the aesthetical, poetical and thematical importance and of the literary impact of the author's works, both volumes present freshly challenging approaches to Esterházy by connecting his texts with region-specific, literary-theoretical, world literary and cultural questions.

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**KATARÍNA BEŠKOVÁ: Súčasná egyptská literatúra: Dystópia, cenzúra a Arabská jar [Contemporary Egyptian Literature: Dystopia, Censorship and the Arab Spring]**

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Recent years have seen a marked interest in the works of contemporary Egyptian writers, as readers both inside and outside of academia have awaited the literary interpretation of the events of the Arab Spring to emerge, following the much-needed period of reflection and processing that allowed the writers to impart their lived experience, express their views and render their testimonies by weaving literary narratives of *their* revolution.

It is within this framework that the monograph entitled *Contemporary Egyptian Literature: Dystopia, Censorship and the Arab Spring* came into being to bridge the gap in Slovak and Czech scholarship on the topic as well as to move the understanding of modern Arabic literature more into the present moment. This monograph, written in Slovak, is also a continuation of earlier scholarship

on the topic as it draws on research conducted by Stephan Guth, Teresa Pepe, Samia Mehrez, Richard Jacquemond or Benjamin Koerber, among others.

The book under review focuses on the works of both men and women authors of the so-called “Tahrir Generation”, a term used by the author and inspired by Ayman El-Desouky's “the 2011 Generation” and modelled after the iconic square. “Tahrir Generation” denotes the group of predominantly young and emerging authors whose lives were “affected by the economic, political, social and cultural specificities of Ḥusnī Mubārak's regime” and who have shared the hopes and disillusionment of the revolution of January 2011 (24). Katarína Bešková views Tahrir as a unique *chronotope* in the Bakhtinian sense (echoed also in one

of the books she discusses, Duniyā Kamāl's *Cigarette Number Seven*, Eng. trans. 2018). Therefore her choice of the name is indeed well-suited for writers who shared the on-site experience of Tahrir as the seminal moment in Egypt's unfolding social, cultural and political memory. The book explores the intersections between the literary output and the socio-cultural and political forces at play at the time, with an emphasis on the interpretive analysis of the works within the context of the revolutionary events of the Arab Spring.

The monograph is divided into five analytical chapters accompanied by an anthology of literary works discussed earlier in the book. Bešková effectively weaves in the work of a number of literary and social theorists as well as scholars specializing in modern Arab literature, however, she does so in a way that supports and elucidates her readings, without weighing down the book.

The introductory chapter, entitled "Literature as the Reflection of the Socio-Political Reality", provides an overview of the predecessors of contemporary Egyptian literature and explores how the social, political and literary realms intersect, oftentimes "writing" one another. The parameters of Bešková's investigation focus for the most part on literature's relationship to politics, which also implies the question of the im/possibility of apolitical, "pure" literature (26). The chapter also touches upon the role of the writer in the Arab society, highlighting the dialectical relation between literary expression and politics in the Arab world which could be traced back to poetry of the pre-Islamic era. Likewise, Bešková sees the pre-Islamic poet, *shā'ir*, as analogous to the modern-day writer or novelist and points out the etymology of the root *sh'r* whose original meaning was "to know [intuitively] or be sensitive to things [that are] fine as a hair" (18). While modern Arab politics profoundly influenced literary expression, it has also been reimagined and reshaped by it. Bešková thus describes the (social) role of the writer in Egypt as "that who first responds to social and

cultural change while trying to assert their positive influence through their literary activity" (19) and later discusses the blended role of a writer-educator in the era of *adab* literature, as well as that of socially engaged authors at the height of *iltizām* ("commitment"), maintaining that throughout the different periods in Arab literary history, the role of the writer was not only reflective but also transformative.

The second chapter, "At the Threshold of the Revolution", portrays the economic, social and political circumstances prior to the 25th of January revolution, emphasizing the role of Egyptian youth in the events leading up to January 25 and discussing the often overrated role of the new media on the course of the revolutionary processes then underway.

Egyptian youth, including several emerging authors discussed throughout the book, is also the main focus of the following chapter, entitled "Tahrir Generation". Describing the pent-up feelings of frustration combined with external and internal alienation among the younger generation, it explores the legacy of transgenerational trauma that informs the ruptured relationships and ongoing tensions between generations as reflected in the works of Yāsmīn ar-Rashīdī, Aḥmad al-Āyidī, Duniyā Kamāl, 'Alā' al-Aswānī or Yūsuf Rakhā, among others. Bešková also devotes some attention to the depiction of the iconic Tahrir Square in the literary works discussed in this chapter.

The practices and mechanisms of the censorship discussed in chapter four round off the themes explored in the preceding chapters by pointing out the intricacies and social sensibilities surrounding literary endeavors in Egypt. Of particular importance is the discussion of how censorship informs the literary creation at its inception as well as during the creative process, leading to innovation on various levels of literary creation (the rise of new genres being only one facet of such innovation) on one hand and self-censorship on the other. Here Bešková examines the works of Aḥmad Nājī, Majdī ash-Shāfi'ī and 'Alā' al-Aswānī, all of them having faced

the trial for their writing, although the official grounds for their accusations differed.

Since all three writers were subjected to a form of ex post facto censorship and faced allegations that were rather arbitrary in nature, the rest of the chapter puts the issues surrounding the censorship in Egypt into wider perspective by shedding light on some more complex mechanisms and practices as well as acquainting the reader with the historical context. In this well-researched chapter, Bešková elaborates on the religious-social principle of *ḥisba*, rooted in long-established Islamic thought requiring of all Muslims that they should be “calling to good, and bidding to honour, and forbidding dishonour” (The Qur’an 3:104, A.J. Arberry’s translation). She also explores other enabling mechanisms of censorship such as social conservatism and the issues of literality versus literariness. In a subchapter entitled “Paradoxes of Censorship”, Bešková discusses the double-edged sword of censoring practices, turning her attention to the counter effect that lies in drawing the reader’s attention to the very things it tries to conceal as well as putting the very authors it tries to ban or censor into the regional, and frequently also international, spotlight (106).

The effect of censorship on harnessing the creative potential of literature finds its expression in creating and establishing new meanings as well as in the rise of new genres, to which the author turns her focus in the following chapter entitled “Dystopia”. It is worth noting, however, that although the discussion of the creative potential of censorship on the rise of new genres at the end of the preceding chapter flows seamlessly into the analysis of dystopian fiction in Egyptian literature, it does not imply a causal relationship between the two. Nor can we trace, as Bešková concurs with Nā’il aṭ-Ṭūkhī, a direct connection between the revolutionary events of 2011 and the proliferation of dark, dystopian narratives or literary portrayals of the post-apocalyptic world that followed in their wake (116). At the same time, her ar-

guments about the countereffects of censorship practices, the role of the writers in present-day society or the question of political impetus behind the rise of dystopian fiction in Egypt may provoke some necessary debates within the field.

The anthology that forms the second part of the book offers a selection of works that illustrate the issues and topics discussed earlier in the book. It contains excerpts of eight works by various authors, written before, during or after the events of 2011, yet all of them reflecting “the social, political, cultural or economic backdrop to this seminal moment” (27). The anthology presents a welcome contribution to the body of works of Arabic literature available in Slovak and Czech translation, where modern works by Arab authors have been rather underrepresented. Bešková’s translations are of high artistic merit which will ensure the book an appreciative readership beyond those who reach for it out of scholarly interest.

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