

Literature, Sound and the Egyptian Uprising

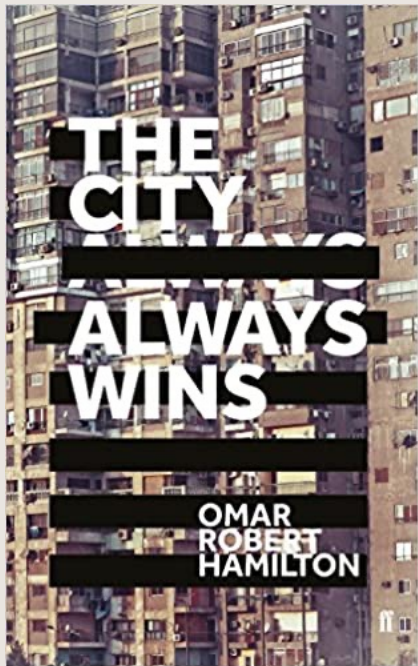
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858.ma: The Archive of Resistance

“858 is ... just one archive of the revolution ... It is one collection of memories ... we can all use to fight the narratives of the counter-revolution, to pry loose the state’s grip on history, to keep building new histories for the future.”



The City Always Wins
Robert Omar Hamilton
(2017)



*Chronicle of a Last Summer:
A Novel of Egypt*
Yasmine El Rashidi
(2016)

“At 9 a.m. came Thursday’s first battle cry. It began with a rhythmic banging sound, as one man beat a pipe against the metal pole at the entrance to Cairo’s underground train station. Then another joined in, banging a rock against a lamppost. And then dozens of men began whistling through their teeth, calling men to battle as they waved their hands, gesturing for hundreds to come forward.”

Why fiction?

Why sound?

R. Murray Schafer

A **hi-fi system** “is one possessing a favourable signal-to-noise ratio. The hi-fi soundscape is one in which discrete sounds can be heard clearly because of low ambient noise level. The country is generating more hi-fi than the city”.

In a “**lo-fi soundscape** individual acoustic signals are obscured in an overdense population of sounds ... a footstep in the snow...or a church bell across the valley—are masked by broad-band noise”.

Why the novel?

Hamilton: “a novel was the only form that could handle all the different things I wanted to . . . say”

El Rashidi: needed to work in “a grey area where definite fact ends and possible fiction, or multiple truths, begin ”

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Chronicle of a Last Summer



Chronicle of a Last Summer

“1919. The Wafd revolting against the British. It wasn’t really a revolution, he says. It was a popular uprising. I raise my eyebrows. But it was a revolt, I say. But there wasn’t a change of a system. The country didn’t completely change. The British didn’t leave until years later. So what is a revolution? I ask. 1952. But it was also a coup? He shakes his head. It can only be called a revolution. Could it have been both? People didn’t take to the streets, it was just one system of power ousting, usurping, another. That’s a coup? Yes, he says, but it was against something that didn’t represent the people, so it was a revolution for the people. Then 2011 was the same? I ask. That was a different kind of revolution, he says. But in the end all that happened is the army forced Mubarak to step down, as in ’52? The people forced him out, he says. But the army wanted that? ... He pauses. I offer: And 2013 was no different ... He tilts his head and thinks for a long time. He isn’t sure. It’s something he feels conflicted about.”

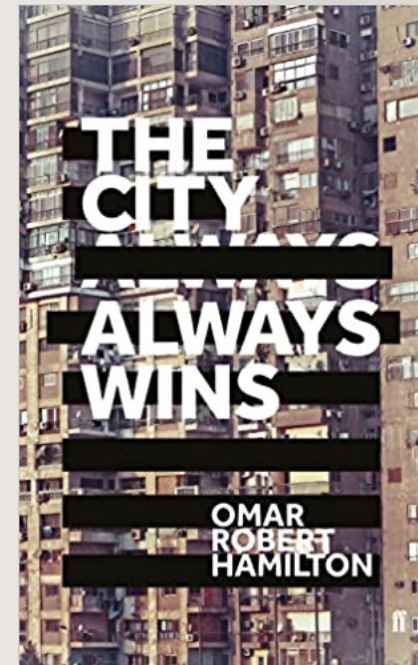
Chronicle of a Last Summer

“Ours wasn’t a culture used to change. Permanency was valued. We lived in the same places we were born in. We married and moved around the corner ... The less change, the less movement, the better.”

Chronicle of a Last Summer

“The president had issued a decree banning mosque speakers above a certain decibel, but they had become louder again . . . It’s the most pertinent daily reminder of the increasing antagonism between the Brotherhood and the state.”

The City Always Wins



The City Always Wins

“I got it!” he says. “It’s a movie! . . . It’s the only way to do it. You can’t write a thesis about it or a poem or a song or a book. It’s too big. It’s too cinematic . . . it’s gotta be a movie. The whole country pours out, takes the streets, beats the pigs, burns down their police stations. It’s not about one hero . . . it’s just too big . . . Think of all the stories. The guy’s running into burning party headquarters . . . people breaking out of prison . . . burning down police station[s] . . . Shit, there’s just so many scenes!”

The City Always Wins

“Khalil hit pause, holding the moment, the intimacy of his sound studio with its low roll of acoustic cotton hanging down from the ceiling . . . He takes a breath before placing the headphones over his ears. The conductor before his orchestra. A moment and he will begin flicking through the sound files one by one; scanning for highlights and grabbing them with loose, brutish cuts to drop them into his five categories: essential, secondary, ambient, cutaway, effect. Five colors for five pillars with which to build the week’s aural architecture. Five colors with which to make the listener see the pain of Abu Bassem, to join his vigil. He presses play on the video once more. We know his name now. We know his name is Bassem.”

The City Always Wins

“We could have done more . . . We should have made the people **listen sooner**. We were too slow and now they’ve made their deal with the Brotherhood and all we have are rocks . . . The elections are upon us . . . They think elections can end a revolution? . . . Khalil is thinking about voting. How can he even think about it? What is he thinking? What are we supposed to do—pack up the morgue and quietly file into the polling station? . . . That’s what this death is for? To be forgotten with a ballot?”