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Thieves in Retirement: A Novel (Middle East Literature In Translation)

Hamdi Abu Golayyel

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Thieves in Retirement: A Novel (Middle East Literature In Translation) Hamdi Abu Golayyel
Hamdi Abu Golayyel offers a striking portrait of a marginalized Egyptian community, bringing to life the absurd and tragic characters who occupy the margins of society while paying tribute to a historical Cairene neighborhood. By turns comic, reverential, beautiful, and tawdry, the novel reveals a social climate where ruthlessness and goodness seem almost indistinguishable and humanity is on display in all its rich variety. The novelist's distinctive vision of Egypt's various postmonarchy political regimes and ideologies shapes this dark comedy of human relations and underground pursuits in late twentieth-century Egypt. Through intricate levels of allegory, puns, and double meanings, Abu Golayyel effectively plays on the rhetoric associated with the nationalist government of Gamal Abdel Nasser, including the post-Nasser turn toward international capitalism with its a consumer-oriented economy-and movement away from the workers' rights orientation of the 1960s. This novel represents a new voice and a new stage in contemporary Arabic literature, as it criticizes official ideologies, whether socialist, capitalist, or Islamist. Abu Golayyel's cast of memorable characters embodies the arbitrariness of life and the search for purpose and dignity in a social milieu that offers little of either. Marilyn Booth's translation fluently renders the novel's delicate levels of diction and rhythm, making this brilliant Egyptian novel available to a much-deserved wider audience.

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