CHAPTER-3

NAJIB MAHFOUZ AS A NOVELIST

3.1: NAJIB MAHFOUZ AS A NOVELIST:

Najib Mahfouz was an Egyptian novelist and screenplay writer, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. And it was not simply recognition of a single author’s achievement but also an acknowledgement of the fact that the Arabic novel had reached distinction on a global scale. Mahfouz’s work was a firm bridge over which the Arab novelist crossed to new horizons of modernity and fictional dexterity and courage. Long before critics began to think of the novel as the more vital and accurate expression of modern man, Mahfouz had realized its importance as the literary form most suited to our times.

By 1951 Mahfouz had already published eight novels, gradually establishing the form in Arabic. However, the publication of his famous Trilogy, a three-hundred-thousand-word family saga in three volumes bayn al-qasrayn (Palace Walk), qasr al-shawq (Palace of Desire), and al-sukkariyya (Sugar Street), published in 1956 and 1957) was the turning point in contemporary Arabic fiction. The Trilogy took a dedication on the part of its author. It is the saga of a middle-class family in Cairo over three generations, spanning the time from nearly the end of the First World War in 1917 through 1944. The achievement of the Trilogy not only compressed the time needed for the Arabic novel’s inception as an established art form but also represented the most
striking example of artistic courage yet known at the time. Mahfouz had spent six years to writing it, working during his free time, for he kept a regular job all his life. The Trilogy was an immediate success. It was hailed as a great literary event, and Mahfouz earned acclaim as the greatest novelist in Egypt and the Arab world at the time. This three-volume novel posed the most serious challenge to the great imbalance in Arabic literature.58

Mahfouz provided a model of dedication, audacity, and perseverance to other would-be novelists, of determination to embrace a vision and see it through. A great change in literary sensibility was taking place in the Arab world after the mid-fifties. The novel introduced a new calm, a more realistic approach, a more accurate picture of contemporary Arab life, objectifying emotion all the time, stilling undue passion, and painting life in slow motion. Mahfouz began as a romantic Egyptian, looking back on Egypt’s ancient history. His first historical novel, ‘Abath al-aqdar, 1939 (The Game of Fate), was followed in 1943 by Radubis and in 1944 by The Struggle of Tiba (kifah Tiba). However, by the mid-forties, he turned to the contemporary scene, writing realistically on modern Cairo. khan al-Khalili (The Khalili Inn) appeared in 1945, and Zuqaq al-midaqq (Midaqq Alley) followed in 1947. In the same year he published Al-Qahira ‘l-jadida (The New Cairo). By now he had embarked on his realistic stage, which would culminate in the Trilogy in the mid-fifties. It was with the appearance of his lovely novel Al-liss wa ‘l-kilab (The Thief and the Dogs) in 1961, however, that his new modernist phase was achieved. The emphasis in this novel and in those that

58 Jyyusi, Salma Khadra, Anthology of Modern Arabic Fiction, P 22
followed lay on a modern technique in dealing with characterization, sequence of events, and symbolization. His later novels are built on the symbolization of one or another aspect of contemporary life. In most of them his emphasis is on social aspects. He often chooses his characters as archetypes of certain ills that assailed city life: bureaucracy, symbolized by shady government officials; coercion, symbolized by policemen; corruption, symbolized by murderers and thieves; exploited and downtrodden individuals, symbolized by prostitutes and servants. He has also a number of characters from among the affluent classes, with their snobbery, their self-indulgence, their greed, and their spiritual void. In many of his later novels Mahfouz anticipated the great decline in ethical standards that was to be fall the Arab world at the end of the twentieth century, the many character blemishes that would become the plague of contemporary life, exhibiting the lamentable results of a century’s failed struggle and immense, gratuitous sacrifices. Mahfouz’s characters seem to be the victims of their times and society. Thwarted, betrayed, disinherited, robbed of their rights and of the precious gifts of freedom and human worth, many individuals turned the evil that surrounded their lives onto each other and onto themselves, unable to avert the moral disorders that colonial intrigues, Arab complicity, and the hegemony of a repressive oligarchy that had no real relationship with the twentieth century had imposed on them. They fall victim to petty quests, many capitulating to the blind authority of autocrats and to the allure of possessions and wealth. If many heroes lack a
constructive attitude toward the social world, they are not always portrayed by Mahfouz as complete perverts.\textsuperscript{59}

However, one of Mahfouz’s greatest works is the landmark Children of Gabalawi (awlad haritna), an allegorical novel written and published in serialized form in Al-Ahram in 1959, banned by an Azhar decree, and republished in 1967 in Beirut. It is a highly symbolized novel, showing the never-tiring human endeavor to achieve the earthly paradise believed to be the rightful heritage of the wretched on this earth. Its seemingly realistic art of description cannot camouflage the undercurrents of the author’s philosophy, which the Nobel citation describes as “a spiritual history of mankind.” Ending as it does with ‘Arafà, the symbol for science, killing Gabalawi, the father who symbolizes the creator, the work caused a big stir in Egypt and, given the atmosphere of ever-increasing religious fanaticism, was probably behind the 1994 attempt to assassinate Mahfouz. In its subject matter, which deals with what Mahfouz feels is the dubious essence of religious dogma, Gabalawi is a unique experiment, an anticipatory expression of the predilection of an intelligent and highly civilized thinker, and as such it is “an anomaly in his novelistic output.”\textsuperscript{60}

When Mahfouz wrote it in the late fifties, he was taking advantage of a more liberal atmosphere in the Arab world, one in which intellectuals spoke freely against religious hegemony, rejected theocratic rule, and called for secularism and freedom of

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, P 23

\textsuperscript{60} Roger Allen, the Arabic Novel (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1982), P 50.
thought. Gabalawi was a warning against what was going to come: the dominance of outmoded religious dicta that would pull people (here, the Muslims) away from scientific reasoning and objective interpretation of universal phenomena. Yet despite the prevalence of a more liberal atmosphere, Gabalawi was banned. By the seventies, what Mahfouz had warned against began to prevail, and fundamentalism began to sweep in varying degrees of intensity all over the Arab world. This was due to several factors: the success of the Iranian Islamic revolution, which did away with the much hated Iranian regime of the Shah, whose hard-fisted rule was seen as a client kingship subservient to the West; the rise after the 1960s of a massive class of educated young men who had come originally from villages to study at the free universities opened in the mid-twentieth century, after independence was achieved; and the conservative upbringing of these young educated Arabs who now filled thousands of government and other posts, carrying their conservative outlook with them. Other important factors were the political dilemma in the fragmented Arab world; the loss of a large part of Palestine to the Jews through Western intrigue and support; the many repressive regimes that suffocated liberty and individual initiative; and the destructive policy of the West that hampered any robust continuity of such progressive initiatives as the union between Egypt and Syria (1958–1961), coupled with the failure by the 1970s of secular ideologies, whether leftist or nationalist, leaving only a religious ideology to be embraced. A very conservative fundamentalist Islam began to spread slowly but with greater vigor over the whole Arab world. Gabalawi remains a great allegory with unique
qualities and a courageous venture into the realms of forbidden ideas, advocating the rationale of scientific thinking and rejecting the dubious fantasies of blind belief.

However, in other novels, Mahfouz again changes gear, as in The Beggar (alshahhadh, 1965) and Autumn Quail (al-summan wal kharif, 1962), where the personal dilemma of the individual dominates. The two main protagonists, Omar in The Beggar and ‘Issa in Quail, are looking for solutions to existential problems; we witness here not the reaction to a societal malaise but, in Raymond Williams’s words, the “dramatic conflicts of an individual mind.” As with many other novels by Mahfouz, there is always a quest, but it is almost never realized. The hero in The Beggar tries all kinds of experiences and eventually rejects society, flouting bourgeois standards and expectations. His hostility toward society is not specific but is, rather, a rejection of the very idea of society and its suffocating norms. As such, it produces no action, and only withdrawal can be expected. In such novels one witnesses individual behavior in particular circumstances (alienation, loss, betrayal, failure). Mahfouz has certainly left very few aspects of problematic experiences in Egyptian life untouched and unexplored. Mahfouz fanatically avoids an emotional participation in his novels and never betrays any sympathy with his characters. A total lack of sentimentality, redundancies, intrusive scenes, or irrelevant descriptions completes a well-knit, compact, and balanced structure. An underlying passion for human justice and harmony is sought, although the harmony is often destroyed by the shattering impossibilities of contemporary life. A great asset is the writer’s capacity to achieve poise and control over a new art form, while mirroring through his characters an age of constant fear and fury as well as a
sense of pervasive anxiety. However, his novels usually convey an atmosphere of gloom and concentrate on the negative aspects of experience, with very little scope for any alleviating sense of joy or any mitigating innocence. Whatever Mahfouz wanted to say to the world, he said it unassumingly, through his characters. He never played any games with his ideas, and he never pontificated or attempted to address the world from on high. The word “pioneer” describes the role Mahfouz played in the history of Arabic literature.61

Mahfouz’s novels are stories of love, ethics, moral responsibility, and existential crises that characterize a culture that has undergone many external and internal changes. His tales describe the lives of ordinary individuals caught in struggles of identity and faith that reveal the existential, spiritual, and material character of Egyptian Muslims. His fictional descriptions of Cairo from 1919 to the present paint a complex picture of Egyptian Muslims confronted with choices presented to them by their own Egyptian culture, as well as those they encounter as a result of the outside influence of colonialism. This simultaneity allows Mahfouz to depict the contemporary Egyptian identity as both modern and traditional.

3.2 CLASSIFICATION OF HIS NOVELS

Najib Mahfouz’s novels fall under three broad categories:

3.2.1: Historical Novels.

61 Ibid P 26
3.2.2: Realistic Novels.

3.2.3: Post realistic Novels.

3.2.1: Historical Novels of Najib Mahfouz:

Many Critics of Arabic literature have been recognized that Najib Mahfouz, the author of the greatest body of modern Arabic fictional literature produced by a single individual, adopted various stylistic strategies for reading his country's realities. These strategies were all aimed at constructing an Egyptian identity through two major streams: representation of Egypt's ancient past, and reconstructing the 'present'. His interest in his country's ancient history, which has been taken by many critics and historians in the context of a powerful national pride opposing foreign domination, can be traced back to his early childhood as he was raised by a mother who had a passion for the Pyramids. His first obvious preoccupation with the history of ancient Egypt was articulated specifically in 1931 when he published a translation of James Baikie's Ancient Egypt. This fondness for the richness of the Egyptian history profoundly impacted his consciousness and stayed with him until it found literary representation in his first three novels, Khufu's Wisdom (1939), Rhadopis of Nubia (1943), and Thebes at War (1944), which have contributed to Mahfouz's reputation as a leading figure in the elaboration of the ongoing narrative on history.

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62 This text was translated by Najib Mahfouz and published with the title Misr Al-Qadima in Cairo in 1931 and was reprinted in 1988, according to Enany, P 42.
Mahfouz’s Three Novels of Ancient Egypt: Khufu’s Wisdom, Rhadopis of Nubia, Thebes at War is sets on the basis of ancient Pharaohnic Egypt. In the rest of his work, Mahfouz is justly admired for his nuanced rendering of modern Egypt, its post-colonial disorder, its complex and often brittle divisions of social class, the perennial tug of Islamic devotion against a vivid and passionate national character. The three novels of ancient Egypt are similarly supple, but distinctly more mythic: rich, colorful, charming, and classical in their scope. The first is a tragedy along the lines of Sophocles: A pharaoh, on hearing a seer predict that his son would not inherit his throne, tries to circumvent fate and ends up only fulfilling it. The second is a love story: A fearsome falcon steals the golden sandal of a stunning courtesan as she bathes, and then drops it into the lap of the pharaoh on his porch across the Nile, stirring in him a passion, and a downfall, so steamy it could move right onto HBO. The courtesan, Rhadopis, is a young woman of ravishing beauty in her eyes a sleepy, dreamlike look shimmered, fit to pierce all creatures to the quick.” The story quivers with erotic desire, yet Mahfouz remains elegant, evocative, never explicit. The last of the novels is analogous politically to modern Egypt, the story of lighter-skinned northerners trying to dominate darker-skinned southerners. Mahfouz is like a present-day Homer, weaving into existence a people’s deepest understanding of themselves. These novels are among his regal gifts to the world, akin to the sumptuous robes and heaven-touched light of the ancients.

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63Vince Passaro, In the Valley of the Kings, The Oprah Magazine, April 2007,
The appearance of three elegant hardback volumes containing Najib Mahfouz’s three ancient Egyptian novels Abath Al-Aqdar (Khufu’s Wisdom), Rhadobis (Rhadopis of Nubia), and Kifah Tiba (Thebes at War) marks an exciting development in the history of contemporary Arabic literature in English.

Among the Nobel laureates earliest works, these three novels form the basis of a monumental project on Ancient Egypt Mahfouz was later to abandon in favour of social documentation, then epic and, finally, prior to the so called, ongoing dream period, a series of intellectual experiments.

Yet despite having a nearly abstract setting, the novels display all of those qualities that were to make Mahfouz’s subsequent books so popular: compelling dialogue, credible three-dimensional characters that have an inner as well as an outer life and a tightly constructed, relevant plot.

Here I would like to discuss about the three historical novels of Najib Mahfouz which are given as follows-

Khufu's Wisdom is the first historical novel of Najib Mahfouz. The novel is very much a traditional and familiar story, a variation on a popular myth, set here in ancient Egypt. Khufu is the great and powerful leader, King of Kings of Egypt, Pharaoh and builder of a spectacular pyramid. The book opens with Khufu rather bored, and to entertain him a prince brings Djedi the magician to perform for him. In fact, Djedi
knows who his successor will be: the just-born son of the high priest at the Temple of Ra.

Needless to say, the Fates defy defying, and the newborn survives. But it's not easy going, and the switches that take place make it unlikely he could ever come anywhere near the throne. By the time the dust (and blood) settles, it's unlikely that anyone could connect the baby named Djedef with the son of the high priest.

Djedef has a happy enough childhood, the woman who everyone knows as his mother, Zoya, marrying the inspector of the pyramid, Bisharu. When he has to decide on his future, Djedef opts for a military career and at school he becomes the academy's prodigy without any peer. But to complicate matters further, he falls for a girl who turns out to be Her Royal Highness Princess Meresankh. His bravery and abilities win Djedef the trust of the royals and a position at the court, but it still takes quite a few incidents for all the pieces of the jumbled puzzle to fall into place and for destiny to be fulfilled.

"Khufu's Wisdom" portrays the builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza, but it focuses only partly on the building of that landmark. Instead, the book is about a king trying to outwit fate and, in doing so, making exactly the moves that play into fate's hands. Khufu, told by a seer that none of his descendents will sit on his throne, orders the death of the baby who the fortuneteller says will be next king of Egypt.

The pleasure of the novel then comes from seeing how the gifted young boy draws closer and closer to Khufu's throne until, through his talents, charm and virtue; he
is poised to become his successor. Deception, romance and a hunger for status all play a role here. So does the ruthlessness of a monarch who believes at first that the acts of kings are like those of gods cloaked in the robe of villainy, yet, in their essence, they are actually celestial wisdom.

Despite the simplicity and obviousness of the tale, Mahfouz offers a few nice twists, and he does the local colour very well. This is a historical fiction where Mahfouz presents the story very well, and that's what makes it an enjoyable and often even compelling read. The outlines of the story are reassuringly familiar, but there's enough novelty to make it feel fresh, too.

Rhadopis of Nubia is another wonderful historical novel of Najib Mahfouz. It is set in ancient Egypt, more than four thousand years ago and it tells about the love-affair of Rhadopis and Pharao Merenra the Second. Part of the strength of the novel is the strong figure of Rhadopis, an independent woman, enchantress and seductress, queen of all hearts and passions. She toys with any number of men, and her soirées are wildly popular, with art, philosophy, and politics discussed there (while all the while the sexual tension is almost overwhelming). She has a whole collection of men wrapped around her fingers. It's a bit much for any character to live up to, but in this case works fairly well, since it serves as a useful counterpoint to Pharao, a similarly complete-awe-inspiring and practically super-human figure.

Rhadopis and Merenra II are, of course, destined to find each other. In keeping with the myth-like approach Mahfouz takes they are brought together by a falcon that
They are both smitten, but Rhadopis is warned of the high cost being a favourite of Pharaoh would be: what she values above all else is her freedom, and being a member of Pharaoh's harem even a favoured one would certainly put an end to that. But Rahdopis has never succumbed to love before, and it is love that proves all-powerful here. For Pharaoh too, as he is willing to conduct their affair on different terms, in order to please her.

They find true love but that brings with it other problems, including a very jealous queen. As significantly, Pharaoh is having trouble as ruler, as the clergy are protesting his efforts at land-reform and doing a good job of getting the citizens on their side. As Pharaoh focuses on his new-found love, dissent grows and plots are hatched. Pharaoh's expectation of being all-powerful and getting his way complicates matters.

Mahfouz builds the tensions of their situation with a fine narrative artistry and with unexpected humor. When, for instance, Rhadopis is in raptures about the mingling of her heart with Merenra's, her slave girl, getting stuck on the anatomical details, takes things down a notch. As loyal ministers and his own queen try to talk Merenra out of his foolish conduct, his stance only grows more stubborn. Mahfouz shows how a figure in power conflates his own blind pride with matters of principle, and how an intolerance of contradiction can shrink a ruler's world to nothing. As for Rhadopis, her abandonment of her dozens of lovers for One Great Love is such an ecstatic business at first that it comes as a masterful shock when Mahfouz switches perspective and reveals how this steamy love affair that was costing Egypt a fortune looks from the outside.
Rhadopis of Nubia suffers some from the simplification and exaggeration of court life and the politics of the time. It reads a bit like Dumas, but without Dumas' solid foundations. This isn’t to say that it’s not good and occasionally riveting reading but there isn’t quite enough substance to it. The characters and situations are rich and compelling, but ultimately Mahfouz is too satisfied with his larger-than-life romantic tale.

Kifa Tiba “The Struggle of Thebes” was another historical novel written by Mahfouz. It is a book about the Hyksos wars, the author turns his attention to the decline and fall of the Middle Kingdom during its last period (1785-1575 BC). The book describes the wars against a foreign power of Asiatic origin which ruled over Egypt for a long time. It is a story of the end of an era. But when the Hyksos were finally expelled, Egypt became independent and began building a new and prosperous empire, The New Kingdom. The historical framework is itself a story of archetypal dimensions. Mahfouz is writing about a renaissance, the rise of Egyptian nationalism, the fight for independence and regained self-confidence reflected in his own times, as many times before.

The story of Thebes at war is sets after 200 years of occupation, the Hyksos leader in his capital in northern Egypt tells Pharaoh in the south that the roaring of the sacred hippopotami at Thebes is keeping him awake at night and demands that they be killed, galvanizing Egypt into hurling its armies into a struggle to drive the barbarians from its sacred soil forever. In battle scenes that pit chariot against chariot and doughty
swordsman against doughty swordsman, and through his sensitive portrait of Ahmose, the young pharaoh whose genius brings this epic to its climax, Mahfouz dramatically depicts the Egyptian people's undying loyalty to their land and religion and their refusal to bow to outside domination. This is not just a tale of ancient, clashing armies. When Mafouz was writing this novel in 1939, other outsiders, British and Turkish, held sway over the land of Egypt, and its inhabitants were engaged in a struggle against a foreign usurpation of their sovereignty that mirrored that of their ancestors. Nor is the novel simply a tale of men and arms, for as Ahmose discovers, while the Nile flows majestically on forever, the violent currents of politics may pull hearts asunder and in gaining a kingdom, a man may lose what his soul most.

Thebes at war is particularly interesting for the way in which the novelist brought history to bear on the political scene at the time. The novel draws on the heroic struggle of the Egyptians and their patriotic Pharaohs to expel the Hyksos, as foreign ruling invaders, from their country.

All the above mentioned three novels of Najib Mahfouz are depicts on historical setting of Pharaohnic Egypt are relevant to the political problems of Egypt in the nineteen thirties. The author is inspired by the lessons of ancient Egypt to find a way out of these predicaments. The struggle to end foreign domination or a tyrant monarch is resolved by the people's heroism or of the leader who represents them.

3.2.2: REALISTIC NOVELS

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64Harrsch,marry, Books and novels of the Ancient world, Najib Mahfouz,Aug,13,2004
After the first three novels, Mahfouz abandoned his original plan to write one historical novel a year. Perhaps his experience with practical life in government service provided him an insight into corruption at different levels and he decided to deal more directly with the problems of his times. Thus he turns to writing realistic novels, like Al-qahirah al-jadidah, (the new Cairo, 1945), Khan al Khalili, 1946, Zuqaq al-midaq (midaq Alley, 1947), Bidaya wa nihaya (The Beginning and the End,1949), and the Triology: Bayn al Qasrayn, 1956, Qasr al-Shawq, 1957, and al-Sukkariya.

First of all I want to discuss about one of the famous socio-realistic novel of Najib Mahfouz Al-Qahira al-Jadidah (The new Cairo) which presents a sketch of Egyptian life in the thirties with an emphasis on its poverty and corruption. It is the Cairo of the middle classes which grew up in the shadow of British occupation and reflects the contradictions in the social and economic order of the city and more so within the individual characters.

The story set in the 1930s, during the reign of King Farouk. The novel opens with conversation of four Cairo College students. Due to all are graduate that year, they are arguing moral principles. One who planning to live his life according to the principles that God Almighty has decreed, while others argue in favor of science as the new religion, materialism, social liberation, and even love as guiding principles. None of the students have any respect for their government.

Among the students, Mahgub Abd al-Da‘im is the poorest, living on a pittance, which is all his father and mother can provide him. His father’s sudden stroke,
however, reduces Mahgub’s three pounds a month to only one pound, and he must literally starve himself in order to finish the school year, becoming more and emaciated as time passes. His father, unable to work, has only enough money to survive for one month after Mahgub graduates on May, so finding a job is truly a matter of the whole family’s survival for Mahgub. When Mahgub contacts a former neighbor, Salim Al-Ikhshidi, for help, Al-Ikhshidi lays out the facts of life regarding government jobs like his own certain people will help him in exchange for a flat fee or a portion of his salary over several years unless he can find a wife among the daughters of ministers, an impossibility considering Mahgub’s poverty.

Before long, however, Al-Ikhshidi, in consultation with higher-ups, has devised a plan for Mahgub, who is in no position to be selective. If Mahgub will agree to marry the lover of a high-ranked government official and become part of a ménage a trios, all his expenses will be paid and a job will be guaranteed in the ministry where Al-Ikhshidi himself works.

The novel follows the young and beautiful Ihsan, whose beauty and devotion to her parents leaves her in a scheming ménage a trios. Life seems to be looking up until the masquerade is discovered and the pair is left wondering what is to come next. The marriage of Mahgub and Ihsan is filled with the expected complications as Mahgub tries to hide his poverty-stricken past and his betrayal of a college friend, at the same
time that he is raising in the government, associating with wealthy and influential friends, and becoming arrogant, all sources of great humor and satire by Mahfouz.65

As the novel takes place in 1930s Egypt, and questions the problems of social and economic inequality that was prevalent in the era. The conversations among the five young men in the beginning of the story highlight the torn views of the youth, struggling between Egyptian culture and values and those of the West. Obvious tensions occur as the reader sees what happens when European cultural values are imposed upon a traditional Egyptian social structure.

Khan al Khalili was another famous realistic novel of Najib Mahfouz written in 1945. The story of novel portrays the clash of old and new in an historic Cairo neighborhood as German bombs fall on the city. The time is 1942, World War II is at its height, and the Africa Campaign is raging along the northern coast of Egypt. Against this backdrop, Mahfouz’s novel tells the story of the Akifs, a middle-class family that has taken refuge in Cairo’s colorful and bustling Khan al-Khalili neighborhood. Believing that the German forces will never bomb such a famously religious part of the city, they leave their more elegant neighborhood and seek safety among the crowded alleyways, busy cafés, and ancient mosques of the Khan. Through the eyes of Ahmad, the eldest Akif son, Mahfouz presents a richly textured vision of the Khan, drawing on his own memories to assemble a lively cast of characters whose world is framed by the sights, smells, and flavors of his childhood home. As Ahmad, a minor civil servant who

65 Mary Whipple, Najib Mahfouz-Cairo Modern, Jan 19, 2011
has sacrificed both education and personal ambition in order to support his family, interacts with the people and traditions of Khan al-Khalili, a debate emerges that pits old against new, history against modernity, and faith against secularism. Addressing one of the fundamental questions of the modern era, Mahfouz asks whether, like the German bombs that threaten Khan al-Khalili daily, progress must necessarily be accompanied by the destruction of the past.66

The completion of Khan al-Khalili in 1945 marked a turning point in Najib Mahfouz's career. Departing from the traditional themes drawn from Egyptian antiquity that characterize the author's earlier works, Khan al-Khalili reflects instead a deep concern with the lives and problems of contemporary Egyptians.

Zuqaq al-Midaq (Midaq Alley), was the earlier period of Mahfouz's work written in 1947. It was although written and set in the early forties, it provides glimpses of unusual intimacy into Egypt in a period of fast transition that is still today in progress. In Midaq Alley we see how characters are enticed away from the roles natural to their birth and upbringing by the hope of material gains chiefly through work with the British Army; nowadays it is the factories of semi-industrial Africa and the Arab world that draw people away from their traditional roles in village and town. The universal problems of behavior and morality the novel examines remain, of course, the same; Kirsha's drug addiction and homosexuality and Hamida's ambitions, Alwan's middle-aged fantasies and Hussein's dissatisfaction, are restricted neither to time nor

66Allen, Rogger, Khan al-khalili
place. And the views expressed in eternal optimism by Radwan Huseiny, and the attitudes of his neighbors toward him, remind one of the place of men of religion in all societies today. In this, as in many of Mahfouz's works, we perceive time, here personified in the ageless Alley, to be the novel's central focus. The aspirations and tragedies of its inhabitants are witnessed with total indifference by the Alley within which the circle of life and death is forever run again. In this it is a view in close focus of the human drama at large, selected by a literary craftsman of impressive skills. And in Midaq Alley, as in life itself, there is much gaiety, color, and excitement to enliven the passing scene.

Najib Mahfouz's Midaq Alley is an essentially realistic take on daily interactions in the world between human beings and the surrounding environment. By the novel's conclusion Mahfouz pessimistically asserts that the value of human life is hollow and ultimately forgotten.

Early in the novel, as Mahfouz sets the mood of the alley, the reader is drawn to the novel's major social nexus-Kirsha's café. There an old man is singing and he is told to cease in favor of the radio. Yet the old man is eventually herded out of the café and is never heard from again for the rest of the novel. Here not only is Mahfouz making a reference to the replacement of traditional ideas by new ideas, but he is doing so in a way that delegates revered traditions to diminutive importance. Hamida, perhaps the novel's shallowest figure, remains preoccupied with wealth and prominence and consistently proclaims. Dreams of marriage are little more than equations designed to achieve higher status, her engagement to Abbas is done solely on the promise of future
money, she is seduced into a brothel by the guise of sophistication. Similarly, Salim Alwan's entire life revolves around his business and "auditing" of transactions, and the only time he shows emotion is rage. Here is yet another portrait of a gluttonous miser who cares not for anything other than the value of money.

While there is one figure who seems to claim substance in terms of the value of a human life, Mahfouz portrays this in such a way that the proclamation appears more as farce than truth. Mahfouz makes his opinion of humanity quite obvious in the pages of Midaq Alley. In doing so he reveals the ugly side of human worth painstakingly visible to readers in the hope that real worth can be achieved.67

Bedaya Wa Nihaya (The beginning and the end) is one of Najib Mahfouz's finest novels. Written in 1949, it is considered now an example of classical Arabic literature and was in fact produced as an Egyptian movie in the 1960's. It tells the story of a family struggling against poverty, in 1930's Cairo. The ordinary, low-income family was suddenly exposed to harsh living conditions after the sudden death of the father, who was the sole bread-winner. The novel is a complex interaction of many emotions and a struggle for survival. The novel focuses the scenery of a traditional pre-war Egyptian society; there was no other possible conclusion but tragedy.

The Beginning and the End is the story of the Kamel family in mid-1940's Egypt, left in poverty by the death of the father. Left to fend for themselves are the

mother, Samira, her daughter Nefisa, and three sons, Hassan, Hussein and Hassanein. Hassan is a ne'er-do-well, a thug and drug dealer who lives on the margins of society. Hussein is a fundamentally decent individual, quiet, hardworking, caring and empathetic. We like him a lot better than his younger brother Hassanein, an arrogant, conceited go-getter and social climber who carves himself out a promising career in the military and doesn't care who he tramples on to reach his goals. The tragic figure in this family is the daughter Nefisa, cursed with a homely face that makes marriage an unlikely prospect, and doubly cursed with a rampant sexual appetite that has no sanctioned outlet whatever for an unmarried woman in a muslim society. Hassanein has no problem dumping his fiancee at the drop of a hat when he decides her family isn't of the class he aspires to belong to; he will disown his brother Hassan rather than be connected to petty criminal. But he's brought up short against his sister's descent into prostitution, and his solution shows him in all his appalling soullessness. "The Beginning and the End" shows us a family and a society torn apart by the conflict between tradition and modernity, especially in its depictions of a society in which women's lives are so circumscribed that they have nothing to look forward to except a marriage that may never materialize. Mahfouz is not a very profound writer, but his sympathy for his characters, including the most degraded, is evident; he empathizes, never moralizes, and shows us a convincing picture of a family in torment. I thought the translation was a good one; it's not stilted or overdone and it flows easily from one chapter to the next. Mahfouz has given us in this book an intriguing story of a family divided against itself.
The Cairo Trilogy was the best realistic family saga of three generations which focuses the socio-political aspects of Egyptian society. The work has sometimes been read as a historical record documenting the social changes witnessed at that critical period in Egyptian history. In itself, Mahfouz's insightful reflection on the events that dominated the modern Egyptian scene contributed to showing the vitality of a nation engaged in a process of remaking and reframing the national identity. Examining the main focuses of the work reveals the man's choices, which should be taken in the context of his vision as a true Egyptian, proud of his Egyptness. However, this did not tempt Mahfouz to remain ceremonial in demonstrating his sense of belonging; he acted from within the 'loving' ranks of his people, glorifying their successes, but, more importantly, criticizing their failures.

We find The Cairo Trilogy, therefore, heavily pregnant with more than one layer of meaning. On one level, it deals with a family saga, observing how it and its members, as individuals and collectively, grow and how their attitudes evolve. On the second level, however, it is not merely a description of history. The value of the work resides here: at the time when we remind ourselves of the fact that all novels are imaginative reconstructions which represent some aspects of real life, we should also remember the fact that they cannot be total representations. The novelists, all novelists, should select from real life the features that, they know, would best represent their visions. In view of this, Mahfouz did not write, say, a dry sociological account, or even a philosophical analysis of his country's history although he studied philosophy. That would not have been as effective as the work of fiction he chose, for a novel, he genuinely knew, is
about people, about their feelings, their emotions, and their depths, not about their appearances. It is about the people whom he grew to know and with whom he was involved, mind and heart. This is The Cairo Trilogy's second layer, then. It is its allegorical dimension that makes it move beyond the ordinary, to the level that most moves readers.

However, The Cairo Trilogy's success as a work of fictional 'realism' has possibly prompted some critics to suggest that "its allegorical dimension has been missed," and that its "hidden level of meaning may escape detection altogether". Undoubtedly, the validity of this suggestion invites skeptical reactions. Besides the fact that the era was rich in political and ideological upheavals, the Egyptians' reading strategies have never missed Mahfouz's subtle narrative techniques by which he could creatively merge the real and the symbolic. The Egyptian readership has always drawn upon their collective awareness of the subtleties of their society's visible and invisible phenomena, and critics, therefore, should trust the public's faculties and their ability to capture the symbolic even when it is submerged in the temporal. In view of this, it becomes incumbent upon critics that the text of The Cairo Trilogy be examined in the context of decoding the implications of the real events of the time. Allegory was, perhaps, the only means by which one could mount a serious and critical challenge on the established notions of social and political authority.

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68 Milson, M Najib Mahfouz, the Novelist-Philosopher of Cairo. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1998: P 133
The Cairo Trilogy, with its brilliant handlings of the era's crisis from a realist perspective, is a particularly appropriate pattern that can accommodate such allegorical representations. Mahfouz was capable of weaving "the public space and the temporalities of the historical narrative into the fabric of a narrative in which the main (or surface) concern is the private space and diurnal temporality of a family," which means that the Trilogy's allegory "operates in the sense of marking the personal as a signifier of the political"\textsuperscript{69}

In the first volume of the Trilogy, Palace Walk, the Abdul-Jawwad family represents the 'traditional' order which, it is implied, has changed little over the preceding centuries. This sense of changelessness is introduced on the very first page of the novel as Amina awakes to attend to her husband on his return from a night of carousing:

Habit woke her at this hour. It was an old habit she had developed when young and it had stayed with her as she matured. She had learned it along with the other rules of married life. She woke up at midnight to await her husband's return from his evening's entertainment. Then she would serve him until he went to sleep\textsuperscript{70}

We are then told that the Abdul-Jawwad household is located in an 'old quarter', Al-Jamaliyya, and that the neighbourhood is 'ancient'. Within this 'traditional' space, the


\textsuperscript{70} Palace Walk, P 1
family itself and its house is also presented as reflecting the social and political order of 'traditional' Egypt.

Mahfouz Focuses new Egyptian Political Identity in the 2nd and 3rd volume Palace of Desire and Sugar Street respectively. Having seen that the character of Fahmy is focalized in Mahfouz's political handling of the allegorical submerging in the first volume of the Trilogy, Palace of Walk, we find Kamal as the main character to shoulder the responsibility in the second volume, Palace of Desire. In this, Mahfouz focuses on the 'middle generation' which dominated Egyptian politics in the 1920s.

Through Kamal's emotional and intellectual development, Palace of Desire unfolds much of the wrapping related to the alternative focus of political loyalty. As the figure of Aida emerges as the new symbol of the nation, Kamal gravitates towards her and towards the image of Egypt she represents. She "is easily recognizable as a covetable symbol of a new 'social order' and a certain vision of Egypt, free of the inhibitions imposed by tradition". Kamal's yearning, then, is to see Egypt rids herself of the chains of the past that have crippled the nation. However, the way his relationship with this 'westernized' young lady is concluded brings the allegorical dimension Mahfouz intended to highlight. If the Egyptians had to free themselves of the crippling traditions of the past, Egypt's emancipation is never to be achieved through simulating Western life styles and Western thoughts. Their hope for a better future can come true.

through their own indigenous patterns of practices in all fields of life. After foregrounding the real change the Abdul-Jawwad family was to experience in the first and second volumes of the Trilogy, the third volume, Sugar Street, introduces the character of Ahmad Shawkat who seems to be free from the allure of the past, believing in everything that entails "various duties intended to help establish a new order on earth" and rejecting everything that acts as "a brake obstructing the free movement of humanity's wheel". Furthermore, it is Ahmad Shawkat in whom Mahfouz invests his hopes for the future, and it is he who had earlier articulated what seems to be the conscious ideological position of the Trilogy:

Yes, there is no argument about the need for independence, but afterward the understanding of nationalism must develop until it is absorbed into a loftier, more comprehensive concept. 

According to the paradigms of allegory set by Mahfouz in the Trilogy, this critique of Egyptian political concept is aimed at an impressive and more comprehensive alternative, which is central in Mahfouz's strategies.

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72 Sugar Street, P 122
73 Ibid, P 123
74 Ibid, P 26
3.2.3: POST REALISTIC NOVELS

After great success of Najib Mahfouz through the writings of realistic novels he concentrates his mind to write some experimental novel. These types of novels are has been written on the basis of modern thinking. These novels are called as post-realistic novel also. There are many post-realistic novel written by Najib Mahfouz, like Awlad Haratina (Children of Gebalaawi, 1959), Al-Shuhaj (The Begger, 1965), Tharthara fawq al-Nile (Adrift of the Nile, 1966), Al-Hubb Taht Al-Matar, (Love in the Rain, 1973), Al-Karnak, (Karnak cafe 1974),Malhamat al-harafish (The Harafish, 1977), Layaly wa alf lilalatalah (Arabian Nights and Days, 1980), Rihlat ibn fattauma (Journey of Ibn Fattauma, 1983). Etc.

First of all I want to discuss about his masterpiece Awlad Haratina (Children of Gebalaawi) which is published in 1959. It was one of the most controversial novels in Egypt. This novel is very important to the discussion of the tension between traditional and modern Islam, which has seen resurgence within Egypt and many parts of the Muslim world. It is an Islam that is fundamentalist and extreme in response to freedom, and sees the West primarily as a corrupting force in the world. In this novel, Mahfouz presents a pessimistic view of man’s struggle for existence. As El-Enany says-

“It is a unique allegory to human history from Genesis to the present day. In it the masters of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are stripped of their holiness and represented, in thin disguise, as no more than social reformers who strove to the best of their ability to liberate their people from tyranny and exploitation. Another character in
the allegory stands for science, which is shown to have supplanted religion and at whose hands the demise of God is eventually affected.”

Mahfouz’s themes in this novel are neither oppositional to religion nor to science; instead, his critique is of humanity and the Abrahamic faiths is based upon the corruption and material desire by human beings that have taken controlled these religions which he describes as downtrodden and miserable. Throughout the novel his characters represent all the monotheistic religions and attempt to resist the corruption of wealth. Simultaneously, he upholds science as the hope of humanity, which is consistent with his previous works, but also issues words of warning that science in the wrong hands may support the oppressor. Gebalaawi is a reference to God; he owns everything and sets rules to govern it.

This novel deals with religion and science, but more importantly the injustices within humanity. It is important to understand how this novel is representative of the social themes within Egypt and also a reproduction of the work of the early reformers who encouraged science and religion. In this novel, the alley is in ruins and Egypt is deteriorating economically and struggling with different political parties.

Children of Gebalaawi can certainly be regarded as an allegoric expression of despair at the ruthlessness and brutality of Egyptian regimes by a person who is in

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disharmony with rampant greed, the vile oppression, and the lust for power that trample underfoot the quest for justice and for true faith.\footnote{Gordon, H. 1990. Najib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in His Writings (Contributions to the Study of World Literature). Westport: Greenwood Press. P34}

The first section of The Children of Gebalaawi presents the story of Adham and his father, which is based on the story of Cain and Abel. Mahfouz changes the story and the names, but depicts Idris and Adham as brothers who are in conflict with one another, and the issue of inheritance is the reason for their strife. “Then we are introduced to the sons Qadri and Humam—Cain and Abel who are established by Mahfouz as parallels in generations with Idris/Adham, and further he adds by having Qadri (Adam’s son) and Hind (Idris’s daughter) sexually involved”\footnote{Ibid, P36}. From a Qur’ānic point of view, Mahfouz is expressing his own ideas about the injustices of human beings and then alluding to the idea that desire is what may ruin one brother and even compel one to murder. The juxtaposition of Mahfouz’s fictional narrative with the Qur’ānic stories of Cain and Abel are compelling, but Mahfouz is also making a strong statement about religion in which he suggests that God might be merciful, but his judgment relies upon one’s own reasoning or logic of God. Mahfouz follows this religious formula in his depiction of Adham after the tragedy of being banished from his father’s house—he is eventually forgiven:

In the next section of this novel, entitled Gebal, Mahfouz depicts a downtrodden alley that is full of destruction, gangsters, and terrorism. Mahfouz creates an image of
Cairo that is gruesome, as a result of the corruption and lack of attention to poorer areas. There is also a lack of morality that leads Mahfouz to feel Cairo is deficient in religious beliefs, not only those of Islam, but all monotheistic beliefs. Egyptian historians and Mahfouz scholars contend that any religious extremism can be destructive to a society, even Islam. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the impact of certain reforms, and then the economic and political disintegration within Egypt, became a call for a resurgence of religion. However, in Children of Gebalaawi one finds that the characters reject a call for religious fanaticism, since Mahfouz keeps the dunya and din in balance; the material and spiritual are not extremes, they are inextricably linked in society. Even if the alley is miserable due to the tyrannical nature of the political atmosphere, fate rests in God’s hands. This is in keeping with Islam and the idea that even though an individual is destitute, God will somehow always be merciful.

Adrift on the Nile is another wonderful novel of Najib Mahfouz which takes place during the 1960s, after the colonists have fled Egypt, but while the impression they have left is still raw. This is a significant time for Egypt, and the city in Mahfouz’s novels conveys the sense of a lost idealism and a bleak future that promises to be both meaningless and filled with defeat for Egypt. The condition of Egypt during this time is relevant in that Mahfouz’s characters act in a social context surrounded by Islam, political upheaval, and questions of the future. According to literary criticism, the portrayal of these characters stand on the brink of absurdity, but in the end, they impart ethical and spiritual meanings.
Adrift on the Nile describes the lives of characters adrift in an Egypt that is in turmoil and which has few political, cultural, and sexual outlets. The novel is set on Anis Zaki’s houseboat. This is where the characters spend most of their time. The novel reveals the many social and political issues that ensued in Egypt during this time period, as the characters talk through the night and smoke hashish from a water pipe. Evenings on the boat give the reader the sense that the characters want to escape reality, to take refuge in a place where no one can judge them. However, at the end of the novel we learn that Anis would like to escape the confines of the boat, but is unable. Samara Bahgat participates in several of the evening scenes. Anis finds a notebook of hers in which she has outlined a scenario for a play that involves characters that resemble the many occupants of the houseboat. In addition, some of the scenarios and descriptions are taken directly from their soirees.

The climax of the novel comes when they decide to go for a late night drive and accidentally hit a man in the street. They decide to drive away instead of dealing with it and return to their lives. Anis is deeply troubled by this and insists that the group should take responsibility for what they have done.

The characters in Adrift on the Nile are on a continual search for meaning driven by a sense of despair. “Against cosmic and historic absurdity are shown the social absurdities of Egypt in the 1960s where everyone is writing about socialism, while most dream about wealth” 78. Mahfouz uses imagery that is both pre-Islamic and symbolic of

78 Ibid, P55
Egyptian culture to demonstrate the contradictions that permeate Egyptian society, such as the questions of wealth, class, religion, and state politics that are at the forefront. Traditional Islam in this novel has been politicized in a transitioning Egypt where most citizens are concerned with the social health of culture, rather than the religious values that were at the heart of Mahfouz’s earlier works.

Adrift on the Nile raises questions of faith and ethics through Anis, who under the influence of hashish delivers a continuous monologue about the state of the world and society. In this novel, there is the sense that things in Egypt are questionable. This period marks a fundamental shift in the mood of Mahfouz’s characters, and also the manner in which absurdity and emptiness fill the lives of the characters, except for Omar. The following passage expresses the mood of the novel, and Mahfouz’s depiction of the socio-political and religious climate.

In Mahfouz’s Adrift on the Nile, Amm Abduh is the keeper of Anis’s boat, but he is also the local Muezzin who calls people to pray. Whereas Anis, the main character, smokes drugs and contemplates the existence of God, his keeper embodies the most pious and spiritual concerns of the novel. The internal and external, which can be viewed as personal and social narratives, have had a significant place in the lives of many Muslims who have been faced with similar historical and existential challenges and political pressures from both their own and other governments.

In this novel, we see an existential struggle between the main characters that demonstrate their dislike for the West, and at the same time are invested in talking about
a past or idealism that they would like to recapture. The reader gets the sense that there is nothing to fear, since so much transformation has taken place in Egypt already.

Al-lis's wa al-kilab (The Thief and the Dogs) is one of the Egyptian author Najib Mahfouz's most celebrated works. He further developed his theme of existentialism using stream-of-consciousness and surrealist techniques. The Thief and the Dogs is written in a stream-of-consciousness style, a style that has a certain, unusual wildness on the sentence level. It charts the life of Said Mahran, a thief recently released from jail and intent on having his vengeance on the people who put him there. The novel was published in 1961, and Said's despair reflects disappointment in revolution and new order in Egypt, As Said is not only a thief, but a kind of revolutionary anarchist.

Said's world revolves around Nabawiyya, his former wife, and Sana', his daughter. Once in love with the former, she has now betrayed him by marrying his friend 'Ilsh. Central to the making of Said Mahran is also Ra'uf 'Ilwan, his one-time criminal mentor, who used the same revolutionist rhetoric, but now, being a respected journalist and businessman, is in seeming opposition to Said, whose outlook hasn't changed. These perceived betrayals throw the protagonist into the utmost confusion and his initial calculation in revenge becomes ever more a wild flailing against the whole world. Only Nur, a prostitute, and Tarzan, a café-owner, provide Said with any respite from his anger and the world at large which is closing in on him, yet in time even they cannot help him.
The novel is heavily dependent on imagery. The thief Said Maharan, will by necessity as a tragic hero be chased down by the dogs. The recurring images of prison, betrayal and darkness amongst others also permeate the text. The novel is remarkable because it is the first novel to employ the stream of consciousness style of writing in Arabic. It helped, therefore, to confirm Mahfouz's stature as a pioneer in the field of literature. It is a dark tragedy about the ways the individual can fail in society and about personal weakness both of which are significant themes for Mahfouz.\textsuperscript{79}

Autumn Quail (1962) more explicitly political than The Thief and the Dogs, this novel addresses the problems of government corruption — and the way it can destroy lives, on a personal level. After Nasser takes control, the bureaucracy is changed out, at least in part to purge any remaining loyalty to the king. One of the purged and imprisoned bureaucrats is Isa al-Dabbagh, whose loss of job and status (and love) will lead to his dissolution and alcoholism. The novel opens on Black Saturday the 26 of January, 1952 when fire ravaged Cairo and widespread looting and rioting rocked the capital. The tone is apocalyptic. Mahfouz grips you from the first sentences, painting a portrait of an individual and a nation in crisis.\textsuperscript{80}

The story of this novel sets in the year 1952, and there is revolution in Egypt. The youth of the nation, more reckless and optimistic than their parents, have formed a militia to drive out both the English colonizers and the corrupt Egyptian king.

\textsuperscript{79} Wikipedia article, the thieves and the dogs

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, P34
Miraculously, both goals are achieved. But Isa, an ambitious government worker, is thrown beneath the hooves of history when a new inquisition discovers his corrupt bargains and fires him ignominiously. All at once he is deprived of his job, his fiancé, and his home. The novel traces his existential wanderings through Alexandria and the questions that accompany a lasting revolution.

While this book lacked the physical vividness of the moral structure of it is compelling enough to create its own aesthetic value. This is true even if you're not a card-carrying existentialist. Mahfouz focuses on Isa's story and mental processes rather than using him as a conduit to state any plain conclusion. Yes, the pathetic fallacy makes several appearances that's when the setting reflects the character's disposition, and it's frowned upon by those who disbelieve that our perceptions of nature influence nature as we perceive it, but it's tastefully in the background. Primarily we become intimate with a powerful listlessness that makes Isa believable.\(^1\)

Miramar (1967) is a fantastic novel of Najib Mahfouz that’s the only description for Miramar. One of the few Mahfouz novels that leave Cairo, Miramar is set instead in Alexandria, in a small, sea side pension named you guessed it Miramar. Written at the height of Mahfouz’s power as a novelist, it has some muscular, confident prose, and a tangle of complex relationships based around the intrigue of love. It is a stunning and powerful novel. Each chapter recounts the same complete story from the perspective of a different narrator. There is Amer Wagdi, a retired journalist who has come to find a

\(^1\)Joe Flynn, review: Autumn Quail by Najib Mahfouz (1962), October 8, 2012
peaceful place to wait for death to catch up to him. Hosny Allam is a young, reckless womanizer adrift in a mindset of random causality. Mansour Bahy, once an idealistic revolutionary, has come to the Miramar to escape his conscience at not being radical enough. And Sarhan al-Beheiry, the smoothest of the lot, enters in pursuit of Zohra, a stunningly beautiful young woman who has fled to the hotel from a sticky past. Under the watch of Mariana, the sly old proprietress, these four men revolve around the central struggles of Zohra, no one coming quite near enough to discover her spirit.

Perhaps the biggest strength of the novel is that Mahfouz finds a way to immerse himself totally within each of his narrators. Not one of them has remotely the same voice as any other, yet with the binding beauty of Zohra's development, the speakers are missing something without each other. The novel is a whole only with four sides. Arguably, it also lacks a supporting center, but I'll come to that in a moment. I was particularly touched by Amer Wagdi, the first and last narrator; Mahfouz was not old by this time, nor was he especially religious, but Amer's voice perfectly matches what a meek, benignant old man should embody. I think I also like Amer the best because he never tries sexually to intrude on Zohra, but that's another story.

Zohra, on the periphery of each narration, is the center of the story. My first essay for this class is about reading between the lines of Miramar. I argue that the very act of excluding Zohra from the narration, when she ties all the pieces together, is both a descriptive portrayal, which is superior to a proscriptive one, and is a feminist writing. Feminism, when done right, is not a promotion of one sex or a denigration of the other, but a diagnosis of a way in which humanity can't stand up straight without both male
and female perspectives. And the book is purposely incomplete: we never know where Zohra goes after the Miramar, or whether she completes her education in spite of the fact that she is objectified wherever she goes.

To say all this would be incomplete without a bit about Zohra. She's deliberately shady, but there are points at which her real personality shines through the narratives. She's uneducated, but she's sharp. She's usually quiet and flighty, but she gets into more fights than any other character. She's the kind of character a girl should want to relate to, but she never gives the reader the chance.

Miramar is impressive because it juggles this and an examination of human nature at the same time. One outcome of the book is that human nature is what causes social currents. 82

Al-Shahhadh (The Beggar, 1965) has been written by Najib Mahfouz in 1965. It is an emotional journey that asks political, spiritual, and religious questions regarding social responsibility and the lack of meaning. This novel resonates with Mahfouz’s earlier novels from the 1950s and 1960s that probe the character of the Egyptian bourgeoisie and, more importantly, the transformation that Egypt experienced under Nasser’s regime and Islam. In this novel, Omar repeats the following phrase: “Don’t we live our lives knowing that our fate rests with God?” 83 This question becomes the fate of Omar as a beggar of meaning. As Omar’s existential crisis continues, he distances

83 Mahfouz, Najib, 1986. The Beggar Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press. P52
himself from familial responsibility and his job. He begins to see his life as boring and sees these aspects as an illness. Mahfouz explains through Omar that contemplation of merely oneself is irresponsible and will result in defeat; there must be social consciousness and responsibility. Mahfouz portrays Omar as an individual seeking meaning outside of reality and not in reality, whether it be about politics, family, or even friendship; however, Mahfouz shows that reality in any circumstance is reality in the world and not somewhere beyond it. As Mahfouz rejects Omar’s escapism, he accepts the character as one who has always resisted moral and ethical responsibility, and ends up in a vulnerable and almost pathetic state of abandonment. This is most apparent at the end of the novel, when Omar is in a garden and his friend, Othman, seeking a place to hide to escape the authorities. Omar is shot and Othman is captured. As they are traveling in the ambulance, Omar wakes up and asks, “If you really wanted me, why did you desert me”? This is the greatest sense of clarity Omar experiences throughout the novel, and it echoes the reality Egyptians experienced as they moved through social and political transformations and sought a new identity. The 1952 revolution and the failure of socialism and democracy under Nasser left an indelible mark on Mahfouz, but many young Egyptians, like Othman in the novel, tried to create a rebellion against the authorities even after spending time in prison. Mahfouz was critical of this time, as El-Enany asserts, “it must be stressed, however, that Mahfouz’s

84 Ibid, P140
quarrel with the 1952 revolution has never been over principles; it was rather over its practices which failed to live up to its principles.\(^{85}\)

Al-Hubb Taht Al-Matar, (Love in the Rain, 1973) is another important novel of Najib Mahfouz. It is a vibrant novel of love, bitterness, and betrayal. Set in Cairo in the aftermath of the Six-Day War of 1967, Love in the Rain introduces us to an assortment of characters who, each in his or her own way, experience the effects of this calamitous event. The war and its casualties, as well as people’s foibles and the tragedies they create for themselves, raise existential questions that cannot easily be answered. In a frank, sensitive treatment of everything from patriotism to prostitution, homosexuality and lesbianism, Love in the Rain presents a struggle between “old” and “new” in the realm of moral values that leaves the future in doubt. Through the dilemmas and heartbreaks faced by his protagonists, Mahfouz exposes the hypocrisy of those who condemn any breach of sexual morality while turning a blind eye to violence, corruption, and oppression.\(^{86}\)

Al-Karnak (Karnak cafe) is another wonderful novel of Najib Mahfouz written in 1974 and newly translated by Roger Allen, the novel takes place in the mid 1960s and focuses on the Karnak café regulars as they respond to some key moments in contemporary Egyptian history. For the young people, history began with the 1952 Revolution in which the army, led by a young officer named Jamal Abdel Nasser,


\(^{86}\) Roberts,Nancy, Love in the Rain by Najib Mahfouz
overthrew King Farouk, abolished the pro-British monarchy, and established a republic, inspiring other Middle Eastern and North African countries in an Arab sovereignty movement. In 1954, Nasser became President of Egypt. Hopes were high then and continue to be high for the young at the café in the early 1960s, despite the acknowledged problems with civil rights, poverty, and the abuses of the police.

The three young people and their fates become the focus of the narrator when the young people inexplicably disappear for several months. One of them, Hilmi Hamada, has been the lover of Qurunfula, a love relationship which has given her life new meaning. Hilmi, his friend Isma‘il al-Shaykh, and Isma‘il’s love Zaynab Diyab, have all been arrested, supposedly because they are involved with the fedayeen movement, a militant Islamic movement which might threaten the current government. After several months of incarceration under deplorable conditions, which they describe after their release, they are found innocent, and they try to continue their previous lives until they are arrested and imprisoned again, this time on the suspicion that they are Communists.

Jamal Abdel Nasser, their President, has been involved in the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and when it begins to challenge Israel militarily, and the problems escalate, the scene is set for an Egyptian incursion to protect the Sinai, resulting in the Six Day War in 1967 with Israel. The three young people from the Karnak Café are imprisoned during this time, and when they are released, following Egypt’s defeat, they are devastated, their hopes for their future dashed.
Throughout the novella, a character named Khalid Safwan plays a sinister part. For much of the time, the reader does not know who he is or what his role is, but eventually, we learn that he is a man who has the power of life and death and uses it. Eventually, at least one of the young people is “persuaded” to become an informer, changing the dynamics of the Karnak Café permanently.

Mahfouz develops tremendous suspense about the outcomes of the regulars of the Karnak Café, at the same time that he creates an intense look at the pressures placed upon them as they try to live their lives and do what they think is right. The “family” atmosphere, which is so dominant at the beginning of the story, slowly dissipates when the young people disappear. The reasons for their disappearance become speculation, and Qurunfula becomes more distraught because Isma’il is gone, with no hint as to when he may return. Changing points of view from Qurunfula, to Isma’il al-Shaykh, Zaynab, and Khalid Safwan keep the interest in the outcome high and the perspective on events constantly changing.

As the forms of torture the young people undergo are revealed, the taboos of the society become obvious, and the faith of the young people in the future of the revolution of 1952 is put to the test. The progress of the country is obvious through their comments, at the same time that the limitations of the country, obvious through their treatment by the military and police, are even more obvious. The desire for “freedom” never flags, at the same time that the powers that be consider “freedom” to be dangerous because of the potential for growth of the fedayeen, the communist movement, and socialism, which would threaten national security.
Ultimately, they must consider whether “peace is more risky than war.” As they and others investigate religion as the answer, then communism, democracy, socialism, and war as the “answer,” they must also consider whether negotiation with the great powers, especially America, might lead peace. Their individual lives, shattered by their arrests and imprisonments, cease to exist in the aftermath of the trauma, and their ability to trust is gone forever.\(^{87}\)

Mafouz recreates in a mere one hundred pages the historical record of a country yearning to be free at the same time that he depicts the movements against individual freedom which are at their peak. The young people he creates here are ordinary college students, despite the fact that all of them have overcome far more than the average western college student will ever dream of, and though they insist that they still believe in the future of the revolution of 1952, their experience less than fifteen years later, shows them and the reader just how far they have left to go. Dynamic, powerful, and thought-provoking, this novella carries a punch and modern relevance that the reader will not soon forget.

Karnak Café is a good, quick read, combining both Mahfouz’s usual presentation of the Cairo-world as well as a more bitter presentation of the conditions of the times. Here Mahfouz presents the accounts of several who have been compromised by the near-paranoid state that is terrified of anything that borders on dissent, turned into informers because they are left with no alternatives. Mahfouz only describes what

\(^{87}\) Whipple, Mary, Review: Karnak café, DEC 30, 2008
happens in a small, quiet part of Cairo, but it's clear he's condemning the government's self-defeating and -undermining practices, showing a few individuals who are destroyed by it -- and clearly implying that this approach can only lead to the further radicalization of the opposition.

Layali alf layla (Arabian Nights and Days) was the most promising novel of Najib Mahfouz written in 1981. In this novel, Najib Mahfouz focuses on the necessity of change and implies the importance of circumspection. In the local context of his native Egypt, and in the broader context of the Arab region, he emphasizes the need to acknowledge and resolve current social, cultural, and political dilemmas. While he is able to reconcile the influences of science, socialism, Marxism, and religion in his own thought, some of his critics are unable to do so. Most of the people whom Mahfouz acknowledges as his cultural influences, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx, are associated with Western culture and are regarded as atheists and materialists by Islamists. One of the few Arab thinkers whom Mahfouz cites as an influence is the Christian intellectual Salama Musa. However, this person has socialist and secularist leanings and is suspected by Islamic critics of seeking to destroy Islamic culture to be replaced with Western culture and materialism.

While Arabian Nights and Days can easily be appreciated on the basis of its fanciful depiction of an exotic culture, it also contains important elements which relate to Mahfouz’s goals regarding literature, culture, and history. These include a mixture of

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literary techniques from both the Arab and the Western traditions, the use of multiple sub narratives, and the rupture of unilinear temporality. Through his treatment of these topics, he also implies the lack of fixed point of reference for the reader and the lack of a decisive conclusion, in regard to both the outcome of the plot and the development of modern Egyptian and Arabic cultures. In regard to Arabic literature and culture, Mahfouz rejects both the return to the mythic past associated with Arab traditionalists and the great leap forward proposed by the Arab Renaissance. He exposes the futility of clinging to outmoded conventions on the fictional level and attempts to influence the development of new conventions for writing on the meta-fictional level. While his writing and thought embody elements of both Eastern and Western cultural systems which, at times, appear to be in conflict, he underscores the need to view controversial situations in literature, culture, and history from multiple perspectives. One application of this is for Arabs to disassociate themselves from Western principles in the process of structuring and evaluating their own literature and society. Another application is for foreign readers and other cultural observers to interpret Arab literature and society from a non-Western perspective.

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90 David Cross, A Critique of Arabic Literature and Society: Najib Mahfouz's Arabian Nights and Days, Charleston Southern University-P29-31
Plurality and coexistence of different ideas and societies is evident in Mahfouz’s The Journey of Ibn Fattouma, which explores different episodes and movements in a fictional journey that reveals Mahfouz’s own personal perspective throughout his writings, and simultaneously the transitions of religion, state, and consciousness in Egypt. His novel expounds on different systems of ideologies and how Ibn Fattouma reacts to these situations, in other words he reveals how through Ibn Fattouma pluralistic visions of diversity.

The Journey of Ibn Fattouma was published in 1983. It conveys Mahfouz’s final perception of human choices and destiny, and is significant for understanding both Mahfouz as a writer and his view of Egyptian Muslim identity. This novel is an allegory of Rihlat Ibn Battuta, which is a story of utmost significance to Egyptian readers.

The novel represents six different phases of Ibn Fattouma’s journey and how these stages lead him to search for the Promised Land (Land of Gebel), which ultimately is never found. The religious promised land within Islam is Akharat (the hereafter) the place with God after death; however, Ibn Fattouma never reaches that point, nor does Ibn Battuta, whose goal was Hajji, which is not even mentioned as a goal for his journey. At the opening of the novel, Ibn Fattouma has lost his father and is being tutored by Sheikh Maghagha al-Gibeili, a neighbor who instructs the young boy at home. “From him I receive lessons in the Qur’an, the sayings of the prophet, philosophy, arithmetic, belles-lettres, jurisprudence, Sufism, and the literature of
One can see a parallel with Mahfouz’s own life, as he too grew up like many in his generation who “began at the Kuttab (Qur’an school) where he learnt religion and the principles of literacy before he joined the primary school.” Mahfouz portrays Ibn Fattouma (Qindil) as a young man who is pressured by the social climate. He questions whether an Islamic society should tolerate poverty and control society’s demise simultaneously.

The main character’s stream of consciousness reflects Mahfouz’s own journey, as he questions throughout his writing the injustices at home and his own dislike of Islamic fundamentalism. Ibn Fattouma journeys through six different lands where he observes the systems of life as different. In comparison, they are better than his own homeland, to which, without regret, he never returns his ever-encompassing dream is to reach the Land of Gebel. He reflects that he encounters no evil on his journey, which fails to remind him of his sad country. When he sees the impaled heads of rebels, he is convinced that they died for justice and honor in the Land of Mashriq (Abode of Sunrise). Although Ibn Fattouma is in a new land with a family still rooted in Islamic principles, when he tries to raise his children with these principles he is turned away from this land to begin another journey. This second journey is to a land with different standards for morality, religion, and relationships. He is expelled and moves onto his next journey to the “Land of Haira” (Abode of Arena), where he spends 20 years in prison on a false charge. Ibn Fattouma’s next journey is to the “Land of freedom,” Dar

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al-Halba, where he feels that people are truly free and that the state has no official religion. Here, certain leaders are elected for a certain amount of time, which is very much an example of the capitalist West that adheres to democracy. The idea of Islam and freedom are questioned in this section when he learns that even homosexuals have rights, even if they are Moslems.

In the last part of this novel, Ibn Fattouma travels to two new places before he makes his final journey to the Land of Gebel. This final section is unfinished and without a resolution, as he has no way to return and it is up to the reader to perceive whether he will reach his final destination, which is the Land of Perfection. In the Land of Aman (land of security), Ibn Fattouma meets strict surveillance of his actions and words; however, he is free to go to the bathroom. This land seems to represent communist Russia where one is allotted no individual freedom. The next place is the “Land of Ghourroub” (Land of Sunset), where he encounters a guru who prepares him to journey on to the land of Gebel.

The final chapter of the novel deals with progress to Dar al-Jabal and is significantly entitled “al-Bidayā” (The beginning). The novel ends with the travelers standing at the foot of a mountain and looking up to the top, towering in the clouds. The questions are about the future and whether Qindil will enter paradise.

In The Journey of Ibn Fattouma, there are significant themes that parallel Mahfouz’s own journey and the argument that traditional Islam and modern society need to compromise. As Qindil (Ibn Fattouma) journeys, suffers, and gains different
insights into new ways of thinking about his own religion and society, he is enlightened by the realization that judgment in the Land of Perfection is left up to God. Ultimately, Mahfouz’s theological position in this novel is in accordance with Islam, where Dunya and Din, the world and the spiritual, are in balance. However, his message is a warning for the reader who desires to emulate perfection on earth, since only God can create perfection. Despite his warning, Mahfouz insists that human beings must take social justice seriously in this world, as metaphysically or supernaturally we are bound by our own limitations.  

The Harafish by Najib Mahfouz is an epic novel chronicles several generations of the al-Nagi family. Each generation of the clan faces numerous moral dilemmas and decisions. The novel, initially written in Arabic, has been translated to English without the slightest loss of eloquence or style. "Harafish" in the context of the novel means "common and ordinary people". The majority of Mahfouz’s work, including The Harafish, focuses on the dreams, plights and moral decisions of these people. By portraying both the admirable and weak characteristics of each individual of the al-Nagi clan, the moral messages are made extremely relatable to the readers.  

Although Mahfouz's literature is set in Egypt in a pre-modern time period, the al-Nagi clan deals with issues which are universal and timeless. The chronicling begins with Ashur Abdullah, later called Ashur al-Nagi. After being abandoned as an infant by his mother, a prostitute, Ashur was rescued and raised by Sheikh Afra. Sheikh Afra, a

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93 Afridi, M. M. Najib Mahfouz and modern Islamic identity
religious and moral commoner, took it upon himself to raise Ashur with Muslim ethics. While Sheikh Afra represented somewhat of an unrealistic moral standard, Ashur led a life that was more relatable and realistic due to its frequent taints, mistakes and aberrations. An example of Ashur al-Nagi’s deviance from moral righteousness was his abandonment of his aging wife for a young and beautiful prostitute named Fulla. Despite of this action, however, Ashur was eventually able to become the chief of all the harafish in the alley that he lived in. His strong presence accompanied by his extremely just and fair approach to ruling his people would forever characterize his undying legacy.

Ashur al-Nagi’s son with Fulla, Shams al-Din, was able to succeed his father as chief. Both Shams al-Din and his father firmly believed that their responsibility was utmost to the Harafish. Future generations of the al-Nagi family would not lead their lives with the same moral virtues as their beloved ancestors once did. A clear moral decline made evident through licentious behavior, involvement in murders, deceitful bargains, and frequent failed marriages took place as each generation passed. Their detestable behavior was caused by their dangerously excessive preoccupation with status, power and wealth rather than the well-being of the harafish. Ashur al-Nagi’s legacy only served as a reminder of their incompetence and failure. The book comes full circle, however, when the last al-Nagi in the novel, also named Ashur, returns to ruling with moral priorities similar to that of the first Ashur al-Nagi. He was able to find his power, not through corruption, but rather in the ability to be humbly fulfilled in serving the Harafish. The glory and love for the al-Nagi family was at last restored.
Mahfouz's literature employs both allegory and parable to vocalize his moral lessons. He has managed to present a clear picture of the human condition and human behavior - all humans encounter problems concerning lust, greed, envy or desire as do the clan members in the novel. Yet all humans also bear some sort of compassion, faith and piety which, if developed, has the ability to provide clarity to such morally conflicted people. Mahfouz did not create faultless characters for his readers to attempt to emulate. Instead, he created ordinary people with weak characteristics that can be observed and learnt from.

In a sense, we are all harafish. We may lead distinctly different lives from one another, but we are interconnected through our weaknesses and struggles. Mahfouz would like us to realize that these struggles are inevitable. Yet no matter how deep our moral decline, moral clarity can reenter our focus back onto the path of a decent, moral life a life which is unassuming, yes, but admirable nonetheless. We, the harafish, do not have to be powerful, wealthy, brilliant or physically desirable. To lead a moral life: that in itself is enough.94

Echoes of an Autobiography (1994) has been written nearly half-a-century after Cairo Modern, this book will frustrate you if you’re searching for an autobiography of Mahfouz. Mahfouz is too complicated a writer for that; he offers, instead, fragments that add up to a cloud of meaning, the echoes of a person. Some sections are as short as one line. This book also ties Mahfouz, at least in my mind, to the South American

94 Emily, The Harafish: Summary and Excerpts monday, may 14, 2007
magical realists particularly Eduardo Galeano and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, both of whom are rarely mentioned in discussions of the Egyptian writer’s work.

In Mahfouz’s writings, we find a dialectic that is both Egyptian and Western. In his personal life and in his writings he has positioned himself between cultures and is able to live in two worlds simultaneously. He exposes a certain history of the Muslim world with the West, where one is amongst and in between. In a manner, he is also identifying an Egyptian culture that is grounded in Islam and influenced by the West through colonialism, early ideas of scientific reform, political systems, and infrastructure, Mahfouz was influenced by many Arab and Western writers. Mahfouz’s writings are examples of the long-standing exchange between the West and the Arab world, which had never before been presented in narrative and literary style, except from the perspective of the colonial writer. Mahfouz’s writing style, genre, and the dissemination of his literature all over the world have shown that the Arabic novel and the Western novel are not only equally important, but also that they have an impact on one another, as the postcolonial narrative has become a genre in many languages, such as English, French, and Arabic.

Mahfouz is respected as a literary figure for his writings and for how he endured being judged and ignored certain accusations against himself for writing existential and religious novels. He is a Muslim who understands the West, but is also weary of how Islam is perceived by the West. This perception as explained by Mahfouz can be considered conservative, since it is coming from a modern writer who is sensitive to the two cultures in which he grew up. Mahfouz’s education was primarily in Qur’anic
training; he then obtained a degree in Western philosophy to support himself in his positions as civil servant and government worker. Through his educational, religious, and political influences, Mahfouz created a body of literature that addresses the themes of religion, politics, existential thought, and social responsibility. Readers of his novels get the sense that they are living with both the colonists and modern ideas, and there is the sense that their presence is temporal and permanent.

Thus, Najib Mahfouz has left his valuable contribution to Arabic Novel literature in modern period. His writings provide a plethora of divergent views on Egypt, Islam, and the emerging new Muslim Identity. Mahfouz’s writings centralize the many dilemmas that Muslims face today in light of modernity, western influences, and a transforming Islam.

Najib Mahfouz presents Egyptian life in a new light, as he offers a collection of writings full of local narratives and luminous descriptions of the political changes that have taken place in the Egypt and Islam in the modern world. His writings present the personal local narratives of struggling Egyptians, as well as a different view of Islamic life in Egypt. His writings convey that Egyptians are human, with typical questions of faith, secularity, ethics, and change. His portrayals of Egyptian locals are essential to understanding that Muslims in Egypt are diverse and attracted to change, while at the same time they want to adhere to their own basic religious principles. In recent studies

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on Islam, many writers have focused on fundamentalism, oppression, struggles with colonialism, and how perhaps Islam is incompatible with modernity.