Chapter 5
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Thematic and Stylistic Study in *The Trilogy*

*The Trilogy* is made up of three novels, *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*, where three generations of the Abd al- Jawad family reside from 1917, the date which marks the opening of *Palace Walk*, until 1944, the close of the family saga in *Sugar Street*.

The first volume of *The Trilogy*, *Palace Walk*, introduces the members of the family, the external characters, and the many questions they have with respect to religion, politics, and moral behaviour. The children in *The Trilogy* represent different walks of life; they represent the nationalist movements, religious fervour, and questions of belief that illustrate the colliding ways in which religion in quotidian Egyptian life is a complex and fragmented aspect of identity. Kamal, plays a pivotal role in the novel; he provides a view into the many events and changing dynamics of the family.

In the second volume, *Palace of Desire*, the readers are introduced to the colliding worlds of religion, politics, and modernity. More importantly, the father or patriarch of the family is seen for who he really is; the duality of his nature is discovered in his late nights with women and his hypocrisy as a Muslim. These are very disappointing discoveries for Yasin. His father has lost his respect and he no longer feels he can trust anybody. When Kamal is older, Yasin let him know the secret that his father is a womanizer and visits women late at night. Kamal’s father becomes just another impression. Kamal no longer sees him as someone with “the divine attributes that his bewitched eyes had seen in him in the past.”¹ The novel depicts the impacts of the presence of the colonizers on Egyptian culture, and the deep impact on the different generations of a family built on traditional Islamic patriarchy.

Finally, the last volume of *The Trilogy, Sugar Street*, represents the
demise of the patriarchal father and the beginning of new ways. What is
physically destroyed, such as homes, is symbolic of how old ways are destroyed.
The death of the father represents the ousting of old tradition to make way for
modern Western ways.

In fact, Najib Mahfouz through his masterpiece *The Trilogy* discusses
about social, political and religious themes against the background of 20\textsuperscript{th}
century Egypt. This very novel accurately portray the rising spirit of
nationalism, the corruption of politicians and political process, while offering
abundant insight into the social and religious attitudes of Egyptian from all
walks of life. Mahfouz minutely observes that most of the people in his nation
leading depraved life especially a large number of Muslims whose life styles are
contrary to the faith they profess.

5.1. Social Theme:-

5.1.1. Male Dominance

The first part of *The Trilogy, Palace Walk*, reflects the dominance of men in
Cairene society and elsewhere in the Middle East. Mahfouz portrays in *Palace
Walk* that man and woman have separate spheres, the women confined to the
house, where they rear the children, the men spending their time either at their
work or among friends, free to choose their pleasures. The husband or the father
is a dictator in the family, and preservation of his power stands between him and
spontaneous expression of his affection for his children.

At the beginning of *Bain al- Qasrain [Palace Walk]*, it is Amina who is
confined in house by her husband, Ahmad Abd al- Jawad. It depicts the
unremarkable daily life in minute detail. Amina rises at mid-night to wait her
husband's return from his usual evening parties and attends to him before he
goes to bed. She catches only a few hours of sleep before rising to perform the
ablution, pray, and prepare breakfast for the family, while Umm Hanafi is busy kneading dough in the bakery to make fresh bread.

After preparing breakfast, the mother takes it on a brass tray to the dinning room and oversees its serving and consumption. Here Mahfouz uses the culinary code to communicate a host of significant messages. Breakfast is singled out because it is the only meal in which the boys eat with their father, the nearest thing to a family gathering. The dishes eaten with breakfast reveal the social background of the family and even with natural identity. Eggs, brown beans, cheese, pickled limes and peppers and hot loaves of flat round bread for breakfast put the family into the upper stratum of the middle class. While the presence of friend beans and flat round bread makes it unmistakably Egyptian, for brown beans is as Egyptian as bacon and eggs are British. The eating of the meal on a low table around which cushion are placed for seating further identifies the social setting as one of a family rising to upper strata of the middle class rather than falling into it from a higher one. The later would cling to a normal dining table and chairs. The interaction between the father and his three sons, the only members of the family allowed eating with him, reveals further information about the character of the father, his educational and cultural background and his relationship with the children.

Although the mother is not allowed to eat with them, her job does not end with the bringing of breakfast tray. She stands in the room by the water jug waiting to obey any command. The mother, who reigns supreme downstairs is reduced to a voiceless marginal existence upstairs. Yet, her silent presence during the ritual confers on her a kind of dormancy which is not available to the other female members of the family. The three boys, though famished, restrain themselves and wait until their father starts, then they follow in order of seniority- Yasin, Fahmi and then Kamal. This shows their highly formal response to their father’s approach and the degree of hierarchical intent within
the family. This is reinforced when the author changes the narrative point of view and describes the progression of the meal from the standpoint of the youngest son, Kamal. He fears his father the most, eats cautiously and nervously and is concerned about his inability to compete for his share of food with his two energetic elder brothers, particularly after the father leaves the table. The departure of the father, followed by the mother, leads to collapse of the eating order and transform the formalized hierarchical space into a democratic one. Now the three boys fight for the food in a completely different setting. This very information is a further indication of the inner dynamics of the family.

After having breakfast the father departs from dinning hall and goes to his room and the mother follows him with a cup containing three raw eggs mixed with milk and honey. Here, the narratives open the world of different concoctions and tonics; some are prepared for the father to stimulate his appetite or for their aphrodisiac effect, while others are cooked for the daughters to make them plum and attractive. It also introduces the two contrasting concerns of men and women in this domain. While the mother is versed in the dietary aspects of such tonics, the father introduces us, through his train of thought, to the narcotic variations on the theme.

Another significant contrast is that between the family gathering over which the father prevails, the breakfast and that mother presides, the coffee hour, soon before sunset. In the latter, a democratic matriarchal interaction replaces the oppressive patriarchal order. Unlike breakfast which takes place on the first floor and is open to everyone, bar the absent father who, after work, goes on his nocturnal exploits. It has an order based on inclusion and not on exclusion.

Although not every member of the family is allowed to drink coffee, everyone plays a role in the highly significant social ritual, which brings them
together and allows for the realization of their different need. The breakfast scene with its rigidly hierarchic order necessitates its presentation from a unitary viewpoint.

From the discussion it makes clear that the family is conservative, cohesive and dominated by the Sayyid’s patriarchal authority. In word and deed he shows himself as the lord and master of the household. At home he is a stern man demanding absolute obedience from his children as well as his wife. He even warned his family members that there is one law in the house which they must obey in order to remain in home. After the first year of their marriage, one night Amina politely objected at her husband’s coming home late. As a result of it he seized her and said authoritatively with a loud voice—"I’m a man. I’m the one who commands and forbids. I will not accept any criticism of my behaviour. All I ask of you is to obey me. Don’t force me to discipline you." ¹

5.1.2. Patience of Women:

After getting threat, Amina knew how to obey and fear her husband whom she always addressed as "my lord" with great respect and reverence. Her only duty was to make him happy and comfortable and not probe into his private life. Her duties made her subservient to her husband. She helps him dress and undress and fetches water and a basin when he bathes. Apart from respect, she doesn’t sit beside him while he relaxes on the sofa and never speaks to him unless asked. Amina accepted all this oppression silently. She however didn’t make any complain against her husband although he frequently used to drink and come home at midnight. She accepted all these immoral deeds and asks God to forgive him. She had no moral courage to object against her husband. But she becomes bothered by the activities of her husband. So, one day she discloses all her grief to her mother. Her mother consoled her in this way—"He married you

¹ Najib Mahfouz, Ban al-Qasrain, 8-9.
after divorcing his first wife. He could have kept her too, if he wanted, or taken second, third and fourth wives. His father had many wives. Thank our Lord that you remain his only wife."

So, Amina was mindful that she might be divorced any moment by her husband.

5.1.3. Attitude towards Sex:-

This had a profound influence on 20th century moral attitudes, especially in matter of sex. After the mid of 20th century it was prevalent mostly throughout the Middle East, especially in Egypt. Mahfouz focuses properly the attitudes of man towards sexual conducts by a double standard, believing that a man is free to do what a woman cannot.

In Bain al-Qasrain it is Sayyid Ahmad Abd al- Jawad who is a strict and feared master at home, while outside he is an amiable person loved and appreciated by his friends. The members of his household do not know what kind of man he is away from home nor do his friends know what he is like at home. In essence, he simply keeps his private life to himself, without involving his family. When he returns at midnight from night club, he tries to grave and compose himself in order to convince his wife and children.

It is true that outside the house he is a hedonist who cherishes wine, women, and song, seeking sexual pleasure with Jalila and Zubayda, leaders of folk ensembles, and Zannuba, who plays the ud, and goes to great length to maintain his virility. But the primary object of his desire is his neighbour Umm Maryam, Bhaija. After the death of her husband she has been involved with Sayyid Ahmad. He (Sayyid Ahmad) exerts a good effort to keeping his sexual prowess. For this, he wants to have sumptuous food, including different pastes of walnuts, almonds, and hazelnuts, and his wife Amina is careful to serve him

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1 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al-Qasrain, (Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1956) 9.
the kinds of meals he loves best. For example Amina provides him with a cup containing three raw eggs mixed with a little milk every morning after breakfast. The rich egg drink was the final of his breakfast. It was one of a number of tonics he used regularly after meals or between them like cod-liver oil and sugared walnuts, almonds, and hazelnuts- to safeguard the health of his huge body. Some of his friends suggest that he use a little hashish as a stimulant, but he fears that it may destroy his virility. Instead he uses an expensive narcotic called manzul, especially prepared by Muhammad al-Azami; not wishing to become addicted. However, he takes it only occasionally to heighten his sexual pleasure.

Mahfouz provides a vivid description of the Sayyid’s evening sport in Zubayda’s boudoir with a group of intimate friends. Here the quiet, respected merchant becomes a wild merrymaker. He drinks, dances and plays the tambourine, while Zannuba sings and plays the Ud. Then the cheerful company suggests that they go through a mock wedding. They laugh at first but seem to take their roles seriously. Without hesitating, he takes her by the arm and leads her to bedroom amid cheers and congratulations from all.

Najib Mahfouz portrays another character of Sayyid Ahmad. He shows him as a faithful Muslim who fulfills his religious duties. He performs the ablution and prays diligently, asking God to bless him, his business, and his children and to make them prosperous and successful. He seems to be serious and sincere in his prayer, which he performs with a deep sense of humility. He regularly takes his son to Friday services, believing that visiting the Shrine of al-Husayn itself is a blessing and will protect him and his family from evil. He also reads the Qur’an but has been able to memorize only the short suras (chapters). His religious behaviour apparently convinces his children that despite his tyrannical exercise of patriarchal authority, he is not only gently and graceful but an upright and exemplary man whose moral conduct is impeccable. Critics
disagree as to whether he had multiple personalities. According to Jomier, Sayyid Ahmad has dual personalities, one that of a tyrannical father and the other that of an amiable, gentle man. Unlike Molier's Jartuffe, however, he is extreme in his pursuit of pleasure, extreme in his use of patriarchal authority, and extreme in his loyalty to his friends. Jomier concludes that he more nearly fits the image of a man from the distant past than a man from the twentieth century. He is a character straight from the *Thousand and One Nights*, where virility was considered a superlative trait.¹

According to the Egyptian writer Yusuf al-Sharuni, Sayyid Ahmad's personality has two facets. Conservative at home, he represents the father figure of the Egyptian middle class of his generation, although Mahfouz exaggerates his patriarchal authority, he is also a libertine, as is shown by seeking pleasure with his business acquaintances. In this regard, his behaviour does not fit the traditional moral standards of the merchant class of his time, characterized by sobriety and temperance. Thus, while the Sayyid is the head of a family in a patriarchal society, he is more like the ritualistic father discussed by Sigmund Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, in that he forbids freedom to his wife and children, and allows it only to himself.

It seems more accurate to say that Sayyid Ahmad has an un-integrated rather than split personality. He does not even try to connect his life at home with his activities in the market place, at the nightly parties in Zubaydas house, or at the mosque where he prays. Indeed, the world is full of men like him. The Sayyid's supposed fear of God does not prevent his having an illicit relationship with his neighbour Umm Maryam. When the elderly Shaykh Mutawalli Abd al-Samad chides his hypocrisy, the Sayyid responds that God is most forgiving, and reasserts his love, obedience, and piety, believing that his good works will wash away his sins. Clearly Sayyid Ahmad recognizes his moral weakness but

attempts to clock it in self-righteousness; though the Qur'an condemns adultery, the Sayyid justifies his illicit relations with loose women by likening them to the slave women of ancient times, even citing Qur'an (4:3) to support his position. Zubayda and Jalila, two of his sexual partners, tell him he is outwardly religious but inwardly dissolute. Loving his pleasure too much to give it up, he should be considered a fasiq.1

Apart from Sayyid Ahmad it is Yasin, the elder son of Sayyid Ahmad who is little different from his father. He too believes that he can put off repentance until the time is right, and that professing faith is sufficient to prevent God from punishing him. He often says that God is too merciful to chastise a Muslim like him who has committed only trivial sins without harming other people. But unlike his father, Yasin has inherited his father’s lust, seeks his own pleasures transgressing the rules laid down for him. He is deeply affected by the private life of his often married mother. Because of her he distrusts all women, even he wishes in regard to his loving step mother would go to hell. He assuages his conscience himself that there is nothing pure in this life, everything is polluted and one has only to open his eyes to see the moral filth. But although he condemns his mother’s conduct, it is not so objectionable that he would not accept the old house on Qasr al-Shawq (Sugar Street) and the few shops he stands to inherit from her.

Mahfouz portrays him as having an unmitigated sexual desire, as if he were possessed by a demon. He also tries to show through him the adverse effect of divorce on children, its primary victims. Yasin also represents the semi-literate Egyptians whose numbers began to grow around the turn of the century. Most were elementary and high school graduates who had had no opportunity to pursue higher education since the Egyptian University was established only in 1908; before then only a few young men from the right families could further

1 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al- Qasrain, 50- 52.
their schooling in Europe. Many of these semi-literates like Yasin held minor government positions. Lacking sophistication, they formed the audience for translation of European detective fictions and some indigenous Arabic works like the historical novel of Juriji Zaydan. Detective stories appeal to Yasin’s imagination more than serious literature. He has read part of Zaydan’s Ghadat Karbala, but cannot comprehend intellectual matters or even write a polished letter. He reads only for entertainment but is considerate enough to share his pleasures with Kamal, who eagerly demands more reading from him.

Like al- Jawad he is somewhat dull, a traditional Muslim, politically uncommitted, and above all driven by his passion for women; he understands sensuality, not love. Mahfouz clearly implies that Yasin is as sensual as his parents and that the causes of his conduct are psychological. He suffers from a lack of mother’s love, which he tries to offset by self-indulgence. Moreover, his mother’s amoral behaviour makes him demean women, regarding them only a maternal nature and the ability to satisfy his sexual needs, he would enjoy a normal life. It makes clear that he is licentious by nature, with an uncontrollable appetite and disposed to use force against women who resist his advances.

At the outset of the action, Yasin is seen involving with Zannuba. Infatuated by her at first sight, he follows her to her home, opposite a small coffee house in the Sanadiqujya quarter. He sits in the coffee house daily, hoping she will show herself, he whispers to himself that one of her breasts is enough to destroy. Malta, and half of her behind would shatter Hindenburg’s brains. He would do anything, even become a donkey pulling her carriage, just to have sex with her. Mahfouz also portrays him that he becomes infatuated with Zannuba because she offers an emotional release from his frustration; she is perfect substitute for the mother who left him.
After waiting impatiently for days preoccupied with sensual thoughts, Yasin finally succeeds in his pursuit of Zannuba. She agrees to meet him at her home, which apparently belongs to Zubayda. When she greets him at the door, he remarks nervously that he had waited so long for this moment that he feels as if his hair has turned grey. When inquires about Zubayda, Zannuba says she is with a prominent customer. Yasin appears concerned that Zubayda may object to her entertaining men in her house without permission; Zannuba responds that she is not merely an ud player in Zubaydas ensemble but also her niece, and there is nothing to worry about. As she leads him inside, he hears singing and music, but his curiosity is not aroused, for he is intent on possessing her luscious body.

But his interest piqued when Zannuba describes Zubayda’s customer as a generous and amiable gentleman who loves pleasure. When he inquires further, she says, “He is a man from our quarter. You may have heard of him. He is Sayyid Ahmad Abal al- Jawad, the shopkeeper in the Nahhasin.” This information makes him bewildered. Zannuba unable to understand his reaction, says, “Did you believe that he was infallible? No man can become perfect without passionate love.” Yasin asks to see this customer without being observed. Zannuba carries a plate of fruit to Zubayda’s room and leaves the door ajar, allowing him to peer inside. He is stunned to his father with Zubayda, drinking, playing the tambourine, and cracking jokes. Good God! Can this be the same mighty, strict, pious, God-fearing man he knows?

After years of complete faith in the impeccable conduct of his father, Yasin faces a bitter-sweet reality as his world of idealistic dreams comes apart. He sees in Zubayda’s private chamber not a ghost but a man of flesh and bone who, like him, loves pleasure. There his father sits next to his mistress Zubayda,

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2 Ibid., 236.
who is playing the ud and singing, “O Mulims, O people of God”. Yasin needs no further proof; this is the same man who divorced his mother, expelled Amina because she defied his authority, and knocked Kamal when he begged for her return. When Zannuba returns she notices his bewilderment and to calm him down, suggests that they do the same things Zubayda and her customer are doing. Yasin’s sudden astonishment is obvious as he tells himself. “I am here with Zannuba and my father is there with Zubayda, both of us in the same house.”

Yasin realizes that he is the image of his father. He is not at all resentful to see him in a debased state in the company of a whore but rather elated at having discovered his real father is no longer an inscrutable mystery man but a real person with whom he can identify. They are cut from the same mould, separated only by age and experience. Yasin is overjoyed that he says in jubilation –

هنينا لك يا والدى ، اليوم اكتشفتك ، اليوم عيد ميلادك في نفسي ، يا له من يوم و يا لك من أب ، لم أكن قبل الليلة إلا يتيمًا ، اشرب و العب بالدب لعبا ، ولا بد عيوشة الدفاة ،

إني فخور بك ، هل تغني أيضا يا ترى ؟

“Well done, father! Today I have discovered you. To me, today is your birthday. What a day and what a father, who before tonight was lost to me. Drink and play the tambourine as you wish, not like Ayshah the tambourine player. I am proud of you. Do you also sing, father?”

Thus, Yasin could learn from his father how to drink, sing and make love. As he watches Zannuba standing before the mirror caressing her hair, she looks ravishingly luscious. No longer able to control his lust, he pounces upon her like a beast of prey.

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1 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al- Qasrain, 239.
2 Ibid., 240.
3 Najib Mahfouz, Palace Walk, 240.
Mahfouz also discusses another immoral feeling of Yasin towards their home servant Umm Hanafi. On the day of Ayshah’s wedding ceremony, having drunk too much Yasin becomes like a mad. He loses his sense and feels to have enjoyed with several sexual partners. He memorizes Zannuba and Zubayda’s home respectively; at last he fixes his greedy eyes on the body of Umm Hanafi. He approaches to her putting his hand over her mouth and says in this way:

"It’s me. Yasin. It’s Yasin. Umm Hanafi, don’t be afraid".

Thus, Yasin attempts to rape the homely maid Umm Hanafi, but his father prevents him. When Sayyid Ahmad knows the scandal of Yasin, he scolded him bitterly and orders him to get married. As a result of it Yasin becomes bewildered and don’t utter a single word. After then, Sayyid Ahmad asks him angrily, whether he agrees or not in marriage? After receiving a positive answer from him he arranges his marriage with a beautiful girl namely, Zaynab, the daughter of his friend Muhammad Iffat. Though he gets married but he could not give up bad habit like womanizing and drinking etc. As a result of it his health is breaking down day after day. Zaynab becomes afraid due to his breaking health and complain against him not to go outside at night. But he refused and advised her to follow his mother. For example –

"Look at my father’s wife. Have you ever seen her object to his conduct?... In spite of that, they are a happy couple and a stable family. There will be no need to talk about this subject again."

1 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al- Qasrain, 266.
2 Najib Mahfouz, Palace Walk, 266.
3 Najib Mahfouz, Bain al- Qasrain, 317.
4 Najib Mahfouz, Palace Walk, 317.
After then Zaynab bearing her grief and sorrowful mind goes to her mother-in-law and tells everything but she says women must accept their husbands as they are. Here Amina typifies the traditional Egyptian woman, subservient and fatalistic, while Zubayda represents the new generation of women, more aware of their role in life and eager for greater freedom. When she discovers Yasin having sex with her black maid on the rooftop, she leaves for her father’s house. Thus one day, Zaynab leaves her husband’s house and goes to his own father’s house. She discloses all her grief in front of her father and requests him to make a divorce between them. After then, Muhammad Iffat comes and meets with Sayyid Ahmad. He discusses all the immoral deeds which has done by Yasin and urges him to make a divorce. But Yasin and his father says that Zaynab, having left the house without her husband’s consent, is nashiz, that is, disobedient wife who has violated her marital duties. According to Islamic law, a husband has the right to sue his recalcitrant wife in a religious court, which will force her to return to her husband’s home or go to a private home of her choice, called Bait at-Ta’a (the house of the obedience). Yasin cannot hope to force Zaynab into obedience because she has already made up her mind to dismiss the marriage. But because divorce is solely the husband’s right, she must wait for him to divorce her. Moreover, Sayyid Ahmad argues that Muhammad Iffat should not pronounce the word ‘divorce’ because no wise person loves this word ‘divorce’, but he is adamant in his decision. At last, after a long and acrimonious discussion, the Sayyid finally agrees to the couple’s divorce on the premise that his patriarchal authority takes precedence over his son’s religious rights as a husband. After taking this decision he asks Yasin to know his reaction. Yasin becomes frustrated and says in this way for example:

كما تشاء ..! منذا يرد لك مشيئه؟! تزوجني تطلقي .. تحييني وتعتنتي .. لست هنا ، خديجة عاشتة فهمي ياسين .. الكل واحد ، الكل لا شيء .. انت كل شيء .. كلا .. لكل
As you wish, who can oppose your will? You marry me, you divorce me. You give me life and take it away. I do not really exist. Khadeejah, Ayshah, Yasin, Fahmy all the same thing. We’re nothing. You are everything. But there is limit to everything. I am no longer a child. I am a man like you, and as a man I will decide my destiny. I can divorce my wife or place her in a different house until she’s ready to obey me. Muhammad Iffat, Zaynab, and your friendship with are rather can all lick the dust from my shoes.

Thus, Mahfouz through his novel Bain al-Qasrain uses this episode to illuminate the social position of women and the attitude of men towards them. It also clearly reflects that the Egyptian society, like other Middle Eastern societies, is male oriented and male dominated. In this society, women’s freedom is often legally circumscribed by the sharia (Islamic law), especially in regard to divorce.

In addition to this Mahfouz also highlights the Egyptian peoples’ misinterpretation of religion. The people of his time misinterpret the text of Qur’an to justify their naughtiness. For example, Yasin in Palace Walk rationalizes his habit of marrying and divorcing women, one after the other, He claims: “Religion supports my view, as shown by its permission to marry four wives, not to mention the concubines with whom the palaces of the Caliphs and wealthy men are packed. Religion acknowledges that even beauty itself, once familiarity and experience make it seem trite, can be boring, sickening, and deadly.”

Yasin feels neither shame nor disgrace in divorcing his wives. His unbalanced interpretation of Qur’an, together with his indifferent attitude

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1. Najib Mahfouz, Bain al-Qasrain, 388.
3. Ibid., 337.
towards marriage, is typical of many other men’s position on the issues of marriage, and religion. Mahfouz condemns this anomaly.

Mahfouz also raises the issue of homosexuality in Muslim culture, tying it to the teachings of Islam. In *Sugar Street* the statement of preacher indicates the interest or involvement in homosexuality. For example, the preacher believes in two things: God in heaven and adolescent boys on earth.”

Mahfouz wonders how a man who has no faith in what he is doing can effectively teach others to keep the faith. His magnificent *The Trilogy* present among other things, a picture of social ills, including licentiousness. In *Sugar Street* Mahfouz retains his definition of homosexuality as a perversion and a sin. Yet he discusses it in such a way that there is neither divine retribution nor social punishment of the homosexual. By this way of representation, Mahfouz wants his readers to understand that even though “Islam condemns homosexuality, the Muslim society of Egypt seems to tolerate it” (Matar 296).

5.2. Political Theme:-

The three parts of *The Trilogy* together uniquely represent Egypt’s movement from a British protectorate to an independent state. It focuses on the change of Egypt, which spans the period of Egypt’s formal occupation by the British in 1922 and anticipates Egypt’s official independence in 1952. Because of the close connection between Mahfouz’s *Trilogy* and the real, specifically Egypt’s social and cultural transformations, the literary discussions is divided according to where they fall within Egypt’s history. In other words, it can also be said that the first novel discusses from that of the second and third because the first novel coincides with the significant historical break in Egypt’s history: the end of WWI and Egypt’s lost hopes for independence. Indeed, for Mahfouz,

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the 1919 rebellion that followed the War has remained the most crucial event in Egypt’s modern history.¹

The year 1919 saw the end of WWI and the beginning of the European mandate system. Under this system, the Ottoman territories lost during the War were divided between the Allied victors, specifically Britain and France. Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia more or less fell under French dominion as either protectorates or colonies. Egypt and the Sudan, Transjordan and Iraq became British protectorates. Protectorate status granted Egypt only nominal independence, allowing an Egyptian head of state, at this time the Ottoman descended King Abbas Pasha-- who was, despite being a mere figurehead, quickly deposed by the British for expressing German sympathies during the War. Protectorate status also allowed the Egyptian government limited control over resources and spending. British and Australian troops continued to occupy Egypt’s urban and transport centres; they were stationed throughout Egypt.

The most overwhelming, however, protectorate status committed Egypt to an unequal trading relationship with Britain. Egypt provided Britain with cheap raw materials extracted by cheap labour as well as a ready market for British manufactured goods. It was an imperialist system of interference and without responsibility.² Many Egyptians were disappointed with this outcome. Many had hoped the end of the War would free Egypt of its Western occupiers and bring an end to its Ottoman-descended monarchy. When this did not happen and, worse, the founders of the native Wafd party were exiled, the already mounting frustration exploded into widespread strikes, political protests and, in some places, outright rioting. Men and women were shot and killed when British soldiers opened fire on whole crowds to control rebellions in Kafr al Shawm in

¹ Milson, Najib Mahfouz, 18.
Embaba and in Fayyum on March 19, 1919. More were killed in other provinces as well as in Cairo in the following weeks.¹ This type of agitation and demonstration of Egyptian people against the colonial rule are portrayed in The Trilogy.

For example, in Palace Walk, the political unrest of Egypt had made a great impact on Kamal and his fellow students. One of the days Kamal found a few students attend in the class room due to participation of majority student in the demonstration. The teacher ordered them to review the previous lessons. Kamal opened a book and pretended to read but paid no attention to the book. He was very curious with the terms “Sa’d Zaghlul,” “the English,” “the students” “the martyrs,” “handbills,” and “demonstrations”. He was perplexed bystander when it came to understanding what they stood for. His bewilderment was doubled by the fact that the members of his family reacted differently to the events and at times in contrary ways.²

During the strike time, Mahfouz gave a real nationalist feeling through the character of Kamal. The revolution affected Kamal’s freedom of movement between home and school which was a trivial thing to grown-ups but not to a ten-year old. The British soldiers make tents in front of their house, and spread out almost all the streets of Cairo. Kamal frequently used to visit the British troop’s camp, when he gets back school. He has spent half an hour each afternoon at the camp, where he makes friends with some of them, especially young Julian. He imitates their activities by forming a model of a military camp on the roof of his house. He makes tents out of pieces of cloth, using pencils as poles. Pieces of wood become guns, wooden shoes are trucks, and date kernels are soldiers. Near the camp he spreads pebbles to represent the anti-British

¹ Ahmad, Women and Gender, 173.
² Najib Mahfouz, Bain al- Qasrain, 346.
demonstrators, meanwhile singing English songs. Then he moves on to the Egyptian camp, arranging the pebbles in an offensive position, and shouts

"Long live Sa‘d Zaghlul! Down with the British protectorate!"\(^1\)

The second novel picks up after the radical geo-political and cultural break that Egypt experienced after the end of WWI. The sense of hopefulness and promise that pervades the first novel is replaced with a sense of gloom and desperation in the second novel. The despair of the second, then, is carried out to tragic ends in the third. Indeed, in several interviews and essays, Mahfouz remembers the time period recorded in the second and third novels as a period of pessimism and despair.\(^3\) The political and popular forces that are beginning to form in the second novel merge into strong social movements in the third novel. For example, the Communist Party and the Muslim Brotherhood are in their infancies in the second novel. We only witness the forces that inspire these two movements as well as their official births in the second novel. It is in the third novel, however, that these movements take off, with the young Ahmad coming of age as a young Communist while his brother, Abd al-Munim represents the growing Muslim Brotherhood. Thus, the second novel anticipates the third novel. The two together display a political and cultural continuity that justifies their discussion together.

5.3. Cultural Theme:–

Apart from these the cultural theme has been discussed in *The Trilogy*. As was the custom of Egypt and throughout the Middle East, breakfast is served on a big tray, with the men sitting around it. Each in turn breaks off a slice of bread, using his fingers rather than a utensil. The women, whose duty is to prepare

\(^1\) Najib Mahfouz, *Bain al-Qsrain*, 426.
\(^3\) Milson, *Najib Mahfouz*, 39.
meals and serve the men, sit down to eat only after they have left the house.¹ Their eating system indicates the then dominant position of males in Middle Eastern society, transcending religious and ethnic differences. Today in Egypt and elsewhere, women have equalled if not surpassed men in almost every aspect of life. But at the time in which the novel is set, women like Amina and her daughters received no formal education and, by long standing social tradition, were utterly subservient to men.

After breakfast the men leave- Al- Jawad to his shop, Yasin to his Nahhasin Elementary school, where he is a clerk, Fahmi to his studies at the law school, and Kamal to the Khalil Agha Elementary School near the shrine of al-Husayn. The women remain behind. Apparently the daughters stay home because there are not enough schools for women, but in fact the Sayyid, like most members of the Middle class, takes a dim view of educating women. The Sayyid regards a woman as a problem and is quite concerned about his daghuters. In a society where virginity is a criterion of honour and respectability, he fears if they do not marry, they may do something immoral, disgracing himself and the family. An unmarried young woman at least enjoys the support and protection of her father; but she marries the wrong man, he may mistreat her or even divorce her, leaving her to depend on her brothers for support. Unlike a man she cannot face life alone. A daughter is a social and financial burden on the family. The parents raise her, care for and educate her and then give her to an outsider to treat as he desires. This makes no sense to the Sayyid.² At the time of action, women were not economically independent of their families; they had either to marry or to stay at home all their lives. They had few chances for education and training. For example, in *Sugar Street*, Yasin and his wife, Zanuba, have a moment of making an important decision concerning their

² Ibid., 301- 2.
daughter, Karima. The husband and wife air contrary views as to whether or not their daughter should go to school.

Optimistic that their daughter will have every opportunity to be educated, Zanuba tells her husband – “If she does well in elementary school, she’ll succeed in secondary school too. Girls today are a safer bet in school than boys”

This statement sounds strange to Yasin and he does not fail to re-join: “We don’t send our girls to secondary school. Why not? Because they’re not going to take jobs.” Yasin’s explanation is that they don’t allow girls go to school because they’re not going to seek employment. Yet many a man has different reasons. For example Ibrahim Shawkat, Yasin’s brother-in-law, who expresses concern about girls, gives a different reason. He says: “The effect the exertion of studying has on girls concerns me. Besides, a girl is going to end up at home.”

The concept of sexism is so powerful that even when a man is well able to train all his children, he does not consider it worthwhile sending his daughters to school. He sends the boys only. If however, a man sends his children to school, including the females, and his lot plummets making it difficult for him to cope with their tuition, he automatically withdraws the female ones. For example, in Palace Walk, the prominent merchant, Al-Sayyid Ahmad, is renowned for his prosperous business. He is a liberal man and many people come to him to meet their needs. He sends his three sons to school but leaves his two daughters home; he rather grooms them for marriage.

Although women had to perform the daily chores, the home was their exclusive kingdom. Indeed, Amina regards the kitchen and the bakery as her

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1 Najib Mahfouz, Sugar Street. (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1994) 151.
2 Ibid., 151.
3 Ibid., 162.
personal domain, where no one, nor even her domineering husband, can dare challenge her authority.

In addition to these Mahfouz also carefully describes the historical background against which the action is set. The readers can learn early on that Sultan Husayn Kamal did in 1917, his son Kamal al-Din refused to succeed him while the British controlled Egypt, and Prince Ahmad Fuad accepted the throne with the blessing of the British. From this it makes clear that naturally Mahfouz intends to demonstrate the social, political, and cultural trends in Egypt during the latter years of World War I.

5.4. Stylistic study:

As regards stylistic study, The Trilogy possesses in ample measure almost all the qualities of good prose. It has good devices such as original similes; description of characters through the narrator, other characters, and themselves; interior monologue; and metonymy to create real characters in real situations. Mahfouz displays a striking affinity in the realistic novels of his Trilogy. He uses the examples of unhappy families to highlight the reality of his own cultures. Sasson Somekh says about Mahfouz: “His main concern is to tell the story of his own world, past and present, mundane and spiritual ... he is fascinated above all by the process of that change.”

5.4.1. Similes:

The author skilfully uses similes to emphasize the unusual in the mundane when he describes the characters in his novels. The author makes as little use as possible of the commonplace images and instead tries to forge his own metaphor. This is especially evident in a great number of original similes.... Yet the great majority of them convey a sharp observation and original viewpoint. Often the components of a simile are in complete harmony with the context,

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situation or character described. The images for these similes are, generally speaking, drawn from personal observation of daily life and natural phenomena.1

Each simile has a dual purpose: to draw the reader to the realistic elements in the novel as well as to parallel the realistic with the nature of the character. In the similes, Mahfouz recreates sensual struggles through often overlooked and common details of life. For example, the simile “thus their tunes found shelter in his hospitable soul, like nightingales in a leafy tree” (Palace Walk, ch. 2) emphasizes the duality of the family’s headman, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad’s personality, and the split role of dictator and fun-loving friend he plays throughout the novel. Similes extend even to the womanizing aspect of his personality as “his affection for Zubayda was starting to go bad, like a fruit at the end of its season (Palace Walk, ch. 51).

Mahfouz takes up in his descriptions of the mundane life and habits of his characters. Authors reveal the inner lives of their characters in a number of ways, for example through descriptions of the food they eat or the times in which the characters gather. These foods and the appetites these characters have for these foods can tell a great deal about possible underlying flaws of a character. For instance, Kamal, the youngest son and future scholar, has a sweet tooth, which often, at least in the beginning, forms the basis for his decisions. After all, his desire to visit a local pastry store results in his mother’s becoming seriously injured. They were very slowly approaching the corner of al-Ghuriya. When they reached it, his eyes fell on a pastry shop, and his mouth watered. His eyes were fixed intently on the shop. He began to think of a way to persuade his mother to enter the store and purchase a pastry. He was still thinking about it when they reached the shop, but before he knew what was happening his mother had slipped from his hand. (Palace Walk, ch. 27) Kamal focuses his eyes solely and greedily on the pastry and pays no attention to his mother, who rarely leaves

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her home to venture outside. He does not notice his mother's needs and fears, which confuse her to such an extent that she falls into traffic and becomes seriously injured as a result of his negligence. In addition, this event foreshadows the adult Kamal, who constantly shows his unwillingness to settle on the more substantial things of life as he pursues the fleeting ephemera of philosophy instead of the stolid substance of a government career as a source of income.

The kinds of beverages people gather around and the times that are associated with them also can tell much about the nature of a character. Mahfouz's Egyptian counterpart, Amina, gather their families together around tea or coffee ceremonies (Palace Walk, ch. 9). The books which the characters read also tell much about their personalities. Yasin, the oldest son of the family, provides a stunning example of this device of characterization. He first encourages Kamal to read and love books; however, the books which Yasin reads to Kamal mainly describe exploits. Exploits are an appropriate topic that displays adequately the character of Yasin, who indulges in numerous exploits with women (Palace Walk, ch. 9) and may have led to his younger brother's difficulty in grasping the substantial over the ephemeral. Yasin loves the superficial and reads books not for their educational value but rather for entertainment. He similarly is attracted only to the superficial in his relationships with women; he sees only their outer appearance as a source of pleasure rather than explore their inner lives as a source of lasting love. As a living testament to the sayings of the Qur'an and the daughter of an avid scholar of the holy book (Palace Walk, ch. 33), Amina studies with her son every night in order to ensure his religious well-being. She herself becomes excited at the shrines of the figures of her faith (Palace Walk, ch. 11; Mahfouz 181; Palace Walk, ch. 27). Thus, the women emulate the books from which they take their wisdom as they educate those around them.
What the narrator reveals about his characters and what other characters reveal about each other and themselves constitute other devices that Mahfouz implement in their writings. Some examples include Zanuba’s description of Yasin as a camel: “My camel, how would I know about passion?’ she asked” (*Palace Walk*, ch. 39). Her description of Yasin and his nature is quite accurate; as big as a camel, he also can hold quite a large amount of liquor. But as a man, he also demonstrates a huge capacity for women; he nightly frequents the bars as he seeks more and more liquor and even more opportunities to encounter women. An honest creature, he, too, describes himself as an animal:

> You’re the most beautiful creature ever to arouse my passion. Holding your lip between mine...sucking on your nipple.... I’ll wait until dawn. You’ll find me very docile. If you want me to be the rear end of a donkey cart that you rock back and forth on, I’ll do it. If you want me to be the ass pulling the cart, I’ll do that. (*Palace Walk*, ch. 39)

He, in fact, is “the ass pulling the cart” as he suggests because he is led by his passion and not by his logic. Finally, the narrator attributes one more animalistic trait to Yasin: that of a bull elephant, another fitting simile given the size of his body.

> Intoxicating desire swept through his [Yasin’s] body, and he fell on her [Zanuba] like a bull elephant crushing a gazelle. (*Palace Walk*, ch. 39)

Such descriptions emphasize not only the sheer mass of Yasin’s body but also the animalistic tendencies that compose his nature. These similes become important in the context of the figure of speech, metonymy, where the part stands for the whole. This device remains Mahfouz’s favourite means of characterization. Mahfouz uses metonymy as a recurring trait that remains constant as the circumstances around the characters change. This figure of speech will discuss later.
5.4.2. Interior Monologue:-

One major device, interior monologue, records the changes characters undergo as well as their reflections on the vagaries of their lives. This device offers a variety of clues into the inner thoughts of the characters and how they see themselves. Sometimes these personal thoughts may be as superficial as the characters; at other times, they offer the most shocking revelations. Of course, the level of profundity of the inner monologues exists on the same hierarchic scale as the depth or shallowness of the characters. Amina’s interior monologue at the death of her husband comprises an entire chapter dedicated to her innermost feelings. Not only does it reveal the intensity of Amina’s emotions, it also helps to enhance and demonstrate the most vital social aspect of Mahfouz’s writings about the downtrodden women of his society (*Sugar Street*, ch. 153).

Of all of the main characters in *The Trilogy*, perhaps Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad causes the greatest amount of misery. Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, the most tyrannical figure of the two novels, “is among the few characters who are not passive in the face of events.”¹ He is powerfully tall, extraordinarily handsome, enormously vital, and robustly healthy; in addition he sports a stream of gleaming black hair (*Palace Walk*, ch. 14). These outward traits become important because they contribute to his womanizing nature. Later on, these looks begin to fade as Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad begins to age and grow sickly; as Mahfouz repeatedly draws the reader’s attention to the change in Al-Jawad’s looks, to his loss of handsomeness, he simultaneously tracks his seeming loss of purpose. At the end, Al-Jawad even begins to foreshadow Amina after she loses him to death. Nevertheless, the duality of his nature seems to be more prevalent in Mahfouz’s descriptions of him, probably stemming from Al-Jawad’s desire to cover up from his family the sinfulness of his actions with the disreputable ladies he visits.

The complexity of this character can be further demonstrated by the fact that he is a man of many faces. He is one person at home a resolute, severe face and another with his friends a smiling, radiant face. He is, again, different when facing his God a submissive face.\(^1\)

Al Jawad’s whole motivation, besides luring women, is to keep up his façades, which becomes a lifelong task for him even to the end of his life. Thus, both character descriptions help to connect him to his family and the rest of the characters. His womanizing connects him to Yasin and to a certain extent Kamal, who cannot ever settle down to the substantial and even extends to the latter prefers the company of prostitutes rather than an actual wife. Al-Jawad’s face of resolute severity also helps to establish the reign of oppression he forces his family to endure which leads to the death of his beloved middle-son, Fahmi; to the gradual shrinking—without and within—of his wife, Amina; and to the destruction of his beautiful daughter, Ayshah. One of the harshest examples of his tyranny comes when he expels Amina from the household and jeopardizes the stability of the family as he separates her from her children (ch. 31-32). Eventually, he must reverse his decision because of the intervention of his children and the introduction of several other characters who are to play a major role in the family’s future times of trouble (Palace Walk, ch. 34-35). Al-Jawad often times reserves his face of smiling radiance for his friends and various ladies of entertainment and pleasure. Rarely does he bring this aspect into his household or into close proximity with his family. Nonetheless, cases exist in which his family happens to stumble upon his expression of joy, such as during Ayshah’s wedding. True enough, Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad is locked away in a room from his family, a tyrant almost alone even at joyous events like a wedding; however, he also enjoys pleasant and joyous moments within his circle of friends contained inside the room. Kamal accidentally stumbles upon his

father’s other face in this very room (Palace Walk, ch. 40). Yasin also provides another example of undesirable consequences when the two realms mix and the wrong face presents itself (Palace Walk, ch. 39; Mahfouz 337-38; Palace Walk, ch. 46). The only respite Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad finds from his two faces resembles his submissive appearance before his God.

He is a genuine and naive believer, even though he would not refrain from committing numerous acts which, he knows very well, cannot be approved by his Maker.¹

He prays keenly not for his sins to be forgiven, but for an addition of piousness to his repertoire of personalities. Al-Sayyid’s portrait is not a static one. The richness of his psychology and background motivations are not an end in themselves. They are instrumental in producing the tragic climax in which he is eventually placed.² His main characteristic of duplicity leads him astray instead of providing him the strength and endurance he seeks. In the end he becomes as weak and frail as Amina, who recites the last religious rites over him (Sugar Street, ch. 117; Mahfouz 1204-08; Sugar Street, ch. 152).

Yasin follows most closely after his father, but to an extreme that is at times difficult to comprehend. Like his father, Yasin is a womanizer. He stands out as a wild, lusting man who does not care what a woman looks like, as long as she is a woman. Mahfouz hilariously portrays this trait in the scene in Goldsmiths’ Bazaar and reveals so much about Yasin’s flawed character that Mahfouz surprises his audience with Yasin’s audacity and inappropriate humour (Mahfouz 77; Palace Walk, ch. 12). His uncontrollable, lustful actions prove to be devastating for his family and result in the attempted rape of the faithful house servant, Umm Hanafi (Mahfouz 297-99; Palace Walk, ch. 41), as well as

² Ibid., 117.
in many marriages and divorces. Somekh sums up Yasin’s character in one very accurate paragraph:

His three marriages (and two divorces), his assaults on two different aged servants in his father’s house, his constant pursuit of big women—such scenes are very enjoyable at first but their repetition is frivolous. In all, Yasin notwithstanding his carefully elaborated background (again divorced parents; obsession with his mother’s indecencies, etc.) is not a deep character. All in all, if we accept E.M. Forster’s definition that the flat character is constructed round a single idea or quality, then Yasin is a flat character. The quality around which Yasin is constructed is sex obsession. ‘His temperament made him crave the body of a woman, neglecting her personality. Furthermore his attention is always focused on certain parts of her body, never the body as a whole.’1 Yasin represents what happens when someone fails to balance self-control with sensuality and lust.

Kamal’s features stand for the main character flaw that contributes greatly to his overall unhappiness with life. He is described as

not good-looking like his brothers. He was perhaps the one in the family who most resembled his sister Khadeejah. Like hers, his face combined his mother’s small eyes and his father’s huge nose, but without the refinements of Khadeejah’s. He had a large head with a forehead that protruded noticeably, making his eyes seem even more sunken than they actually were. (Palace Walk, ch. 8)

Mahfouz perhaps uses Kamal’s big head to emphasize the inflated intellect that ultimately gets Kamal nowhere in life. Instead of using his intellect to provide a living, he prefers the idle life of an intellectual. Also, his head merely seems to provide a comic relief for others and induce struggles with

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himself and those around him (Mahfouz 53; *Palace Walk*, ch. 8; Mahfouz 751-52; *Palace of Desire*, ch. 89). Kamal’s head, like his sweet tooth, leads him nowhere. The character with the most potential remains the least fulfilled, and ultimately the least significant. Undoubtedly the most important female character in the whole novel is Amina. She is the first character to appear in the novel, and her death marks its end.¹

Her importance in the novel lies in her role as an anchor and stabilizing force for the family; all the household and family revolve around her. Thus, her attributes and metonymies become vital in understanding the environment and atmosphere of the family. Yet her traits shrink her until she eventually becomes a grey, somewhat taciturn old woman, mainly because of the death of one of her children with whom she is always associated. Mahfouz describes Amina not by her looks, but by what she does and thus emphasizes the serving nature of her personality and the depth she contributes to the family. This depth often times sharply contrasts with the nonsenses of the men and shows who really wields the authority in the household. Mahfouz discusses Amina’s looks only in relationship to the death of Fahmi in order to capture her own self-induced shrinking and slow loss of purpose that culminates with the death of Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad. Years after Fahmi’s death, Mahfouz confronts the reader with an even more downtrodden Amina which rivals her struggles of the previous novel.

She sat there as usual, but time had changed her. She had grown thin, and her face seemed longer, if only because her cheeks were hollow. The locks of hair that escaped from her scarf were turning grey and made her seem older than she was. The beauty spot on her cheek had grown slightly larger. In addition to their customary look of submission, her eyes now revealed a mournful absentmindedness. Her anguish over the changes that had befallen her was

considerable, although at first she had welcomed them as an expression of her
grief. *(Palace of Desire, ch. 72)*

In relation to her husband’s frivolous aging that results from fleeting time
and profligate behaviour, Amina’s senescence provides a devastating example of
her weakness and pain. And just as Yasin may become a younger version of his
father so, too, does the hideously grieving Ayshah become her mother’s extreme
parallel.

Ayshah’s case often remains quite puzzling. She is known for her beauty,
a typical European beauty but an atypical beauty for her culture. Mahfouz uses
her looks in a metonymical fashion. Unfortunately, she is all too proud of
flaunting these extraordinarily good looks. Whenever Ayshah looked at herself
in the mirror, she was immensely pleased with what she saw. Who else from her
illustrious family, indeed from the whole neighbourhood, was adorned by
golden tresses and blue eyes like hers? Yasin flirted openly with her, and Fahmi,
when he spoke to her about one thing or another, did not neglect to give her
admiring glances. Even little Kamal did not want to drink from the water jug
unless her mouth had moistened the lip. Her mother spoiled her and said she was
as beautiful as the moon, although she did not conceal her anxiety that Ayshah
was too thin and delicate.... Ayshah herself was perhaps more conscious of her
extraordinary beauty than any of the others. Her intense solicitude for every
detail of her appearance made this clear. *(Palace Walk, ch. 22)*

Her looks became the basis for every experience in her life, both joyous
and sorrowful. Her beauty lures a police officer to defy time-honoured traditions
to steal forbidden glances at her through her window *(Palace Walk, ch. 5)*. Her
marriage also results when her beauty catches the eye of the rich Shawkat family
who chooses her to be the bride of Khalil *(Palace Walk, ch. 36)*. Her
concentration on the superficial exemplified by her “intense solicitude for every
detail of her appearance” (Palace Walk, ch. 22) extend into her family life, especially into a controversy that sparks the jealous Khadeejah to condemn the pleasure-seeking lifestyle in which Ayshah and Khalil allow their family to indulge. Ayshah’s daughter, Na’ima, dances; her husband, Khalil, smokes his pipe; and Ayshah herself sings. All is indeed well and superficially tranquil, until sickness sweeps away Khalil and their two boys from Ayshah’s arms. At this point, Ayshah’s beauty begins to fade prematurely on her own accord revealing her weakness and showing a side of her that surprises the reader. Her “fading” even surpasses her mother’s.

Amina’s body had withered, and her hair had turned white. Although barely sixty, she looked ten years older, and her transformation was nothing compared to Ayshah’s decline and disintegration. It was ironic or pathetic that the daughter’s hair was still golden and her eyes blue, when her listless glance gave no hint of life and her pale complexion seemed the symptom of some disease. With a protruding bone structure and sunken eyes and cheeks, her face hardly appeared that of a thirty-four-year old woman. (Mahfouz 985; Sugar Street, ch. 116)

Ayshah no longer exemplifies the kind and caring woman she once had been. Instead, her personality transforms into a similar, yet more vindictive personality trait that resides in Khadeejah. Ayshah’s new portrait is one of a smoking, embittered bluish shell of woman who has gathered all her hope in one weak vessel of a daughter, Na’ima (Mahfouz 987; Sugar Street, ch. 116). Ayshah, the great pride of the family, now becomes its greatest burden and forces them to walk on eggshells to accommodate her debilitated state in life.

Gazing sadly at Ayshah, she saw the personification of shattered hopes. When she looked at this unhappy face, which seemed to have lost all its vitality, Amina’s soul was overcome by sorrow. Apprehensive about distressing her
daughter, she had learned to greet Ayshah’s rude answers and harsh comments with affectionate forbearance. (*Sugar Street*, ch. 116)

Ayshah’s tragic story parallels to an extreme the devastation of Amina just as Yasin parallels to an extreme the corruption of his father. This cyclical pattern helps to establish the unhappiness of the family that can be passed down from generation to generation with each new cycle greater than the next. Ayshah’s weary resting on her weak daughter, Na’ima, further establishes the mother’s tragedy and her own personal reliance on beauty.

Na’ima stood out in this group like a rose growing in a cemetery, for she had developed into a beautiful young woman of sixteen. Her head enveloped by a halo of golden hair and her face adorned by blue eyes, she was as lovely as her mother, Ayshah, had been—or even more captivating—but as insubstantial as a shadow. Her eyes had a gentle, dreamy look suggesting purity, innocence, and otherworldliness. She nestled against her mother’s side, as though unwilling to be alone even for a moment. (*Sugar Street*, ch. 116)

Na’ima presents the strongest case for a metonymy charting the progress of a character through the novel. Ayshah still leans on superficiality of beauty, but now on the beauty of her daughter, whom Najib Mahfouz describes as “insubstantial as a shadow” (*Sugar Street*, ch. 116). There remains nothing to Ayshah but a dream of beauty that is pure, innocent, otherworldly, and unable to survive in this world. This revelation slowly kills Ayshah and she becomes, in the end, merely a flat character who revolves around the ideal of beauty.

However, Khadeejah provides the exception to this family’s cycle of unhappiness. Although she, too, does not break the cycle of death and anguish that epidemics her family, she does not shatter like all the others. She remains strong when she, too, loses her son—but to prison, not to death. Khadeejah, known mostly for her large nose and ill-temper, reflects the brashness and
abruptness of her first reactions. Yet, she is also known to balance this temperament with a deep love for her family and a keen sense of motherly protectiveness. Thus, though she never acquires beauty, her looks do not fade; her temperament softens as the others’ harden. She balances her gruff temperament when her sense of motherly devotion surfaces. Perhaps she is more prepared for Ayshah’s bitter responses in the end because she indulged in them from the very beginning.

Khadeejah seemed to surpass even Yasin in the flabby abundance of flesh and saw no reason to claim she was anything by happy about that. She was delighted with her sons, Abd al-Muni’m and Ahmad, as well as with her generally successful marriage, but to ward off the evil eye of jealousy never let a day go by without some complaint. Her treatment of Ayshah had undergone a total change. During the last eight years she had not addressed a single sarcastic or harsh word to her younger sister, not even in jest. In fact, she bent over backwards to be courteous, affectionate, and gracious to Ayshah, since she was touched by the widow’s misery, frightened that fate might deal her a comparable blow, and apprehensive that Ayshah would compare their lots...This oversight did not keep Khadeejah from lavishing enough affection, sympathy, and compassion on Ayshah to seem a second mother for her younger sister. (Sugar Street, ch. 118).

Thus Mahfouz has made consistent literary effort portraying the various themes against the background of 20th century Egypt. He however has used some unique styles throughout The Trilogy in a proper manner which has been appreciated by the critics and scholar.