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Research Article

Realism In Naguib Mahfouz's Literary Thought

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Abstract. Naguib Mahfouz (1911 – 2006) was an Egyptian writer who won the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature. He is not only Egyptian but also Arab ever to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He published 35 novels, over 350 short stories. Mahfouz's literature is classified as realist Literature, existential themes appear in it. Mahfouz's novels published between 1945 and 1957 are generally realistic in content. Among these novels are 'Khan-al-Khalili' (1945), 'Al-Qahira al-Jadida' (1945) ('Cairo Modern'), 'Zukaq-al-Midaq' ('Midaq Alley') (1947), 'Al-Sarab' (1948) ('The Mirage'), 'Bidaya wa Nihaya' (1949) ('The Beginning and the End') and 'Thulathia-al-Qahira' (1956-1957) ('Cairo Trilogy') or 'Al-thulasia' ('Trio') is particularly famous. About 10 of his books were published before the Egyptian revolution organized on July 23, 1952. His writings played a special role in the intellectual organization of this revolution. Naguib Mahfouz wrote a number of short stories in the first decade of his literary career, and most of them dealt with the darker aspects of civic life. Many of the characters in Mahfouz's stories are taken directly from life. As a result, he quickly won the hearts of the readers. So, this research will contribute to enrich Arabic and world literatures.

Keywords: Naguib as the Nobel Prize winner, Features of Cairo, Realism in literary thought.

INTRODUCTION

Renowned writer Naguib Mahfouz was an Egyptian Nobel laureate. Naguib Mahfouz started writing at the age of 17. His first novel was published in 1939. He published 35 novels, over 350 short stories, 26 screenplays and seven plays over a 70-year career, from the 1930s until 2004. His most famous works include '*The Cairo Trilogy*' and '*Children of Gebelawi*'.¹ 'The Cairo Trilogy' (1956-1957) raised him to a unique height in Arabic literature. In it, he depicted the traditional urban lifestyle of Egypt during the period of liberation from British rule. In recognition of this novel, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988. More than half of Naguib Mahfouz's novels have been adapted into films. Most of his literary works were later translated into English and other languages.²

Naguib Mahfouz, the Egyptian novelist who won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1988, was a man of well-versed in western culture, the most famous modern Arab novelist on whom more has been written than any other Arab writer. He was the pioneer of the novel in the Arabic language and his career has spanned almost the entire range of novelistic development in the Arab world. Mahfouz develops his novel further through the application of new or more appropriate technique. As the author he creates a morality tale which takes place in a country where life's most basic guiding principles are still uncertain. He paints a vivid picture of social, political and religious issues and their impact on Egyptian society.

Naguib Mahfouz is best known for writing a three-volume novel called the 'The Cairo Trilogy' in a long literary career of 70 years. This epic book weaves a lively succession of socio-economic and political upheavals from the bloody timeline of *World War I* to the time of King Farouk's ouster in a military coup d'état in 1952. The book is easily compared to German novelist Erich Maria Remarque's *World War I* novel '*All Quiet on the Western Front*' and Soviet writer Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel '*Steel*'.³ *The Cairo Trilogy* is not just a literary masterpiece but also a valuable historical and anthropological document. Mahfouz's observations concerning the contemporary socio-political state of Egypt are astutely woven throughout an intensely personal family saga, creating a fictionalized record of a significant turbulent period in the nation's recent history. *The Cairo Trilogy*, finally published in 2001 as the single volume Mahfouz intended, has been largely responsible for earning him Egypt's State Literary Prize for the Novel (1957).⁴

After winning the Nobel Prize in 1988 Mahfouz quoted as saying: "*The Nobel Prize has given me, for the first time in my life, the feeling that my literature could be*

¹ Haim Gordon (1990). *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in His Writings*. ISBN 0313268762.

² Bob Trevelyan, Obituary: Naguib Mahfouz, BBC NEWS, 30 August 2006

³ Koushik Roy, naguib-mahfouz-Sahitye Nobel Bijoyee ekmatro Arabio Nokkhotro, Notun goti, Masantic, 2016, Dhaka, <https://nbojagaran.com>

⁴ NASRULLAH MAMBROL, Analysis of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy*, OCTOBER 9, 2022, <https://literariness.org>

appreciated on an international level. The Arab world also won the Nobel with me. I believe that international doors have opened, and that from now on, literate people will consider Arab literature also. We deserve that recognition."⁵

The Swedish letter to Mahfouz praised his "rich and complex work": [It] invites us to reconsider the fundamental things in life. Themes like the nature of time and love, society and norms, knowledge and faith recur in a variety of situations and are presented in thought-provoking, evocative, and clearly daring ways. And the poetic quality of your prose can be felt across the language barrier. In the prize citation you are credited with the forming of an Arabian narrative art that applies to all mankind.⁶ Mahfouz's works received praise from American critics:⁷

- "Mahfouz's work is freshly nuanced and hauntingly lyrical. The Nobel Prize acknowledges the universal significance of [his] fiction." —Los Angeles Times
- "Mr. Mahfouz embodied the essence of what makes the bruising, raucous, chaotic human anthill of Cairo possible." —The Economist

Bangladeshi Essayist Kabir Chowdhury, in his book 'Biswa Shahitye Noy Rotno', explains the characteristics of Naguib Mahfouz's literature: "Before Naguib Mahfouz, no writer in Arab had written a novel and gained so much popularity. The narrative form that preceded it in Arabic is not comparable to the form of the modern novels."⁸

Features of Cairo

By 1867, Egypt was completely under Ottoman rule, except for an intervening French invasion from 1798 to 1801 AD.⁹ Starting in 1867, Egypt became a nominally autonomous tributary state called the Khedivate of Egypt. However, Khedivate Egypt fell under British control in 1882 following the Anglo-Egyptian War. After the end of *World War I* and following the Egyptian revolution of 1919, the Kingdom of Egypt was established. While a *de jure* independent state, the United Kingdom retained control over foreign affairs, defense, and other matters. British occupation lasted until 1954, with the Anglo-Egyptian agreement of 1954.¹⁰

Egypt was a major battlefield in the North African campaign during the *World War II*, being the location of the First and Second Battles of El Alamein. Although Egypt was part of the British Military Operations zone and British forces were stationed there, many Egyptian Army units also fought alongside them. Some units like 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th Infantry Regiments, 16th and 12th Cavalry Regiments, 17th Horse Artillery Regiment, and 22nd King's Own Artillery Regiment. Some other units also fought but its names are unknown. Beside these units, the Anti-Aircraft Artillery

⁵ Luxner, Larry (March–April 1988). "A Nobel for the Arab Nation". *Aramco World*. Houston: Aramco Services Company. Retrieved 21 June 2020.

⁶ "Award Ceremony Speech". *Nobel Prize.org*. Nobel Media. Retrieved 24 October 2013.

⁷ "Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006)". *The American University in Cairo Press*. AUC Press. Archived from the original on 2 June 2017. Retrieved 26 October 2022

⁸ Kabir Chowdhury, 'Biswa Shahitye Noy Rotno', Dhaka: Kothaprokash, 5th Edition (2019), P. 55-59

⁹ "French Invasion of Egypt, 1798-1801". *www.HistoryOfWar.org*. *History of War*. Retrieved 5 July 2019.

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Egypt. Retrieved 25 December, 2022.

Regiments all over Egypt played a vital role in destroying Luftwaffe attacks on Alexandria, Cairo, Suez, and Northern Delta.¹¹

King Farouk's dictatorship, Jaglul Pasha's patriotism, assassination of President Anwar Sadat, Hosni Mubarak's rise to autocracy, Winston Churchill's trump card in World War II, Franklin Roosevelt's alliance with Hitler's Mussolini's naval rivalry, Non-Aligned Movement, Suez Canal and Aswan Dam The preeminence of the head of state Gamal Abdel Nasser in the construction all inspired Naguib Mahfouz to build a real literature. Mehfoz grew up in Cairo, Bawiti-al-Quadi and Abbasiyya with 6 siblings. As depicted in the novels of English novelist Thomas Hardy, rural earthy Casterbridge Wessex dominates, as Malgudi comes to life in Rasipuram Kuruppaswamy Narayan's writings, Naguib Mahfuz's writings return time and again to those places that refined his childhood and the joys and sorrows of his youth.¹²

Some writings of Naguib Mahfouz are about the scenario of Cairo and its circumstance during *World War II*. Mahfuz's two earliest novels, '*Khan al-Khalili*' (1945) خان الخليلي, and '*Midaq Alley*' (1947) زقاق المدق represent about the scenario. 'Khan-al-Khalili' is a name of market next to Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo. 'Khan-al-Khalili' is written on the numerous lanes of this market and their anecdotes. The story is set in Cairo during the continuous German air raids from September 1941 to August 1942. '*Midaq Alley*' is written on the story of how World War II changed the city of Cairo. '*Midaq Alley*' is the most famous of Mahfuz's early novels, perhaps his most mature work up to that time. A movie was also made in Mexico in 1995 based on the story of this novel called 'Midak Alley'. In an interview published in the English literary magazine 'The Paris Review' in 1992, he told the story of the beginning of his literary work. "My writing journey started in 1929. Then all my stories were rejected. Mazalla editor Salama Musa used to tell me, 'You have the potential, but you haven't reached that point yet.' I particularly remember the month of September 1939, because it was the beginning of World War II, Hitler invaded Poland. My story 'Abath-al-Aqdar' was published in the magazine, an unexpected gift for me from Majalla publishers. This is a very important event in my life."¹³

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Naguib Mahfouz

Naguib Mahfouz Abdelaziz Ibrahim Ahmed Al-Basha (نجيب محفوظ عبد العزيز) (11 December 1911 – 30 August 2006) was an Egyptian writer who won the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature. Mahfouz is regarded as one of the first contemporary writers in the Arabic literature, along with Taha Hussein, to explore themes of existentialism¹⁴. His hometown was Gamaliyya, one of Cairo's most

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egypt_in_World_War_II. Retrieved 22 December, 2022.

¹² Koushik Roy, naguib-mahfuz-Sahitye Nobel Bijoyee ekmatro Arabio Nokkhotro, Notun goti, Masantic, 2016, Dhakd, <https://nbojagaran.com>

¹³ Hadisur Rahaman, Adhunik Arabi Sahitye Nagib Mahfuzer Obodan, <https://hadisurbd.com/naguib-mahfouz/>

¹⁴ Haim Gordon (1990). *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in His Writings*. ISBN 0313268762.

picturesque districts. He graduated from Cairo University in 1934 with a degree in philosophy. Mahfouz has spent his life in Cairo and moves from it only once a year, to spend the hot summers in seaside Alexandria. He published his first novel *Khufu's Wisdom* (عبث الأقدار) in 1939 and wrote ten more before the Egyptian Revolution of July 1952, when he stopped writing for several years. The appearance of the Cairo Trilogy (Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, and Sugar Street) made him famous throughout the Arab world as a portrayer of traditional urban life. With his novel 'Children of Gebelawi' (1959) أولاد حارتنا he began writing again, in a new vein that frequently concealed political judgments under allegory and symbolism.

He is the author of about 35 novels, half of which have been made into films which have circulated throughout the Arab world. Since his winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988 his work has been extensively translated and published throughout the world. This newfound status has also brought Mahfouz criticism from the increasingly intolerant Muslim fundamentalist movement. This culminated in an unsuccessful, yet violent attack, when he was stabbed in Cairo in 1994.¹⁵

Literary Realism

Realism: [Thought] a way of thinking and acting based on facts and what is possible, rather than on hopes for things that are unlikely to happen.¹⁶ Literary realism is a literary movement that represents reality by portraying mundane, everyday experiences as they are in real life. It depicts familiar people, places, and stories, primarily about the middle and lower classes of society. Literary realism seeks to tell a story as truthfully as possible instead of dramatizing or romanticizing it.¹⁷

When Homer wrote 'The Odyssey', he mentioned the poetry of truth that describes man in his weakness and attachment to his material needs. And when Aristotle dealt with the principle of imitation in the poetry of epics and in tragedy, as well as in comedy, and most of what is made from zero in the club and playing on the guitar, he referred to the realistic approach with this principle. The concept of imitation developed at Aristotle, making it an imitation of the essence of the tangible thing, not an imitation of the tangible thing itself, and standing only at the external resemblance.¹⁸

Realism in Naguib Mahfouz's literary thought:

"Through works rich in nuance, now clear-sightedly realistic, now evocatively ambiguous [Mahfouz] has formed an Arabic narrative art that applies to all mankind."

-----Swedish Academy of Letters¹⁹

¹⁵ Emery, Ken, The World of Naguib Mahfouz, Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar 2000 Egypt and Israel: Between Tradition and Modernity June 26 through August 6

¹⁶ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/realism>, Retrieved 14 January, 2023.

¹⁷ <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-literary-realism>: Retrieved: 31 December, 2022

¹⁸ Dr. Rashida Mehran, Al-waqi'yyah wa Ittijahatuha fi Al-Shi'r Al-Arabi, The Egyptian General Book Organization, Alexandria Branch, 1st Edition 1979 AD, 17

¹⁹ Emery, Ken, The World of Naguib Mahfouz, Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminar 2000 Egypt and Israel: Between Tradition and Modernity June 26 through August 6

Naguib Mahfouz is a realistic novelist who portrays the historical reality or the social reality faithfully and creates living social characters from the heroes of his novels who live with a full depth of real life and fight with emotions and desires, and express the community of reality, and the aspirations of society. The narratives of Naguib Mahfouz are based on reality, firstly from the historical reality of the past, and again from the reality of the neighborhoods of Cairo, its streets and lanes, its cafes, and his contemporary people and politics. He considered politics as an accessory to reality. He acknowledged it with his expression: *"In all of my writings, you will find politics. You may find a story which ignores love or any other subject, but not politics; it is the very axis of our thinking."*²⁰

Naguib Mahfouz and Taha Hussein (1889-1973) were among the first authors of modern Arabic literature to apply existentialist philosophy to literature. Then, the humanist Naguib Mahfouz has crossed the Arab world and is ranked among the best novelists of the twentieth century. Naguib Mahfouz wrote a number of short stories in the first decade of his literary career, and most of them dealt with the darker aspects of civic life. Many of the characters in Mahfouz's stories are taken directly from life. As a result, he quickly won the hearts of the readers. His first three novels were on historical reality – 'Abath-al-Aqdar' (1939) عبث الأقدار, ('Irony of Fate', English translation 'Khufu's Wisdom') 'Rhadopis of Nubia' (1943) رادوبيس and 'The Struggle of Thebes' (1944) كفاح طيبة.

Mahfouz's novels published between 1945 and 1957 are generally realistic in content. Among these novels are *Khan al-Khalili* (1945) خان الخليلي, *Cairo Modern* (1945) القاهرة الجديدة (Al-Qahira Al-Jadida'), *Midaq Alley* (1947) زقاق المدق ('Zukaq-al-Midaq'), *The Mirage* (1948) السراب (Al-Sarab), *The Beginning and the End* (1949) بداية ونهاية (Bidya wa Nihaya), and 'Cairo Trilogy' (1956-1957) ثلاثية القاهرة ('Thulathia-al-Qahira') or 'Al-Thulathia'. The last one is particularly famous. Most of Mahfouz's novels focused on the lives of ordinary Egyptians in Cairo - his realistic style reaching a peak with the publication in the late 1950s of an immense family saga.²¹

'Awlad Hartina' (1959) ('Children of our neighborhood' in English translation, '**Children of Gebelawi**') is indicative of a change in his style of writing. Allegorical and symbolic political issues he brought up in his writings during this period. Philosophical and complex psychological themes began to dominate his writings. The writer has brought out the conflict between faith and causality in this novel. Gebelawi's children, heirs and enemies, the relationship and the course of events, are highlighted in the novel. Gabelawi is a man who is both rich and powerful, who has built up a mountain of wealth by dishonest means. He always likes to impose decisions and authority on his people and five sons. Among the five sons, he gave the responsibility of taking care of wealth to the youngest son Adham. Adham was later cheated by his elder brother and wife for the property. But Gebelawi's authority over everything remains. The book '**Children of Gebelawi**' is both famous and controversial. This novel was serially published in the daily 'Al-Ahram' in 1959. Al-

²⁰ Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, Routledge, 1992, p. 23.

²¹ Bob Trevelyan, *Obituary: Naguib Mahfouz*, BBC NEWS, 30 August 2006

Azhar, the highest Islamic authority in Egypt, has banned it on grounds that it offends Islam by including characters who clearly represent God and the prophets.²² In 1994, Mahfouz was attacked outside his home by Muslim extremists said to have been incensed by his treatment of religious themes in the book. He was stabbed in the neck but survived.²³

Naguib Mahfouz's novels stem from reality, once from the ancient historical reality, and at other times from the reality of Cairo's neighborhoods, streets, lanes and concepts. It appears in his realistic novels a depiction of reality of all kinds, whether historical or social, while creating a full life from the characters of his social novels. Naguib Mahfouz said in an old interview with *Al-Kawakeb* magazine in 1953, and he said: *"The reality is that many understand realism wrongly. In a sentence, it is less than the change that we find in any other doctrine, such as idealism or romanticism. He also said, "Realism does not drown in emotion and imagination, but rather expresses reality on the basis of imagination, reason and emotion." In his opinion, this is what gives it the element of balance and the characteristic of realism. Naguib Mahfouz says to Ahmed Abbas Saleh (Sabah Al-Khair Magazine, January 17, 1956): I moved to the realistic stage starting with "Cairo Modern" and followed it with the story "Khan Khalili."*²⁴

Naguib Mahfouz portrays the historical reality and the social reality. Perhaps it was a sign of the departure of history and the past and the transition to real life or present. This historical stage includes three narratives, namely "Abth al-Aqdar", "Radobis", and "Kifah Tiba" as a historical trilogy in the time of the pharaohs to take people to the best society, when the Egyptian society was enchained under the oppressive English rule. Being influenced by the pharaonic nationalist movement Naguib Mahfouz invigorates the oppressed people against the oppressive rulers by his writings. As a translator of the revolutionary Egyptian social and national consciousness in that period, at this stage, that many Egyptians turned to at that time as a reaction to British influence and possession in Egypt. Naguib Mahfouz has included in his narrations the three concepts of the Egyptian nationalism, and the greatness of the pharaohs. These narratives revolve around Egypt's efforts in independence, and achieving social justice through revolution against oppression, and rejecting oppression and humiliation.

In the novel *"Radoubis"*, we see that the human being submits to his destiny and falls like the fruit of Al-Daniyyah without effort. And in the novel *"Kifah Taysyaba"* we find the human being in front of the latest position from the heart of the experience of life, this is the position which is the end of experience or death. In this novel, Naguib Mahfouz focused on the concepts of liberation, and he made impossible love equal to possible victory over enemies. The story of *"The struggle of Thebes"* against the Hyksos, and their expulsion at the hands of Ahmose, is nothing

²² The Washington Post, NOBEL PRIZE-WINNING EGYPTIAN AUTHOR WOUNDED IN STABBING, 15 October, 1994

²³ Bob Trevelyan, Obituary: Naguib Mahfouz, BBC NEWS, 30 August 2006

²⁴ Amani Ibraheem, Al-Waqi'yya fi Kitabat Naguib Mahfouz. Al-Tatawor Al-Tabi'ee lil Adab. <https://www.elbalad.news/5081131>, December 11, 2021,

but a container for the feelings that were boiling in the hearts of contemporary Egyptians against the English invaders, and the hope burning in their hearts for their expulsion and rid the country of their evil.

Naguib Mahfouz experimented with psychological realism in the novel "*The Mirage*", then returned to social realism with the novel "*The Beginning and the End*" and the novel "*The Cairo Trilogy*". Starting in 1945 AD, Naguib Mahfouz began his realistic novelist line through society, which he maintained throughout most of his literary career with the novel "*Cairo Modern*", then the novel "*Khan al-Khalili*" and the novel "*Midaq Alley*". In his social novels Naguib Mahfouz, presents a vivid picture of Egyptian society at the beginning of the twentieth century. The social injustice of the middle class was the most important basic ideas and images that occupied Naguib Mahfouz at the beginning of his realistic phase, and the impact of political and the social transformations which go through in most of the novels of that stage has been evident.

Mahfouz's literary production constituted a positive expression of the movement of reality in society, including criticism of its political, social and economic conditions, patterns of behavior, cultural content and prevailing thought in this society. This stage includes four novels of close content: "*Cairo Modern*" and "*Khan Al-Khalili*", "*Midaq Alley*", and "*The Beginning and the End*". Most of the events of this stage took place in the popular neighborhoods, and the popular neighborhoods remained cherished by the great novelist Naguib Mahfouz throughout his realistic phase. Because of its closeness to his spirit, and the sincerity of its general content, and its spiritual connection to the popular conscience, and in the novels of this social stage, we find a tendency to liberate from the style of narration and discourse, and a tendency towards enriching the internal dialogue, and indirect portrayal of events. Mahfouz's early novels are about Egypt's Pharaonic past: Khufu (Cheops), builder of the Great Pyramid; the Hyksos invaders. But in the 1940s he began to confront what could only be called the country's crisis of modernity. From that period came "*Cairo Modern*," originally published in 1945 (a little before his better-known work, "*Midaq Alley*").²⁵ There has been a tendency to divide Mahfouz's writings into a number of periods, e.g. a historical, a realistic and a metaphysical-mystical. A series of Cairo novels takes place at the present day. To them belongs *Midaq Alley* (1947). The alley becomes a stage, which holds together a motley crowd, all drawn with telling psychological realism. Mahfouz really made his name with the big Trilogy (1956-57). In the Centre there is a family and its vicissitudes from the end of the 1910s to the middle of the 1940s. The series of novels has autobiographical elements. The depiction of the individuals relates very clearly too intellectual, social and political conditions. On the whole through his writings Mahfouz has exerted considerable influence in his country. The theme of the unusual novel *Children of Gebelawi* (1959) is man's everlasting search for spiritual values. Adam and Eve, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and others, as well as the modern scientist, appear thinly disguised. It is the scientist who ultimately is responsible for the primeval father Gebelawi's (God's)

²⁵ Dinitia Smith, In Egypt at Crossroads, a Faustian Arrangement, The New York Times, June 19, 2008

death. Different norm systems are confronted with tension in the description of the conflict between good and evil. On account of the way in which higher things are treated the book could not be printed in the author's own country but was published elsewhere. *Adrift on the Nile* (1966) is an example of Mahfouz's impressive novellas. Here metaphysical conversations are carried on in the borderland between reality and illusion. At the same time the text forms itself into a comment on the intellectual climate in the country.²⁶

Naguib Mahfouz has created his novel-art by borrowing from Western novels. By his own admission, he is particularly indebted to Flaubert, Balzac, Zola, Camus, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. He read all of them in French. Apart from these, the other western writer who had a huge influence on him was Marcel Proust. Naguib Mahfouz was deeply moved by Proust's classic work 'Memories of Things Past'. The concept of time in that novel has significantly influenced many of Naguib's works. Time plays an important role in almost all of Naguib Mahfouz's novels. His characters are always thinking about tomorrow. In his novels we often come across the following phrases: "Time is a terrible companion", "What has time done to my friend? A hideous mask is plastered on his face!"²⁷

'*Cairo Modern*' ('*Al-Qahira al-Jadida*') is set in the 1930s (and was first published in 1945) and begins with four friends who are completing their studies at university. Four young men, Mahgub Abd al-Da'im, Ali Taha, Ahmad Badir and Ma'mun Radwan, meet to discuss current events in 1930s Egypt when they are not finishing their university studies. Ma'mun sees everything from an Islamic spiritual point of view, Ali from socialist ideals, and Ahmad finds solace in every situation and challenge through women. Mahgub, however, is an enigma who doesn't fit in at all, though he pretends enough to be acceptable. The events of the novel revolve around Mahgoub Abdel Dayem. This poor young man whose motto in life was only one word, which is the word "Taz" or in other words, his motto was liberation from everything from values, ideals, beliefs and even principles.

Poverty and hunger made him a person without honor, morals, or even a conscience, and he was ready to do anything to live a decent life. Naguib Mahfouz was brilliantly able to draw this difficult character with all his thoughts and internal struggle. A university degree turns out not to help much with the job search. This is not a country or system where qualifications count for much. As someone bluntly tells him: "*Forget your qualifications. Don't waste money on applying for a job. The question boils down to one thing: Do you have someone who will intercede for you? Are you related to someone in a position of power? Can you become engaged to the daughter of someone in the government? If you say yes, then accept my congratulations in advance. If you say no, then direct your energies elsewhere.*"²⁸

'*Cairo Modern*' ('*Al-Qahira al-Jadida*') 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 corruption and reflects the

²⁶ Swedish Academy, The Permanent Secretary, Press release, October 13, 1988

²⁷ Hadisur Rahaman, Adhunik Arabi Sahitye Nagib Mahfuzer Obodan, <https://hadisurbd.com/naguib-mahfouz/>

²⁸ <https://www.complete-review.com/reviews/mahfouzn/cairomod.htm>

contradictions in the social and economic order of the city and more so within the individual characters.²⁹ Mahfouz's two earliest novels, *Khan-al-Khalili* and *al-Qahira al-Jadida*, reveal his sympathy for socialist social order and his distaste for the fundamentalist ideas of the 'Islamic Brotherhood' organization.³⁰

The completion of *Khan al-Khalili* in 1945 marked a turning point in Naguib 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.³¹ Egyptian Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz 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 cafes, and ancient mosques of the Khan. Through the eyes of Ahmad, the eldest Akif son, Mahfouz presents a richly textured vision of the Khan, and of a crisis that pits history against modernity and faith against secularism. Fans of *Midaq Alley* and *The Cairo Trilogy* will not want to miss this engaging and sensitive portrayal of a family at the crossroads of the old world and the new.³²

Midaq Alley (Zuqaq al-Midaq) is written on the story of how *World War II* changed the city of Cairo. *Juqaq-al-Midaq* is the most famous of Mahfouz's early novels, perhaps his most mature work up to that time.³³ The novel takes place in the Gamaliya neighborhood of Cairo, which is where Naguib Mahfouz and his family lived for the early years of his life. It has remained one of Mahfouz's best-known works, and was one of his earliest novels to detail a lower-class lifestyle in Cairo. Many of his earlier novels focused on middle-class neighborhoods. The novel is marked by a loose narrative that traces an ensemble rather than a fixed protagonist.³⁴

Never has Nobel Prize-winner Naguib Mahfouz's talent for rich and luxurious storytelling been more evident than in *Midaq Alley*, which centers on the residents of one of the hustling, teeming back alleys of Cairo. From Zaita the cripple-maker to Kirsha the cafe owner with a taste for young boys and drugs, to Abbas the barber who mistakes greed for love, to Hamida who sells her soul to escape the alley, these characters vividly evoke the sights, sounds and smells of Cairo. The universality and timelessness of this book cannot be denied.³⁵

²⁹ Ghali Shukkri, *al-Muntami, Dirasa fi Adab Najib Mahfouz*, p. 95.

³⁰ Hadisur Rahaman, *Adhunik Arabi Sahitye Nagib Mahfuzer Obodan*, <https://hadisurbd.com/naguib-mahfouz/>

³¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/es/book/show/4900242-khan-al-khalili>

³² <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/208575/khan-al-khalili-by-naguib-mahfouz/>

³³ Hadisur Rahaman, *Adhunik Arabi Sahitye Nagib Mahfuzer Obodan*, <https://hadisurbd.com/naguib-mahfouz/>

³⁴ <https://www.gradesaver.com/midaq-alley>

³⁵ https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/5499.Midaq_Alley

'**The Mirage**' (**Al-Sarab**) is a stunning example of Nobel Prize-winning Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz's psychological portraiture. It is the story of an intense young man who has been so dominated by his mother that her death sets him dangerously adrift in a world he cannot manage alone. Kamil Ru'ba is a tortured soul who fled her abusive husband and became overbearingly possessive and protective toward her young son who has long been isolated emotionally and physically. Now he is in twenties and seeks to escape her posthumous grasp. Finding and successfully courting the woman of his dreams seems to promise salvation, until his ignorance of mature love and his fear and jealousy lead to tragedy.³⁶

'**The Beginning and the End**' (**Bidaya Wa Nihaya**) is one of Naguib 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. For readers of the translated version, the novel may seem cruel, but for a traditional pre-war Egyptian society, there was no other possible conclusion but tragedy.³⁷ A family suffers financial difficulties after the father dies. The older brother turns to crime, while the younger brother starts working to help support his youngest brother to continue his studies and join the Military Academy. The family's only daughter falls in love and has an affair and when her lover doesn't marry her, she works as a prostitute to support her brother and mother with what little money she makes. The youngest brother becomes an officer, forsaking his fiancée and family to try in vain to join the ranks of the upper class.

When the second brother suddenly comes home to escape the police, the family calls in the youngest brother to help just as he also finds out about his sister's prostitution which lead to an intense argument between them ending in her suicide by throwing herself in the Nile. Her brother, unable to bear all that has happened throws himself in too.³⁸

'**Cairo Trilogy**' (**Thulathia-al-Qahira**) is a three-part family saga, centred around al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad and his family - his wife, his children (three sons and two daughters), and eventually his grandchildren. The family is fairly old-fashioned, even for those times, but while they are devout they are not fanatical believers. The father-figure is very strict, but outside the house leads a much freer life, enjoying wine, women, and song. It covers the period from 1917 to 1944, and though apparently conceived as a single novel, the tri-partite division is a logical one, as Mahfouz presents the story in distinct chunks, rather than one continuous whole: **Palace Walk** covers the period from 1917 to 1919, **Palace of Desire** jumps ahead and covers the period from 1924 to 1927, and **Sugar Street** covers the period 1935 to 1944. These three novels are named after the three streets of Naguib Mahfouz's old neighborhood of Al-Gamalya. The main character of the story *Palace Walk* (1956) **بين القصرين** ('*Bayan-al-Qasrayen*', *Cairo Trilogy*, Part 1) is the street name of the house of

³⁶ <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/13132470-the-mirage>

³⁷ <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/mahfouz.htm>

³⁸ <http://newcenturyproduction.com/dollarfilm/movies/1221811306575.php>

Ahmed Abd al-Zawad, a hard-line conservative Cairo resident. Ahmed Abd al-Zawad's three sons – Yasin, Fahmi and Kamal; And two daughters – Ayesha and Khadija. *Palace of Desire* (1957) قصر الشوق ('*Qasr al-Shawq*', *Cairo Trilogy*, Part 2) is the street name of Ahmed's eldest son Yasin's house and *Sugar Street* (1957) السكرية ('*al-Sukkariyah*', *Cairo Trilogy*, Part 3) is the street name of Ahmad's daughter Khadija's house. Some compare this novel with Tolstoy's '*War and Peace*'. The novel '*Cairo Trilogy*' reflects Mahfouz's political beliefs, particularly his attraction to the Wafd party. Naguib Mahfouz won Egypt's highest state literary award in 1957 for the '*Cairo Trilogy*'.³⁹

The first great family saga of modern Arabic literature, '*Cairo Trilogy*' tells the story of patriarch al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad and his family over the course of more than 30 years, from *World War I* to eight years before the overthrow of King Farouk in 1952. The trilogy is considered by many to be Naguib Mahfouz's magnum opus, written at the peak of his realist phase. The work has been hailed for its depiction of the changing conditions of Egypt's urban society as it underwent political, social, and religious struggles during the turbulent interwar period following the end of World War I, producing a conflict between Egypt's nationalist aspirations and Great Britain's imperialist and colonial power.⁴⁰

In the *Cairo Trilogy* as a whole, Mahfouz privileges a sense of the collective over the individual, represented by both al-Sayyad's family as well as the formation of the Wafd Party. It is this feature that makes Mahfouz's novel uniquely Arab, for it deviates from the European novel's conventional centering on a single protagonist. Along with a skilled use of narrative perspective, Mahfouz's use of time is also unique in its dilation and contraction. While the events in *Palace Walk* (the longest of the three novels) occur gradually over the course of just two years, *Palace of Desire* quickens the pace of the story over four years, and in *Sugar Street* (the shortest) events are stretched across a span of 10 years. This distinctive use of time creates a sense of urgency that escalates over the course of the trilogy, mirroring the increasing urgency of a nation fighting to free itself of foreign rule.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

Thus, Naguib Mahfouz began with the historical novel, and ended it to the stage of the realistic novel in which he laid the foundations of this color, and then crossed it to the post-realistic stage. Mahfouz planned to cover the entire history of Egypt in a series of books. Following the third volume, his interest shifted to current settings and issues, as well as the psychological impact of social change on ordinary

³⁹ Hadisur Rahaman, Adhunik Arabi Sahitye Nagib Mahfuzer Obodan, <https://hadisurbd.com/naguib-mahfouz/>

⁴⁰ analysis-of-naguib-mahfouzs-the-cairo-trilogy/ <https://literariness.org/> Retrieved 10 September 2022.

⁴¹ analysis-of-naguib-mahfouzs-the-cairo-trilogy/ <https://literariness.org/> Retrieved 21 October 2022.

people.⁴² Naguib Mahfouz elevated the Arabic novel to the finest runways of art, and caught up with the modern novel in the world.

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⁴² "Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006)". *The American University in Cairo Press*. AUC Press. Archived from the original on 2 June 2017. Retrieved 26 October 2013.

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