The Modernization Process of Egypt and Turkey in Selected Novels of Naguip Mahfouz and Orhan Pamuk

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By

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To my supportive parents, and my beloved husband…

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to analyze the process of the transition to modernity in Egypt and Turkey through two literary works: *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-7) the Arabic version of which is called *Bayn al-Qasrayn* (*Between the Two Palaces*) by Naguib Mahfouz and *Cevdet Bey and Sons* [*Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*] (1982) by Orhan Pamuk. These works project the historical, social and cultural transformations from traditionalism to modernism in Egypt and Turkey through fictions that reflect the stories of three generations, during the time spans depicted in the two works (1917-1944 for *The Cairo Trilogy* and 1905-1970 for *Cevdet Bey and Sons*). The narratives represent upheavals not only in Egypt and Turkey but also in a world in the process of convulsive change.

In nineteenth-century Egypt, the influence of European culture was felt more profoundly under the rule of Muhammed Ali's grandson Ismail (1863-1879) who planned to turn Egypt into a modern state. This was also influenced by British indirect rule in Egypt, which lasted from 1882 to 1952 and ended abruptly with the Egyptian Revolution of that year (1919). Regarding the 1798 French invasion of Egypt, followed by that of British, it can be claimed that these colonial imprints were of crucial importance for Egyptians in the process of modernization. The nineteenth century was also a period of downturn for the Ottoman Sultanate, due to economic crises and the interventions of European countries, which had turned the state into a semi-colony.[1] In addition, the collapse of the Ottoman Sultanate and the foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923 was another major change. As the social, economic, technological and historical backgrounds of Egypt and Turkey are different from those of European countries, developments in the world at the time left the peoples of these two entities stuck between their own culture and Europe, a process which can best be expressed through Homi Bhabha's "ambivalence." The majority of the population of both the Ottoman Sultanate (whose fall was followed by the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923) and Egypt were Muslims. However, the new way of life that was intended for their

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[1] Nur Bayer, *Orhan Pamuk'un "Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları" ile Thomas Mann'ın "Buddenbrooks" Adlı Romanlarında Aile ve Toplum Eleştirisi*, PhD diss., (Atatürk Üniversitesi, 2010), 32.

people was a form of Western modernity. The political situations in Egypt and Turkey, together with the previously mentioned developments in Europe, caused Islam to be re-adjusted to meet the exigencies of modernity. However, modernity was misunderstood as external mimicry, especially by some intellectuals in both Egypt and Turkey, while resistance was regarded as unavoidable for people who feared to lose their own cultural and religious values.

The intellectual and historical transformations that took place in Egypt and Turkey in this period are successfully portrayed by Naguib Mahfouz and Orhan Pamuk through their novels, both about three generations of one family. Both Mahfouz and Pamuk portray extended families that have close relationships which fade away over time, as each new generation moves further away from traditional lifestyles and tries to adopt a new way of life under the social and economic conditions of their countries. Mahfouz depicts the story of three generations of the Abd al-Jawad family, from 1917 to 1944. During this time Egypt experienced two world wars, as well as the brutal repression of the 1919 Revolution by the colonial regime of Britain, although partial independence was gained as a result. The national struggle of Egyptian youth—represented in the novel through the personality of Fahmy, the second son of the Abd al-Jawad family, and his friends—was for the total freedom of the nation.

In *The Cairo Trilogy*, the first generation, Ahmad Abd al-Jawad and Amina, represent the past, while the second generation, Kamal's, represents the conflict between past and present. Due to Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's strict discipline and tyranny, nobody dares to contradict his decisions. It is unthinkable, for example, for his wife and daughters to go out of the house without his permission. Born into such a family, the youngest son of the family, Kamal, lives through a duality of values due to the process of modernization his country is going through and the kind of education he has gone through. The third generation, however, openly opposes the system implemented in the family and in Egypt: of Ahmad al-Jawad's two grandsons, Abd al-Munim joins the Muslim Brotherhood while Ahmet becomes a Marxist/Socialist. Because of their ideologies, the brothers are sarcastically called "the believer and the apostate" by their father.

The members of the three generations in Orhan Pamuk's *Cevdet Bey and Sons* undergo similar experiences in terms of inner conflicts and ambivalence during the transition to modernity in Turkey. Beginning in 1905, in the final years of Abdulhamid II's reign, the novel narrates sixty-five years of a family life, enabling the reader to observe the historical, social and cultural structure of Turkey through this lens. Cevdet Bey's

adaptation to the new developments is humorously depicted by Pamuk. Having graduated in military medicine in France, Cevdet Bey's brother Nusret is a member of the Young Turks, the Turkish nationalist reform party of the early twentieth century which favored reformation of the former system of the Ottoman Sultanate. Nusret criticizes everything in his country, looks down on his fellow citizens, and has blind faith in everything French and European. Cevdet Bey's younger son, Refik, is constantly searching for the meaning of life, but his struggles fail to satisfy him. Ahmet, representative of the third generation, is a painter who puts art at the center of his life and isolates himself from other people, but he is uneasy and dissatisfied with his life.

Of all the characters in Mahfouz's *Trilogy* and Pamuk's *Cevdet Bey*, it is probably Husayn Shaddad of the *Trilogy* and Ömer of *Cevdet Bey* who have the most in common. Educated abroad, Husayn Shaddad and Ömer return to their countries despising everything about them. As a result of their European educations, both have internalized the Eurocentric metanarratives regarding their countries, a process which in this work will be referred to as *self-Orientalization*. Derived from Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, self-Orientalization refers to the internalization of Orientalist discourse in understanding one's own country. It is also ironic that, contrary to their expectations from life and their condescending attitudes toward their countries, both Husayn Shaddad and Ömer are obliged to be satisfied with ordinary jobs that they look down upon.

This book presents an analysis of the transition to modernity in Egypt and Turkey as depicted in *The Trilogy* and *Cevdet Bey* based on comparative literature theory. In the context of this study, the term "world literature" plays a significant role. When Goethe defined the term "world literature" in the nineteenth century, he considered it to be "the literary standard of modern times."[2] However, the obstacles to a true world literature prevented it from developing in accordance with its context for a long time, as world literature tended to be regarded as "a canon of masterpieces or an established body of classics."[3] According to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, the famous novelist, theorist of post-colonial literature, and professor of Comparative Literature and English, it was the system of "linguistic or aesthetic feudalism", which involves a hierarchy of languages and cultures that maintains Eurocentric approaches, that prevented world literature from extending its limits to the true meaning of

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[2] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2003), 1.

[3] Ibid., 15.

the term.[4] Whether world literature has achieved the standards that Goethe wished it to or whether it is still subject to the impediments that Ngugi mentions is a matter of discussion, but in this work it will be assumed that comparative literature enables world literature to reinvent itself "to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin."[5] Closely related to this redefined concept of world literature, comparative literature enables one to compare literary works from any nation across borders, history, language, culture and tradition. Its interdisciplinary nature paves the way to understanding one's own national culture as well as foreign cultures. In *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, Susan Bassnett underlines this, observing that "we do not know ourselves when we know only ourselves."[6]

Besides comparative literature theory, postcolonial theory is also applied to this study. In the period that Mahfouz fictionalizes in *The Cairo Trilogy*, Egyptians were directly or indirectly confronted with the impact of British occupation. This impact can best be understood through the lens of postcolonial theory, which interrogates the influences of colonialism on societies and cultures. The term "post-colonialism" was used by historians after the Second World War in reference to a chronological period relating to the post-independence periods of former colonies. However, from the late 1970s, literary critics used the term postcolonialism to discuss the multidimensional cultural influences of colonization.[7] Based on the latter definition by literary critics, *The Cairo Trilogy* is analyzed from a postcolonial perspective. New historicism, which is defined in the second chapter together with the relationship between literature and history, is also drawn upon in the analysis of these works.

Another key concept used is modernization, as it has been defined and described in political science and development studies. Referring to the developments that stem from advanced industrial technology, including structural and cultural changes besides economic growth, modernization theory notes that:

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[4] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Globalectics: Theory and The Politics of Knowing*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 60-61.
[5] Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 2003), 5.
[6] Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*, (UK: Oxford 1993), 23.
[7] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 168.

The common characteristics that societies tend to develop, as they become modern, may differ from one version of modernization theory to another, but in general, all assume that institutional structures and individual activities become more highly specialized, differentiated, and integrated into social, political, and economic forms characteristic of advanced Western societies.[8]

Related to the basic features of modernization theory, there are many different definitions of the terms modern and modernization. Bedri Gencer defines modernization as "the process of establishing a new way of life."[9] Samuel Huntington, in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, gives a similar definition of modernization as "a multifaceted process involving changes in all areas of human thought and activity."[10] In *Modernity Versus Postmodernity*, Jürgen Habermas notes that the term "modern" has a long history: its Latin form, "modernus," was used for the first time in the fifth century to distinguish the new Christian period from the Roman and Pagan past. He adds that the variable content of the term "modern" repeatedly infers its relationship with the past to assert that it is the result of "a transition from old to new."[11] Habermas believes the term is too narrow to restrict the concept of modernity historically to the Renaissance, and he proposes that people regarded themselves as modern in the period of Charles the Great in twelfth century, and also in the France of the late seventeenth century. To him, this means that the concept of modern "appeared and reappeared exactly during those periods in Europe when the consciousness of a new epoch formed itself through a renewed relationship to the ancients."[12] To Habermas, the tie between ancient and later times with which "modernity" defined itself changed with French Enlightenment ideals and "with the belief, inspired by modern science, in the infinite progress of knowledge and in the infinite advance toward social and moral betterment."[13] The Age of Enlightenment, in which many philosophers in Europe emphasized reason rather than tradition, was regarded as an essential period in the process of modernization. Theories were established

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[8] http://what-when-how.com/sociology/modernization-theory/ Accessed January 6, 2016.

[9] Bedri Gencer, *İslamda Modernleşme, 1839-1939* (Ankara: Doğu Batı Yayınları, 2012), 116-17.

[10] Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 32.

[11] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter) 1981: 3.

[12] Ibid., 3.

[13] Ibid., 4

about how technological advancement led to social advancement, which was in turn connected with many different facets of development. As the norms of the Enlightenment required the replacement of divine providence with the rational human mind and abandoned the prestige of tradition, the philosophy of establishing "a rational organization of everyday social life"[14] was unavoidable.[15] Anthony Giddens, on the other hand, underlines the period in which the term "modernity" first emerged: "modernity refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence."[16] The following concepts, defined by Peter L. Berger, outline some of the characteristic modes referred to by modernity:

> Abstraction (especially confrontation of life with bureaucracy and technology, rationalization of life);
> Futurism (life is arranged according to time);
> Individualism (separation of the individual from society and emergence of alienation);
> Freedom (not fate but choices reigned the life);
> Secularization (the loss of religious influence and/or religious belief at a societal level)[17]

Berger's characteristics of modernity reveal that although modernism was defined by many simply as adaptation to the necessities of the time, the values of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment played major roles in the process of modernization. In other words, the developments and various approaches stemming from Europe made an overwhelming impression throughout an increasingly globalized world. The spreading cultural mores and ideas of the modern age paved the way for a homogenized world. However, the process of modernization influenced each country in a different way, because each had different cultural, economic, historical and social backgrounds. These differences aside, modernization was directly related to communication, urbanization, industrialization and education all over the world. In accordance with this understanding, with the expansion of European power, the perception of superiority of the present versus inferiority of the past became transformed

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[14] Ibid., 9.

[15] Ashcroft et al., *The Key Concepts*, 132.

[16] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequencesof Modernity*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 9.

[17] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Anchor, 1977), 70-82.

into "a sense of superiority over those pre-modern societies and cultures 'locked' in the past—primitive and uncivilized peoples whose subjugation and 'introduction' into modernity became the right and obligation of European powers."[18]

Taking into account the various definitions of modernity and modernization, it can be proposed that modernization is used in two different ways: the first, based on its etymological origin from Latin as modernus, can simply be defined as the replacement of past values with contemporary ones. According to the second, based on its defining characteristics and their historical origins, modernization is considered to date back to the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and being "modern" implies characteristics such as individualism, secularization and rationalism which are closely associated with those periods in European history.

In the process of transition to modernity, either willingly and directly or reluctantly and indirectly, many countries entered the running to reach Europe's level of prosperity. Among the former were Turkey and Egypt, whose leaders were aware of the superiority of Europe in terms of science, technology and economy. For Egypt, this awareness dated back to Napoleon's 1798 invasion, on which he was accompanied by around 160 scientists from France. For Turkey, the last years of Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century can be regarded as a turning point in terms of modernization. In this period, development in industry, science and technology, military organization and schools came to be considered significant by Muhammed Ali Pasha of Egypt and Mahmud II of the Ottoman Sultanate. Observers and students were sent to Europe from Egypt and the Ottoman Sultanate in order to research developments first-hand and obtain a western-style education. Through the support of the leadership of these countries, who were open to change, not only technological developments but also cultural and social attitudes were imported from Europe, because the students and other observers associated the technological developments of the West with the society and culture of their host countries. As a result, the process of transition to modernity divided intellectuals into two: confronted with the values of modernity, some were in favor of total Westernization, while others approached the new developments cautiously, taking into account their own values which had been labeled as "backward." Both groups were aware of the technological superiority of Europe, but the issue that divided them was that, together with technological developments, the new parameters of

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[18] Ashcroft et al., *The Key Concepts*, 131.

modernism could result in the rejection of cultural and spiritual values. All in all, the process of transition to modernity became adversarial in both Egypt and Turkey, since the process in Europe had been the result of grassroots movements that had grown out of social unrest, whereas in Egypt and Turkey it began as a result of the awareness of the technological superiority of Europe following military defeats by the Western Powers, and gradually extended to all areas of life. Furthermore, the modernization movement in Europe grew organically over many centuries, in many countries, with many false starts and setbacks, whereas the process in Egypt and Turkey took place very rapidly, in the space of a few decades. And whilst in Europe, it was a bottom-up process of reclaiming the rights to self-determination and knowledge from crown and church, in Egypt and Turkey these transformations were top-down, imposed on an (outwardly) passive population by ideologists at the top.

The comparative analysis of the process of transition to modernity in Egypt and Turkey in *The Cairo Trilogy* and *Cevdet Bey and Sons* is undertaken in the context provided above, and aims to shed light on the way these two countries went through this process, as well as on the effect it had on their peoples and cultures.

Based on Edward Said's affiliative reading as a new sort of criticism, the first chapter of this work is on the lives and literary careers of Naguib Mahfouz and Orhan Pamuk, enabling the reader to read their works within the network of the socio-cultural structures of the societies they grew up in. Moreover, both writers reflect themselves in the personality of the characters in their novels, so in analyzing the texts, an autobiographical knowledge of the writers will be useful, for example, to comprehend Kamal's intellectual crisis in *The Cairo Trilogy* and Ahmet's passion for artistic imitation in *Cevdet Bey and Sons.*

The second chapter of this work is about the first attempts at modernization in Egypt and the Ottoman Sultanate, and covers the historical references in *The Cairo Trilogy* and *Cevdet Bey and Sons* based on new historicism as a literary frame, due to the close relationship between history and literature. Regarding the continuity of history, historical knowledge of modernization in Egypt and Turkey (or the Ottoman Sultanate) enables a better analysis of these novels, both of which are set during critical periods. *The Cairo Trilogy* is set during a time when Egypt was under British occupation and includes the 1919 Revolution, focusing on the historical, social, political and cultural structure of Egypt through the story of a middle class Egyptian family caught in the clash of tradition and modernity. Pamuk starts *Cevdet Bey and Sons* in a critical period as well, as the book opens with the last years of the Ottoman

Sultanate and the assassination attempt on the last Sultan, Abdulhamid II. A large degree of continuity exists between the socio-historical, political, and cultural developments of Egypt and Turkey and their first attempts at modernization, from Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, which was followed by attempts to modernize by Muhammed Ali (r. 1806-1849) and his successors, to the modernization attempts of Selim III (r. 1789-1807) and his successors in Turkey.

The third chapter of this work contextualizes the process of modernization in Egypt and Turkey through *The Cairo Trilogy* and *Cevdet Bey and Sons* within the framework of the proper meaning of modernity. Considering the time frames of the novels (1917-1944 for the *Cairo Trilogy* and 1905-1970 for *Cevdet Bey and Sons*) it can be proposed that the citizens of both Egypt and Turkey were anxious about the future of their countries from the outset. Egypt was a British Protectorate in 1917 during World War I, while the Ottoman Sultanate was undergoing a period of political and social uncertainty. During this period, both countries sent students to Europe to observe the technological developments abroad and to train according to the curricula of the countries they were sent to, so that they could reduce the technological deficiencies of their own countries based on their experiences. Associating modernization with the imitation of their European host countries, these students adopted a point of view that evaluated the world in terms of binary oppositions, based on the idea of the backward East versus the modern West. Both Mahfouz and Pamuk give voice to such attitudes—which were a common characteristic of the process of modernization in Egypt and Turkey—from the mouths of their characters in *The Cairo Trilogy* and *Cevdet Bey and Sons*. The first generation in both works is the one on whom the influences of traditional ways of life are most heavily felt. Both Mahfouz and Pamuk choose to narrate the social, political and cultural conflicts of the transition to modernity through the experiences of their second-generation characters. Kamal in *The Cairo Trilogy* and Refik in *Cevdet Bey and Sons* are representatives of the conflict between past and present. When it comes to the third generation, an absolute break from the past is unavoidable, and finds its epitomes in the life experiences of Ahmad Shawkad of *The Cairo Trilogy* and Ahmet of *Cevdet Bey and Sons*.

Through these various analytical lenses, this book illustrates how the parallel intellectual and historical transformations that took place in Egypt and Turkey are portrayed by Naguib Mahfouz and Orhan Pamuk through their stories of three generations: *The Cairo Trilogy* and *Cevdet Bey and Sons*.

Chapter I

Two Controversial Novelists:
Naguib Mahfouz and Orhan Pamuk

As stated above, the objective of this study is to analyze the process of the transition to modernity in Egypt and Turkey through two literary works: *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-7) by Naguib Mahfouz and *Cevdet Bey and Sons* [*Cevdet Bey ve Oğulları*] (1982) by Orhan Pamuk. These works project the historical, social and cultural transformations from traditionalism to modernism in Egypt and Turkey through fictions that reflect the stories of three generations across the time spans depicted in the two works (1917-1944 for *The Cairo Trilogy* and 1905-1970 for *Cevdet Bey and Sons*). The narratives represent upheavals not only in Egypt and Turkey but also in a world in the process of convulsive change.

Beginning this work with a chapter focusing on the backgrounds of the authors of the works that will be analyzed is intended to shed light on the deep relationship between the literary works and their authors. This approach is inspired by Edward Said's theory of *worldliness*, or material context of the text, which begins by questioning "who addresses us in the text."[1] Besides the range of circumstances surrounding the author, the historical moment in which the text was written is also crucial in analyzing a text. As Said underlines in *The World, The Text and The Critic*, it enables the critic to release the text from isolation and "imposes upon the scholar or critic the presentational problem of historically recreating or reconstructing the possibilities from which the text arose."[2] Worldliness, or the material context of the text, enables one to understand the position of the writer in the world, as the texts are "a part of the social world, human life and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted."[3] According to Said, the text's worldliness can be approached through *affiliative reading*, "a process of identification through

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[1] Ashcroft et al., *The Key Concepts*, 16.
[2] Edward Said, *The World, The Text and The Critic*, (Vintage: London, 1991), 174-5
[3] Ibid., 4.

culture."[4] Affiliative reading, which enables one "to make visible, to give materiality back to the strands holding the text to society, author and culture,"[5] can take into account a wide range of circumstances, including the "status of the author, historical moment, conditions of publication, diffusion and reception, values drawn upon, values and ideas assumed, a framework of consensually held tacit assumptions, presumed background, and so on."[6] The status of the author has an important role, according to Said's affiliative network. In this approach, it is implied that the text cannot be considered separately from its author, the social context in which the author grew up, and the cultural dynamics of the society within which the text came into being. Thus, according to Said's affiliation theory, basic knowledge about the lives of Naguib Mahfouz and Orhan Pamuk and the events which are regarded as significant in terms of their literary careers will provide a foundation for analyzing their works in a multidimensional way.

Apart from growing up in different social classes and family structures, the two experimental and visionary novelists—the Egyptian 1988 Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz and the Turkish 2006 Nobel Laureate Ferit Orhan Pamuk—have a lot in common. On the one hand, their Nobel Prizes caused them to be regarded as cultural representatives of Egypt and Turkey respectively; on the other hand, they both drew the attention of the Egyptian and Turkish governments due to their striking views, for which they have both been heavily criticized. Probably one of the most notable events for which both these authors come across is their denouncing of the fatwa issued by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, Iran's Supreme Leader, condemning Salman Rushdie to death for blasphemy against Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses*.[7] Mahfouz and Pamuk's controversial attitudes changed the course of their lives; while the former was stabbed in the neck outside his home Cairo[8] after his publication of *Children of Gabalawi*, the latter claimed to be "the Most Hated Turk"[9] in an interview after the publication of his seventh novel, *Snow.* It is also important to note that in

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[4] Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 25.
[5] Ibid., 175.
[6] Ibid., 174-175.
[7] For Mahfouz's case see, Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, (New York: Routledge Inc., 1993), 239. For Orhan Pamuk's case see Michael McGaha, *Autobiographies of Orhan Pamuk: The Writer in His Novels*, (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2008), 31.
[8] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5297470.stm   Accessed November 19, 2014.
[9] McGaha, *Autobiographies of Orhan Pamuk*, 1.

The Cairo Trilogy and *Cevdet Bey and Sons*, both Mahfouz and Pamuk reflect their own personalities in those of their fictional characters Kamal and Ahmet respectively. Taking this into consideration, it can be proposed that without knowledge about the authors and the circumstances under which their novels came into being, analysis of those works cannot go beyond personal assumptions or structural inertness. Given this, the remainder of this chapter examines the lives of these authors and the cultural context of the societies they grew up in.

Naguib Mahfouz

The contemporary Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz is considered to be one of the most distinguished authors of the Arab world. His distinction stems not only from the Nobel Prize for Literature which he won in 1988, but also from his extraordinary ability to portray the common lives of the Cairo middle class in their daily routines. As there is no official (auto) biography of Mahfouz to date, important information about the Egyptian writer's life and literary career can be gleaned from Gamal al-Ghitani's *The Mahfouz Dialogs*. This work was highly regarded by Mahfouz himself, not only because it remains a loyal reflection of the truth regarding his life, but also because of the close relationship between Ghitani and himself: "This book has relieved me of the need to think of writing an autobiography because of the essential and basic data that it contains concerning the course of my life, not to mention the fact that the author is himself a pillar of the latter."[10]

Kazım Ürün, who had the opportunity to interview Mahfouz and reports on it in *Naguib Mahfouz and His Socio-Realist Novels* (*Necip Mahfuz ve Toplumsal Gerçekçi Romanları*), is another source on Mahfouz's life. The abovementioned sources aside, those who wish to research Mahfouz's life and literary career have to focus on the limited number of interviews he has given. On many occasions, Mahfouz was asked about writing his own autobiography, and the answer to this question came in an article he wrote for *Al-Hilal* magazine, entitled "Ana ufakkir idhan fa anaa ghayr mawjuud" [I think, therefore, I do not exist]:

> The idea of writing an autobiography does not occur to me occasionally. Sometimes, I think of writing it as a strictly autobiographical novel. But because of the adherence to the truth required in such work, I find it a serious dilemma and a crazy adventure. This is especially true since I have

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[10] Gamal al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, translated by Humphrey Davies, (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 65.

gone through a long period of transformation in which all our values have
been rocked, falsehood become prevalent, and every individual has been
split in two: one part is social and televisionary whereas the other part
breathes a different life in the dark. No my dear, I think, then, I do not
exist.[11]

Mahfouz was born in 1911 during the worldwide economic crisis just
before the First World War, in al-Jamaliyya, one of the oldest regions of
Cairo, as the child of a middle-class family. By the beginning of the
twentieth century, Cairo already seemed like a modern European city, as it
had been shedding its medieval ways of life.[12] Being the youngest of his
four brothers and two sisters, with a ten-year difference between himself
and the rest of his siblings, Mahfouz was deprived of true fraternal
friendship, the absence of which seems to have affected him deeply; he
attributes his close relationship with his friends to this lack of significant
sibling affection. The age disparity was the biggest obstacle in Mahfouz's
desire to share his ideas with his siblings, as he explained to al-Ghitani:

> I did not have the kind of brother or sister that I could play with, go out
> with, or confide my secrets in. There was between me and them the kind of
> barrier which exists between a child and his parents [...] Because of this,
> friendship played a very important role in my life from a very early age. It
> provided the necessary substitute for the missing fraternity.[13]

The childhood of Kamal Abd al-Jawad in *The Cairo Trilogy* and his
close relationship with his friends may be interpreted as being drawn from
Mahfouz's personal experiences. Conversely, Mahfouz himself asserts that
the stories of brotherly relationships among siblings in his works are a
result of his having being deprived of such relationships in his youth; such
examples can be seen in *The Cairo Trilogy*, *The Beginning and the End*
and *Khan al-Khalili*.[14]

As mentioned above, due to the economic crisis and the First World
War that followed it, the period Mahfouz was born in was a critical one for
Egypt in microcosm and for the rest of the world in macrocosm. Due to its
strategic position, Egypt was exposed to many colonial enterprises,

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[11] Kamel Abdelbadie Elsaadany, *A Study of the Literary Discourse in the Novels of
Naguib Mahfouz: The Dynamics of Gender and Religion*, PhD diss., (University of
Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1999), 7.
[12] Kazım Ürün, *Necip Mahfuz ve Toplumsal Gerçekçi Romanları*, (Konya: Çizgi
Kitabevi, 2012.), p, 59.
[13] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 80.
[14] Ibid., 67.

especially those of France and Britain. Mahfouz had the opportunity to observe his country under British occupation, in the struggle for independence, and as an independent country. All these developments were seen as viable literary material in the analytical eyes of the author, and he drew upon them to reflect the political and historical affairs of his time through his novels.

To understand how the political events of the day became familial affairs in Mahfouz's family, it is worth looking at stories 14, 15, 18, 19 and 23 in his novel *Fountain and Tomb* (first published in 1988). Story 23 offers a good example of how intermingled the matters of nation are with those of family:

> One morning I awaken with sudden harshness. A dark grip grabs and jerks me from the land of dreams. A flood of jangling noise engulfs me. My hair stands on end with horror: voices wail from the hall. Terrible thoughts rip at my flesh and the specter of death rises up before my eyes. I jump out of bed and dash to my closed door, hesitate a moment, then throw it open to face the unknown. My father is seated, my mother leans against the sideboard, and the servant stands in the doorway. They are all crying. My mother sees me and comes to me. "We scared you… Don't be afraid, son." Through a dry throat, I ask, "What […]?" She whispers hoarsely in my ear, "Saad Zaghloul […] May he live on in you!" I cry from my soul, "Saad!" I go back to my room. Gloom hangs everywhere.[15]

When Mahfouz was asked how he viewed his childhood, he observed that: "My life as a child is reflected to some extent in *The Cairo Trilogy* and even more in *Fountain and Tomb*."[16] Although when he was 12, his family moved to al-Abbasiya, a new Cairo suburb, Mahfouz seems to have retained a deep sense of loyalty to al-Jamaliyya, stating that only through writing could he find relief from the heartfelt emotions and obscure feelings of the strange bond between the area, the people who lived there, the historic monuments and himself.[17] Mahfouz explains the importance of Jamaliyya as his source of inspiration thus: "It seems to me that there has to be some link to a specific place, or a specific thing that is the starting point for one's feelings and sensations. […] The writer needs something that shines and inspires."[18] Al-Ghitani records Mahfouz's statement on the indispensability of al-Jamaliyya or "the world of *hara*":

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[15] Naguib Mahfouz, *Fountain and Tomb*, translated by Soad Sobhi, Essam Fattouh and James Kenneson, (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 36.
[16] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 73.
[17] Ibid., 78.
[18] Ibid., 77.

> Even when, later on, I shifted to treating intellectual or symbolic topics, I would also return to the world of hara. What engages me is the reality of that world. There are some whose choice falls on a real or imaginary place, or on a historical period; my preferred world is that of the hara. The hara came to the background of most of my works, so that I could go on living in the area that I love.[19]

Al-Jamaliyya, as the setting of much of Mahfouz's fiction, has been the focus of many researchers, including Rasheed El-Enany. He claims that "Jamaliyya continues to haunt [Mahfouz's] work in various mantles of disguise and lends to it many of its typical characters and physical assets."[20] Drawing upon the third edition of *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, which contains a new introduction added by Gamal al-Ghitani, El-Enany notes that: "*Khan al-Khalili*, *Midaq Alley* and *The Trilogy* are accurate documentations of the features of the area during the period of their events."[21] Cairo's being the cornerstone of Mahfouz's daily life and literary formation has won Mahfouz a reputation for being "a living repository of memories of Cairo."[22] Al-Jamaliyya's rich socio-cultural context enabled Mahfouz to observe different people from diverse countries, as there were not only Egyptians but also Turks and Persians found there.[23] This may be why he describes Egyptian lifestyles alongside those of other peoples in his works, for example, referring to Turkish ways of life in *The Cairo Trilogy*.[24]

Before joining primary school, Mahfouz's education, in common with others of his generation, began at the Kuttab (Qur'an School).[25] Mahfouz claims that the Kuttab taught him how to be naughty, but it also taught him the principles of religion and the principles of reading and writing.[26] Mahfouz's attendance of a mosque school at an early age, as decided by his devout Muslim parents, not only "influenced the prose style of the adult writer," but also "probably contributed to his portrayal of many characters with an interest in Sufism, which he uses to represent a desire to

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[19] Ibid.,, 77-78.

[20] El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz*, 1.

[21] Ibid., 1-2.

[22] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 64.

[23] Ürün, *Necip Mahfuz ve Toplumsal Gerçekçi Romanları*, 62.

[24] Mahfouz, *Palace Walk (The Cairo Trilogy I)*, Translated by William Maynard Hutchins et al., (London: Black Swan, 1994), 226, 302-3.

[25] Ibid., 11.

[26] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 70

withdraw from a world embroiled in conflicts and sick with divided loyalties."[27]

The 1919 uprising was one of the most significant events that left a mark on Mahfouz. He recalled that the "one thing which most shook the security of my childhood was the 1919 Revolution. We saw the British, and we heard the shooting, and I saw the bodies and the bounded in Bayt al-Qadi Square."[28] At the time of revolution, the writer was only seven years old; at that tender age, he observed the violence that marked the uprising of Egyptians against the British:

> I used to look at the thugs who came to Al-Jamaliyya Police Department after their fights in the desert. From a small room on the roof I used to see the demonstrations of the 1919 Revolution, to see women's demonstrations in which low-class women take part on donkey-drawn carts, and to see bullets [of English solders] firing [at the demonstrators] […] My mother used to pull me back away from the window, but I wanted to see everything.[29]

The main pillar of Mahfouz's writing was his ability to interlink politics and social conflicts with the ordinary lives of Egyptians. *The Cairo Trilogy* is the most obvious example of this reality, in terms of reflecting the events of 1919 and the nationalist feelings of the time. When asked about the importance of *The Trilogy*, Mahfouz said that its first volume, *Palace Walk*, expresses the awakening of a society from deep sleep by the advent of a revolution; the second, *Palace of Desire*, shows how caste and class are among the factors that led to the failure of this revolution; and in the third, *Sugar Street*, new revolutions start with the appearance of a new generation of young men.[30]

To a large extent, *The Trilogy* reflects Mahfouz's own experiences. The sharpest example of this is the aforementioned similarity between the author and the *Trilogy*'s main protagonist, Kamal Abd al-Jawad, as Mahfouz himself observed: "Kamal reflects my intellectual crisis that was a generation crisis, as I think. Indeed, Kamal's intellectual crisis in *The Trilogy* was the crisis of all our generation."[31] However, a closer consideration of the author's life reveals that Mahfouz's father and mother were quite different from *The Trilogy*'s tyrannical patriarch, Ahmad Abd

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[27] Mahfouz, *Fountain and Tomb*, 2.
[28] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 73.
[29] El-Enany. *Naguib Mahfouz*, 52.
[30] Elsaadany, *A Study of the Literary Discourse in the Novels of Naguib Mahfouz*, 4
[31] Ibid., 48.

al-Jawad, and the obedient maternal figure, Amina Abd al-Jawad. While recalling his mother's passion for ancient monuments and their walks around Egyptian museums or visits to the Pyramids and the Sphinx, Mahfouz stresses that his mother enjoyed relative freedom, unlike Amina in *The Trilogy,* who is not allowed to go out without the permission of her husband.[32] In fact, his inspiration for a family where the father is a strict disciplinarian and the mother is absolutely subservient was not his own family but one that lived opposite them:

> The house was always closed, the windows were never opened and the only person who ever came out of it was its master, a Levantine called Shaykh Radwan, a man of imposing appearance. My mother would take me to visit this family and I would see that the man's wife was forbidden to go outside. We used to visit them but she never visited us. She used to implore my mother to come and see her.[33]

One of the most crucial aspects of Mahfouz's family, which influenced him and became the subject matter of *The Trilogy*, was his father's obsession with the political events and politicians of the period. When relating tales of his father to Ghitani, the first thing Mahfouz recalled was how his father associated every event in their daily life, great or small, with some public matter, so much so that "he would discuss household matters in the same breath as those of the nation, as though they were one and the same."[34]

Mahfouz grew up in a religious family, as can be seen from his being sent to Qur'an School at an early age. The religious, family and political issues with which he was surrounded due to his father's manner influenced him very much. Talking about the context of his home, Mahfouz notes that their house gave the false impression that no one with any connection to art could possibly emerge from it.

Mahfouz has described the religious nature of their household as the only culture that was available to him as a child. As for the political order, he regarded it as the only thing that connected the house to public life.[35] At the time, Mahfouz was not concerned with literature, nor was anyone in his family engaged in literary activities. Indeed, there were no books in the house other than a copy of the Qur'an and *The Tale of 'Isa Ibn Hisham*, which had been given to his father as a present by one of his friends. The

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[32] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 70-71
[33] Ibid., 71.
[34] Ibid., 71.
[35] Ibid., 72

present was obviously not related to his father's (non-existent) interest in literature; it was merely a token of friendship.[36]

Ghitani proposes that Mahfouz disappointed his father and teachers by declaring his intention to study philosophy, because he was strong in math and science and weak in literary studies. In fact, what young Mahfouz, a talented footballer, wanted above all else was to get a job in a soccer team that would enable him to remain in Cairo. Being good at math and science caused him to think about becoming a doctor or an engineer, but when he started reading articles on philosophy, he found many philosophical questions arising in his own mind, which helped him to determine the direction of his future occupation.[37] Eager to find answers to his questions, Mahfouz pursued his education in the Philosophy Department of the Egyptian University in Cairo. During his university years, Mahfouz applied for two French scholarships, one in language and one in philosophy. He was especially keen to win the language one, so that he could learn advanced French and become a university professor instead of a civil servant. Studying in France would also enable him to focus on literature and art. However, although he ranked number two, he did not win the scholarships, a failure he attributed to the political tendencies and prejudices of the election board.[38]

After obtaining his undergraduate degree in philosophy, Mahfouz was again at a crossroads. He had to decide whether to continue his studies in the field of philosophy, or to switch to literature, which he described as a disease getting out of control. Mahfouz recalled that it was Dr Adham Rajab, his lifelong friend, who first directed his attention to literature:

> I am obliged to Dr Adham who guided my steps toward literature […] I only graduated from the School of Philosophy, and therefore all my studies were merely philosophical. I never realized that I had the ability to be a writer until two years after my graduation. I needed Dr Rajab to give me an idea about the modern English Literary School. Thanks to his library; it was of great help[39]

When Mahfouz became aware of his inclination toward literature, the idea of studying literature together with philosophy came to mind. However, resistance to such an idea was clear: the secretary of faculty,

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[36] Ürün, *Necip Mahfuz*, 65.
[37] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 82.
[38] Ürün, *Necip Mahfuz*, 75.
[39] Adel Ata Elyas, *A Thief in Search of His Identity—Naguib Mahfouz's The Thief and The Dogs: A Critical Analysis With A Translation of The Novel*, (PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 1979), 2.

Abbas Mahmud, told him that it would be in violation of the prevailing system for him to study philosophy and literature together.[40] Deciding to stick with philosophy, Mahfouz began to work on an MA thesis entitled "The Concept of Aesthetics in the Philosophy of Islam." In this study, he intended to compare the French philosopher Bergson to Muslim philosophers, but soon after (upon publishing some philosophical articles) he dropped this idea due to his increasingly strong inclinations towards literature. By this point, the question of whether he would prefer philosophy or literature was occupying his mind night after night.[41] Mahfouz recalled the watershed moment in 1936 when he finally knew he had to take the other path:

> I held the book of philosophy in one hand and, the book of Tevfiku'l Hakim, Yahya Hakkı or Taha Huseyn in the other. On the one hand there were philosophical *écoles* in my mind, on the other hand the fictitious characters were appearing in my mind at the same time. [...] I had to decide. Otherwise, I would go mad. The characters of Ehlu'l Kehf that Tevfiku'l Hakim described, the postman that Yahya Hakkı portrayed, the little farmer in the *el-Eyyam* of Taha Huseyn and many characters in Mahmud Teymur all occurred simultaneously in my mind. Then I gave up philosophy and joined the walk of the characters that occurred in my mind.[42]

By deciding to focus on literature, Mahfouz was taking a plunge into the unknown, because the leading writers and intellectuals of the time were giving weight to thought rather than art; art was a kind of rest area for them, a trivial pursuit for which they spared little time. In that period, there was no one among the Egyptian intelligentsia who devoted himself to literature.[43] In spite of this, Mahfouz insisted on his decision and set his course. But then he came across another significant problem: catching up with everything he had missed.

> Time was limited and I had much to do. This is why after I [had] graduated and taken up my duties, I continued working at home. It was as though I was still a student, and this made my father worry about me. He used to say to me, "It is as though you hadn't graduated. I see you sitting at your desk day and night and I ask you, 'Are you going to get a doctorate?' and you tell me no. So why are you wearing yourself out?" My father was worried because I was working such long hours. I felt that time

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[40] Al-Ghitani, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, 82-3.
[41] Ürün, *Necip Mahfuz*, 7
[42] Ibid., 77.
[43] Ibid., 73-4.