

**The Farhat J. Ziadeh
Distinguished Lecture
in Arab and Islamic Studies
2004**



**Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilization
University of Washington, Seattle**

Dear friends and colleagues;

We are very pleased to provide you with a copy of the 2004 Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture in Arab and Islamic Studies: "Naguib Mahfouz: A Retrospective," delivered by Prof. Roger Allen of the University of Pennsylvania on May 8, 2004.

The Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lectureship is dedicated to the promotion and celebration of excellence in the field of Arab and Islamic studies and was formally endowed in 2001. Fahat Ziadeh is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilization at the University of Washington. Few scholars have been so definitive in their impact on generations of students and colleagues in the field of Arab and Islamic studies. Born in Ramallah, Palestine, in 1917, Professor Ziadeh received his B.A. from the American University of Beirut in 1937 and his LL.B from the University of London in 1940. He was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, London, and became a Barrister-at-Law in 1946. In the last years of the British Mandate, he served as a Magistrate for the Government of Palestine before eventually moving with his family to the United States. He was appointed Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Princeton where he taught until 1966, at which time he moved to the University of Washington. The Ziadeh Lectureship is a fitting tribute to his seminal contributions to the building of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Washington as well as his impact on the field nationally and internationally.

The Ziadeh Endowment and the advancement of Arab and Islamic Studies that it fosters are made possible by contributions from a host of colleagues, students, and friends, as well as the exemplary generosity and commitment the Ziadeh family. To all of you have been among these supporters, we want to extend once again our warmest thanks for your continuing participation in helping make this lectureship series possible.

You may also find an electronic copy of Professor Allen's lecture on our departmental web site: <http://depts.washington.edu/nelc/>, as well as other information about the Department and its programs and events, online newsletters, and contact information.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Williams
Chair, Near Eastern
Languages & Civilization

Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization
University of Washington, Seattle

**The Inaugural Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture
in Arab and Islamic Studies**

May 8, 2004

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ: A RETROSPECTIVE

Professor Roger Allen
*Professor of Arabic Language and Literature,
Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,
University of Pennsylvania.*

Roger Allen

Roger Allen obtained his doctoral degree in modern Arabic literature from Oxford University in 1968; he was the first student to obtain a doctorate in this field at Oxford. He wrote his dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. M.M. Badawi, on the early modern Egyptian prose writer, Muhammad al-Muwaylihi (now republished in a second edition as *A Period of Time*, Reading, England: Garnet Press, 1992). Professor Allen has retained a life-long interest in the writings of the Al-Muwaylihi family, and in 1998 he was asked by Professors Sabry Hafez and Gaber Asfour to prepare an edition of the complete works of Muhammad al-Muwaylihi (now published [2002]), and later of the complete works of Ibrahim al-Muwaylihi, published by Al-Maglis al-A'la li-al-Thaqafah (Supreme Council for Culture) in Cairo.

Professor Allen emigrated to the United States in 1968 and joined the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania. The professorial position in Arabic and Comparative Literature that he holds at Penn is actually the oldest professorial post in Arabic (as a separate language in its own right) in the United States, dating back to 1788. At the university he has taught many generations of students, now including some of the most distinguished members of the younger generation of specialists in Arabic literature. He has also been very involved in the improvement of methods of teaching the Arabic language in American universities and colleges; he has written a textbook (*Let's Learn Arabic*, 1986-88) and conducted many workshops in the USA, Europe, and the Arab world on language teaching.

In addition to Arabic pedagogy, Professor Allen's research has included major contributions in the field of Arabic Literature, including, among others: his seminal study on the *Arabic Novel* (Syracuse University Press, 1982); an anthology of critical writings, *Modern Arabic Literature*, Library of Literary Criticism Series (New York: Ungar Publishing Company, 1985), editorship of the volume on *The Post-Classical Period* in the *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*; his *The Arabic Literary Heritage* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) and dozens of articles on Arabic literature.

Roger Allen has also produced a number of translations of modern Arabic narrative, including Nobel laureate Najib Mahfuz's *Mirrors* (1977) and *Autumn Quail* (1985), Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *The Ship* (1985, with Adnan Haydar), 'Abd al-rahman Munif's *Endings* (1988), and collections of short stories by Najib Mahfuz and Yusuf Idris. Allen's translation of a collection of short stories by Mahfouz—*God's World* (1973), was mentioned by the Nobel Committee in their citation in 1988, and Professor Allen was centrally involved in the nomination process itself (see the article "Arabic Literature and the Nobel Prize," in *World Literature Today*—"A Nobel Symposium", Winter 1988).

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ: A RETROSPECTIVE

Roger Allen

ENCOUNTERING MAHFOUZ¹

My topic tonight is Naguib Mahfouz, a retrospective.² Naguib Bey is now in his 93rd year, having been born on the 10th December 1911 and registered on the 11th (a fact unearthed by Raymond Stock, a doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania who is currently writing Mahfouz's biography and completing a study of his Pharaonic works). My own relationship with the Mahfouz that I know and love now dates back some 35 years, and I would like to use this occasion to indulge in a certain amount of personal reminiscence, not least in order to provide a written record of what may—once more in retrospect—be of some more enduring interest.

I first met Naguib Mahfouz in 1967. I was taken to his office by Magdi Wahba, then Undersecretary of State for Culture, Professor of English at Cairo University, and Secretary-Treasurer of the worldwide Samuel Johnson Society. Magdi was one of the three great Englishmen-Egyptians of his era, the other two being M.M. Badawi, my own beloved supervisor, and Mahmoud Manzalaoui. I was escorted into a room in the mansion at the head of Shari' Ma' had Swisri in Zamalek, then the headquarters of the cinema censorship office for which Mahfouz was serving as a disarmingly effective arbiter. The room was shuttered, and at first it was difficult to make out the smiling personage that greeted me. With apologies, Mahfouz explained that he has an eye condition which is intolerant of bright light. With typical humor he went on to note that it was very fortunate that the daylight hours were spent as a cultural bureaucrat, because, with that out of the way, he could devote

¹ Let me begin by acknowledging that it is a great honor to have been asked to deliver this, the second Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture. Farhat is one of the foundational figures in Arabic studies in the United States. I myself am now sufficiently aged to recall that, having learned Arabic at Oxford through the pages of Thatcher's *Arabic Grammar*, with sentences such as "the lame girl is in the yellow room," and "the shaikh's daughter has flashing eyes" (watch out for the dual there, folks!), I was a member of that generation of learners of Arabic for whom the sheer relevance of the book that was universally known as "*Ziadeh and Winder*" was positively shocking. Then there is, of course, the illustrious career of Farhat, the scholar of Islamic law and its practitioners. And beyond that, there lie the administrative roles, not least of which, in my experience, was the period he spent as Executive Director of the Center for Arabic Studies Abroad (CASA), during which the finances of that organization positively flourished under his tutelage. Farhat is, if you will allow me to use a very British category, the living personification of a scholar and a gentleman. At this point I am also reminded of the sage words of my esteemed and now lamented colleague at the University of Pennsylvania, George Makdisi, who pointed out to me that scholars are truly blessed when they can count on the support and love of a life-companion. The work then becomes something akin to a "team-effort." So, that acknowledged, let us also salute his wife Su'ad and the Ziadeh team.

I would also like to salute my predecessor in this lecture series and fellow-graduate of Oxford, namely Irfan Shahid, whose long-standing devotion to the study of the linkages between Byzantium and the Arabs, not to mention his enduring affection for the works of both Gibran and Shawqi, provide us all with models for emulation.

² Surrendering to the inevitable, I am transliterating my subject's name as "Naguib Mahfouz" rather than using the preferred Library of Congress version, Najib Mahfuz.

the hours between 4 and 6 to writing. Whence comes the disarming truth that, until his retirement in 1970, everything that Mahfouz wrote was conceived, organized, and penned in what was essentially his "spare time." I have just used the word "organized," and that verb accurately describes the way in which this great author has arranged his daily life and his writing career. In another little nugget he informed me that the writing of the renowned *Trilogy* of novels had taken him five years to plan and execute; the process had been so long that he had kept files on individual characters in order to ensure that, whenever he came back to them, their predominant features would be the same. He asked me what I was doing in Cairo, and I told him that my research was on Muhammad al-Muwaylihi's early narrative work, *Hadith `Isa ibn Hisham*, of which I was preparing an edition and translation. Learning that I was a translator, he immediately asked me what I thought of Trevor Le Gassick's recently published translation of *Zuqaq al-Midaqq* (*Midaq Alley*, originally published in Beirut in 1966). I should note here that, while this publication date makes it the first published text of Mahfouz in English, Philip Stewart's version of *Awlad haratina* (1959, 1967 in book form; now republished in full as *Children of Gebelawi*³) antecedes it, having been submitted as an Oxford thesis in 1962. In answer to Mahfouz's leading question I replied that *Midaq Alley* read very well in English, to which he replied that, while he agreed, he wished that some of the more authentic aspects of the language of the original had been retained (to be fair to my colleague, Trevor, I have to acknowledge here that, when this novel was republished in a new edition, he did restore a good deal of such detail to the translated text). At this point I suggested that I too would like to translate some of Mahfouz's works into English, and he readily agreed. I still retain the list that we drew up at the time along with his signature: it included, at my specific request, a generous selection of short-stories and the novel, *Al-Summan wa-al-Kharif*. I was, of course, asked why I selected that novel from among many others, and I replied that I was fascinated by the way it treated the Egyptian revolution itself and its aftermath.

By 1973 those translations had been completed. And while it took till 1985 to see *Autumn Quail* in print (AUC Press), the anthology of short stories which I had prepared with an Egyptian colleague, `Akif Abadir, appeared in 1973 as *God's World*, that being the title of one of the stories that it contained. When this anthology was cited in the Nobel Award announcement in 1988, this title turned out to be problematic, in that virtually every Egyptian critic, ignoring the cited publication date (1973), assumed that it referred to Mahfouz's Arabic collection, *Dunya Allah* (1963) rather than our English collection which was culled from a number of short-story collections all the way up to 1970. I sent Mahfouz a copy of this collection in 1973, and yet another letter from him informs me that it arrived on his birthday.

I have already alluded to the Nobel Prize announcement which was released on October 13th, 1988, immediately transforming Mahfouz's relatively quiet life, not to mention that of several Western specialists on his works. As might be expected, there is a history behind these bald facts. A large amount of speculation and rumor, most especially in Egypt itself, has focused on the nomination process and on who was responsible for Mahfouz's nomination. Most of this repertoire of comment shows little or no awareness of the nomination process involved. In the immediate aftermath of the announcement, there was, of course,

3 Colorado: Passeggiata Press, 1997.

considerable rejoicing that Egyptian and Arabic literature had been acknowledged in such an international fashion, but there was also a good deal of contumely, led in part by those who, like Yusuf Idris, another great Egyptian writer of narratives, challenged Mahfouz's "worthiness" (*jadarah*) while overlooking the inevitably central role of translation in the Nobel selection process—a point I was able to "discuss" with Idris at the Marbid Festival in Baghdad later that same year, and those who disapproved of Mahfouz's positive posture towards the Camp David Accords with Israel, even stretching to the point of suggesting that the nomination had come from those Israeli scholars who had, in Mahfouz's own words, written the best studies of his works.

So, here is the story as I know it. In 1984 my colleague and friend, the distinguished Palestinian poet and critic, Salma Jekyll, was invited to organize and participate in a conference on Arabic poetry to be held in Stockholm. Her host was Sigrid Kahle, the wife of John Kahle who had spent several years as Swedish Ambassador in Tunisia. In a further linkage, John's father was Paul Kahle, the Oxford-resident Swedish Arabist who had been editing the manuscripts of the plays of the Egyptian oculist-playwright, Ibn Daniyal (d. 1311). Kahle's incomplete edition of these plays was finished and published by M.M. Badawi and Derek Hopwood in 1992.⁴ Sigrid Kahle was and is an enthusiastic student and translator into Swedish of the poetry of Adunis. During the conference Dr. Jekyll was taken to the Nobel Library, where she noted and drew attention to the virtual absence of Arabic literature from its shelves. It was perhaps not surprising therefore that in 1986 Dr. Jekyll received a request from the Nobel Committee to write a report on the current state of contemporary Arabic literature; the focus in that confidential report was on two writers, Adunis and Naguib Mahfouz, and I contributed to the latter section. In the same year (1986), the journal *World Literature Today* was similarly asked to prepare a second "Nobel Symposium" in which recent winners of the prize were to be compared and contrasted with other writers in different world literary traditions who had, at least thus far, not won the prize. I wrote the article on Arabic Literature for that special issue in the summer of 1987 and again discussed the relative merits of Adunis and Mahfouz, suggesting reasons—largely connected with the availability of translated texts—as to why the latter was the more plausible candidate. As part of this special issue of the journal devoted to the Nobel Prize and other cultural traditions, this article was also sent to Stockholm following its publication in Oklahoma in February 1988.⁵ What occurred subsequent to that is, of course, confidential and unknown to me, but I can add a brief footnote to the above details. In 1991 a Scandinavian scholar, Kjell Espmark, published a study under the title, *The Nobel Prize in Literature: a study of the criteria behind the choices*.⁶ Coming to Mahfouz's selection process, he refers specifically to my *World Literature Today* article, and in the following terms:

⁴ Ibn Daniyal, *Three Mediaeval Arabic Shadow Plays*, Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Series, 1992. Salma Jekyll describes her participation in the Nobel Award ceremony in "The Arab Laureate and the Road to the Nobel," in *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition* ed. Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993, pp. 10-20.

⁵ *World Literature Today*, Vol. 62 no. 2 (Spring 1988).

⁶ Kjell Espmark, *The Nobel Prize in Literature: a study of the criteria behind the choices*, Boston: G.K. Hall, 1991.

Finally there was Roger Allen's examination, "Arabic Literature and the Nobel Prize," an essay that turned out to be prophetic. His short list contained only two names, Mahfouz and Adonis—as we have seen, the very two Arabic candidates who were being considered—and his argument concluded with a plea for the former.

I cannot help but suppress a wry smile as Espmark concludes his comments by saying that "this reads like a justification several months in advance..."⁷

October 13th 1994 was thus the anniversary of Mahfouz's Nobel Award, and that date was selected for a vicious attack on him outside his apartment. Were it not for the fact that the Police Hospital is directly opposite his home, he would almost certainly not have survived. This too was a life-altering event, although not of the kind that anyone would have wished. In the first place, the Egyptian authorities now insisted on protecting their most precious cultural asset, something he had always steadfastly refused. Beyond that however, he literally lost the ability to write for himself, except with the utmost difficulty and using his other hand. Since that fateful day, his "writings" have in fact been dictations. The primary recipient of those "pensees" and witticisms, both of which remain hallmarks of his conversation, is the prominent playwright, Muhammad Salmawi, who every Saturday goes to Mahfouz's apartment, discusses a wide variety of events with him, and then publishes "Mahfouz's thoughts" in an edition of *Al-Ahram* the following week. Many of these segments have been translated by Salmawi himself and are published as *Naguib Mahfouz at Sidi Gaber: Reflections of a Nobel Laureate 1994-2001*.⁸ The very title is a fine example of Mahfouz's current world view and, one might add, his sardonic sense of humor. Seeing life as a journey—in this case by train—he draws attention to the fact that, as a suburb of his beloved Alexandria, Sidi Gaber is almost at the end of the line but not quite.

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ AND LITERARY HISTORY

Let me now turn to a consideration of some of the issues that seem to me to arise when one indulges in a retrospective on Mahfouz's achievements. A retrospective implies, of course, an exercise in literary history. In a series of recent articles, I have been exploiting my 35-year career in order to re-examine the history of the study of modern Arabic narrative genres, believing most strongly that, in spite of the natural conservatism implicit in the literary-historical enterprise, literary history itself has its own history, and, most especially in the case of literary traditions such as that of Arabic, it is a history that is in need of constant rewriting.⁹ It is in the placement of the development of fiction into the larger picture of what is generally termed in Arabic "*al-nahdah*" (renaissance) that the problem needs, I believe, to be addressed.

Within this particular context, that of the Arabic novel and its development, the question that faces the literary historian in the early years of the 21st century is: what

⁷ Espmark, pg. 158.

⁸ Cairo: AUC Press, 2001.

⁹ See, for example, Roger Allen. "Literary history and the Arabic novel," *World Literature Today*, Vol. 75 no. 2 (Spring 2001): 205-13. Incidentally, the issue (devoted to Contemporary Arabic Literature) has a splendid picture of Mahfouz on its cover.

exactly is the “history” that is being recorded, and which major parameters are to be applied. Among such parameters that seem to me to be less useful is what I would term the principle of “one model of the renaissance (*nahdah*) fits all.” It is, of course, convenient for the history of the Egyptian Arabic novel that the one model consistently applied in this context has been that of Egypt itself. Thus, the process of “renaissance” has involved a pre-modern (pre-1800?) period of almost unmitigated gloom (usually subsumed under the derogatory term, “decadence” [*inhitai*]), then an abrupt encounter with Western culture in the form of Napoleon’s invasion, the beginnings of a transfer of “influence” (particularly through the process of translation), followed by a varying lengthly development of different genres—novel, short story, and drama, for example—within the context of each Arab society and region, all within the framework of a tense relationship of “influence” stemming from Western cultures. I have deliberately exaggerated the terms of reference of such an approach here, but there is, needless to say, a good deal of evidence (and in both Arabic and Western languages) to support such a portrait of this version of literary history. However, at this juncture I would like to stress two points. The first is that, as I have already noted, this view is very one-sided, in that it totally ignores the contribution of the pre-modern tradition of Arabic narrative. It is in this very context that the award of the Nobel Prize and the subsequent focus on particular pre-1967 works of Naguib Mahfouz is, in my opinion, less helpful for literary-historical purposes. The one-sided idea that the novel is an “imported” genre in the Arab world, with no reference to the other part of the picture—the role of pre-modern Arabic narrative genres—is confirmed by the linkage of the *Trilogy* and its author to earlier European models (Mahfouz, we learn, is “the Dickens of Cairo”, etc.). The second point I would like to make is that, as critics in the different regions of the Arab world begin the process of exploring their own local narrative heritages, it becomes clearer than ever that the “one model of the *nahdah*” only succeeds in suppressing the manifold elements of particularity which are the anticipated consequence of the cultural and linguistic diversity of a region as vast as that of the Arab world and its individual nations. Just to give a few examples: the countries of the Arab Gulf region where fictional genres have now begun to appear with some frequency have been able to refer not only to the Western heritage of fiction in developing the narrative models that will best suit their purposes, but also to the works of Naguib Mahfouz himself and all the other Arab novelists who have been participants in the process of bringing the Arabic novel to its current stage of maturity. Morocco provides an example of another type of difference, in that, quite apart from the different patterns of colonial influence represented by French educational policies in the Maghrib region as a whole, Morocco itself was not subject to Ottoman suzerainty; thus the attitude of contemporary intellectuals to the continuities of their cultural tradition and thus to the relationship between pre-modern and modern narrative genres and styles is quite different from that of other regions.

THE TRILOGY—*Palace Walk* (1990), *Palace of Desire* (1991), *Sugar Street* (1992).

In such a revised, variegated, and regionally particularized literary-historical context, what then is the status and role of Mahfouz’s great *Trilogy*? Within a more generalized frame of reference, many critics have responded to that question, and from a variety of different viewpoints. I do not wish to summarize such a huge library of works here, but merely

to suggest that we can view it from within two separate chronological perspectives. Seen within its own time-frame, that of the pre-1967 period (the June war, known in Arabic as "*al-naksah*" [the setback]), being long since acknowledged as a watershed in modern Arab thought), the work can be seen as providing Egyptians with a valuable account of a nation and its people during a crucial period of confrontation and transition. In Egyptian and Arab-world terms the timing of the *Trilogy* was perfect (in spite of the often quoted details about the difficulties that Mahfouz encountered in getting such a huge work published). From a post-revolutionary perspective Egyptians could look back on the anterior period and discover a lovingly precise record (in both the *Trilogy* and the novels of the 1940s) of exactly what it was that they had been struggling to escape. Each volume is named after a street where the members of different generations from a single family, that of `Abd al-Jawwad (Gawwad in Cairene dialect), live. The daily existences, the trials and tribulations, the generational squabbles of the individuals who make up this family, all become emblematic of an entire period of 20th century Egyptian life, spanning a period between about 1916 and 1944. The level of Mahfouz's interest in and research on this period is aptly reflected in the highly successful way in which he manages to capture historical moments, social trends, and intellectual movements within a broad canvas that his readers soon recognized as being totally authentic.

The dates of publication of what were to become the three volumes of the *Trilogy*, 1956 and 1957, were part of a new and very different era in the life of Egypt—the Czech arms deal, the Suez invasion, the Aswan High Dam, the Bandung Conference, and, in Gamal `Abd al-Nasir, a new leader for the Arab world. Indeed the following year (1958) was to witness the creation of the United Arab Republic, which, in spite of the issues that led to its demise in 1961, was the clearest possible expression of aspirations for Arab unity. In this transformed context the *Trilogy* became not only the record of what had been achieved, but also the clearest possible example of the novel genre fulfilling its generic purpose as a reflector and advocate of change. Like few other works in modern Arabic literature, it has long since come to be generally recognized as a "classic," pure and simple. Another such work, I would suggest, is Badr Shakir al-Sayyab's poem, "*Unshudat al-Matar*". In both cases, the literary work transcends local concerns of time and place to become something more archetypal and universal.

From a 21st century perspective and most especially following the Nobel Award in 1988, the *Trilogy*, much praised in the Nobel citation, also becomes a capstone gesture. A prolonged process of translation, adaptation, imitation, and domestication that begins with the earliest examples of modern Arabic narrative in the 19th century is crowned by a work that provides incontrovertible proof that the novel genre is not merely an effective tool for effecting social change—that had already been abundantly demonstrated elsewhere and earlier—but that it was now also firmly ensconced in the modern tradition of Arabic letters. The lengthy training period, one might say, was at an end, and the genre could now begin to fulfill its role as an agent of not only social but also generic change.

It is precisely in this context that the true extent of Mahfouz's own esthetic sensitivity becomes so obvious, in that he seems to have been among the very first to appreciate that the profound political and social transformations he was witnessing in the immediate af-