

termath of the Egyptian revolution of 1952 were such as to render his great experiment in social-realism through the novels of the 1940s and early '50s no longer the most effective literary vehicle for his fictional genius. In a word, the *Trilogy* of novels, for all their detailed account of a society over a 30-year period and their devotion to the continuing development of various aspects of novel-writing technique, was very much a transitional work within the total framework of Mahfouz's oeuvre. Whence, if you will, the "problem" associated with the attention afforded the work in the Nobel citation some 30 years later in 1988 and the subsequent association of these three novels with Arabic novelistic modernity in the eyes of Western literary critics and readers who had access to its pages through the newly issued and much celebrated translations such as those published in English by Doubleday (and supervised by Jacqueline Onassis in person).¹⁰ Was the celebration of Mahfouz in the aftermath of the Nobel award in 1988 as the "Dickens of Cairo" (or was it the Balzac or Flaubert?) intended as a genuine compliment to the Egyptian Nobel Laureate, or was it rather to be construed as something akin to a pat on the head to an Arab author who had managed to replicate a European family saga-novel in Arabic? More to the point within the context of the Arabic novel itself, by the year 1988—some 20 years after the June War—had not a younger generation of Arab novelists inspired by Mahfouz's example, and indeed Naguib Mahfouz himself, taken the Arabic novel in many new and different directions?¹¹

THE 1960s

The work through which Mahfouz demonstrated his realization that a change of direction was inevitable was also the one that has caused him the most grief ever since, namely *Awlad haratina* (available in two translated versions: Philip Stewart's *Children of Gebelawi* [mentioned above], and Peter Theroux's *Children of the Alley* [Cairo: Doubleday, 1996]). Making use of the prophetic figures of Adam (Adham), Moses (Jabal), Jesus (Rifa'ah), and Muhammad (Qasim), Mahfouz traces the history of Man's relationship with monotheistic faith through to the modern period represented by the fifth figure of 'Arafah, the Arabic equivalent of "scientia" or science. The sequence of faith-systems is placed within the allegorical context of the "*harah*" (quarter), within which the proclivity to violence—so regrettably a central part of the role of religious belief in the history of mankind (as contemporary events illustrate with devastating clarity)—is symbolized by the looming presence of the "*futuwwat*" or thug gangs who habitually terrorize the inhabitants of "the quarter." Beyond and outside all this resides the figure of Jabalawi (Gebelawi), who ejects Adham from his house forever and then watches in despair as his descendants abuse and misuse the *waqf* (endowment) that he has consigned to them. In the final section of the narrative, 'Arafah, possessed of a remarkable destructive substance, goes to Jabalawi's house outside the quarter and kills him.

An Egyptian reading public, already thoroughly inured through the games of censor-

¹⁰ For details on this process, see the recent account by William M. Hutchins, "Translating Arabic: a personal note," *Translation review* no. 65 (2003): 7-15.

¹¹ A notion most clearly reflected in Edward Said's article, "Goodbye to Mahfouz," originally published in *London Review of Books* Vol. 10 no. 22 (8 Dec., 1988): 10-11; reprinted as the Foreword to Elias Khoury, *Little Mountain* trans. Maia Tabet, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, ix-xxi, and in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

ship to “read between the lines,” was not slow to realize the implications of what Mahfouz was saying in this work. Here was the now celebrated—at least in Arabic-world terms—novelist and personification of social-realism turning his attention, and in a thoroughly allegorical fashion, to a new topic. The problem with this scenario, of course, is that the topic was not actually a “new” one for Mahfouz, but rather it required a much greater familiarity with the writer’s earlier career in order to discover the extent of his interest in the relationship between modernity, religious belief, philosophy, and the development of a just society in a post-independence Arab nation. Such subtleties were however buried in a vociferous protest from Al-Azhar while publication of the episodes in the newspaper, *Al-Abram*, was still in progress. It is, no doubt, a telling sign of the changing balance of influence and power inside Egypt between 1959 and now that the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, whose editorials were widely regarded as being the mouthpiece of President `Abd al-Nasir himself, stood by Mahfouz and steadfastly refused to stop publication. With publication complete, a compromise was reached: the work would never be published in book-form in Egypt. That stipulation has been honored to the letter ever since, although a doctored edition of the text was published in Beirut in 1967.¹² Nor unfortunately does the story end there.

Following the award of the Nobel Prize to Mahfouz in 1988, what should have been Mahfouz’s big moment on the world stage was substantially compromised by what has since come to be regarded as a major confrontation of cultural values. A group of Shi`i citizens of the English city of Bradford became outraged at the contents of a recently published novel: *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, a British author of Indian extraction. Ignoring its clearly fictional identity and its fatally sophisticated reader-expectations, they sent a copy of the text first to the Pakistan of Benazir Bhutto, whence it made its way to Iran. The then Supreme ruler of Iran, Imam Khomeini, informed of the contents of the novel, issued his famous *fatwa* condemning Rushdie to death. Here is not the place to go into the particulars of this tragic situation in detail, but it is important to note that the implications for Mahfouz turned out to be considerable. Firstly, as the recent Nobel prize-winner and a now prominent non-Western litterateur, he was asked for his views and stated that he firmly believed in the principles of freedom of expression. That was before he himself had had a chance to read parts of Rushdie’s work for himself; he later declared his dislike of the work. He was speaking of what was for him a matter of principle, but that was sufficient to have an Egyptian popular preacher, one `Umar `Abd al-Rahman, pronounce a death-sentence on Mahfouz himself, it being suggested that Rushdie would never have penned *Satanic Verses* had Mahfouz not “led the way” with *Awlad baratina*.¹³ It was this tragic sequence of events—one that grotesquely illustrates the differing definitions (or lack thereof) for fiction and its major principle of irony across the great divide of cultural and religious traditions—that led to the attempt on Mahfouz’s life in 1994. All this controversy aside, it is important to note that *Awlad baratina* is also a pivotal work in

¹² It is important to note that this 1967 edition of the work is not entirely complete. For details, see Philip Stewart, “*Awlad baratina*: A Tale of Two texts,” *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* Vol. 4 no. 1 (Jan. 2001): 37-42.

¹³ `Umar `Abd al-Rahman was first imprisoned by the Egyptian authorities, then exiled to the Sudan, whence he made his way to the United States. He was implicated in the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York and is now serving a prison-sentence.

any comprehensive survey of Mahfouz's oeuvre. Admittedly it may not sit terribly well in a literary-historical framework that insists on linking his works to earlier trends in European fiction, but within a broader and less culturally hegemonic perspective this allegorical novel may be seen as looking both backwards to Mahfouz's earlier concerns as a graduate student in philosophy and forward to a whole series of later works that invoke the "*harab*" in an quest for linkages between the sacred and secular.

The 1960s emerge in retrospect as one of the darkest eras in modern Egyptian history. Beginning with the break-up of the United Arab Republic with Syria and the imprisonment of large numbers of leftist intellectuals, the dominance of the Arab Socialist Union as the sole political entity and the omnipresent activities of the secret police (I was in Cairo in 1966 and can vouch for the latter) created an atmosphere of suspicion, fear and resentment, all of which produced a widespread sense of alienation. The mood is perfectly captured in a whole series of novels that Mahfouz wrote during this period. From a critical perspective I would suggest that it is among these novels that we find Mahfouz's finest exercises in fiction. The first of them, *Al-Liss wa-al-Kilab* (1961; *The Thief and the Dogs*, 1984) clearly demonstrates that Mahfouz is now the total master of those fictional techniques—particularly regarding the function of dialogue and interior monologue—that are not fully controlled in the texts of the *Trilogy*; this novel would be my personal selection as his finest novel. By the time of *Thartharah Fauq al-Nil* (1966; *Adrift on the Nile*, 1993) and *Miramar* (1967; *Miramar*, 1978) Mahfouz's frustration has reached its peak. Indeed the extent of that anger was well realized by `Abd al-Hakim `Amir, the President's right-hand man, who, having read *Thartharah Fauq al-Nil* with its sense of almost total negativity towards the achievements of the Egyptian revolution, insisted that Mahfouz should be imprisoned. It took the personal intervention of the Minister of Culture, Tharwat `Ukashah, to prevent Mahfouz from joining the vast majority of his novelist-colleagues in prison.

AFTER 1967

Earlier I described the June War of 1967 as a major watershed in every aspect of modern Arab life. Unlike the aftermath of the 1952 revolution in Egypt when Mahfouz paused for several years before committing himself to paper, the months immediately following June 1967 saw him publish a series of disarmingly cryptic short-stories. In "*Tahta al-Mizallah*," for example, a group of people standing under a shelter in the pouring rain witness a series of remarkable events but remain motionless. When they are questioned by a policeman, he shoots them all dead.¹⁴ A number of these stories appeared in the Egyptian press between 1967 and 1970. It was in the latter year that Mahfouz admitted to me over the telephone that in such uncertain times, he had resorted to a maximally symbolic mode as a means of putting painful truths into literary form, but that he was finding it difficult to emerge from such a modality and pursue new generic and stylistic directions. He told me to look out for a new series that was about to appear. He had been working with an Alexandrian friend, the painter Sayf Wanli, on a series of vignettes about Egyptians. The pieces, along with Wanli's illustrations, could not be published in usual venues because of the need for color, so they would be appearing in an unusual place, the television journal, *Al-Idha`ah*

¹⁴ The story is translated as "Under the bus-shelter" in Naguib Mahfouz, *God's World*, Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, [1973] 1988: pp. 135-42.

wa-al-Television. Thus began the appearance of *Al-Maraya* (1972; *Mirrors*, 1999), and I owe a great debt to the Egyptian publisher, Sherif Borei, who, having purchased Wanli's portraits, was anxious to see Mahfouz's original vision published in book form and allowed me to revise my English translation for that purpose. I can clearly recall the way in which Louis 'Awad, the great Egyptian critic and a long-time friend of mine, upbraided me for translating this work, and I can understand why. Here Mahfouz, to cite the title of John Osborne's famous play, was "looking back in anger." Several of the vignettes are thinly disguised portraits of prominent Egyptian figures, one of them almost certainly 'Awad himself. Whatever else one may wish to say about this interesting work, it is certainly the case that Mahfouz had found a way to "liberate" himself from the symbolic straitjacket in which he thought himself to be constricted.

With the death of President 'Abd al-Nasir in 1970, Anwar al-Sadat, his deputy, had come to power and almost immediately began a systematic attack on the literary sector in Egypt. Prominent magazines were closed down, membership of closely monitored unions was required, and for a short period several prominent writers, including Mahfouz himself, Yusuf Idris, Tawfiq al-Hakim, and Louis 'Awad, were banned from writing. This was also a period during which the censorship authorities discovered that there were obscene passages in *Alf Laylah wa-Laylah* and that Ibn al-'Arabi's highly allegorical musings were not a little controversial. Both were banned for a while, until the scale of the international embarrassment (not to mention the presence of both texts in most of the major library collections of the world) made such local attempts at ego-stroking unenforceable. Mahfouz's barely suppressed fury at the results of Sadat's policy of "*infitah*" (economic opening up), which led to an even wider economic split between Egypt's classes than had been the case before, finds its most forthright expression in *Yawm Qutila al-Za'im* (1985; *The Day the Leader Was Killed*, 1989), but, as is the case with the sequence of novels penned during the 1960s to which I referred above, the building resentment is palpable in most of the novels of the 1970s. Incidentally, it would appear that both *Al-Karnak* (1974), which deals with the torture of students and leftists during the 1960s, and *Al-Hubb Tahta al-Matar* (1973), which depicts the atmosphere in Cairo during the "phony war" that preceded the 1973 "*ubur*" (crossing of the Suez Canal), were heavily censored before their publication and that substantial parts of the original text are missing from currently available versions.

I have to admit that Mahfouz's anger during this particular period does not translate into a set of works that, in critical terms, will stand the test of time. Indeed many of the novels of this much troubled period leading up to Sadat's assassination have already come to be regarded as records of their time but not major contributions to Mahfouz's overall achievement. That said, there are two narratives that emerge as exceptions to this pattern. The first is *Hikayat haratina* (1975; *Fountain and Tomb*, 1988), which was originally billed as a collection of short stories but which, like *Al-Manaya*, seems to defy generic categorization or, perhaps more accurately, does not fit conveniently into the genres identified as fictional within the Western literary tradition. Therein, of course, lies its interest in the literary-historical context that I sketched out earlier in this presentation. Once again the "*harah*" (quarter) is invoked in the title—deliberately, one must assume—to create a contemporary allegory concerning the tension between a life of devotion and the demands of modern society. The *harah* is also central to the work that Mahfouz regards as his own

personal favorite, *Malhamat al-Harafish* (1976; *The Harafish*, 1994, a narrative that he wryly names after the nickname by which his circle of closest friends is known).¹⁵ Replicating the multi-generational structure of *Awlad haratina* of many years earlier, Mahfouz explores the fate of many generations of a single family as they eke out a living and exert their authority in different ways in a “quarter” that remains undefined in terms of place and time. The absence of such specificities lends the work a mythic quality, as moral values and social norms are invoked and challenged by successive generations of the descendants of `Ashur al-Naji.

In considering the placement of this work in Mahfouz’s career as a novelist, we need to begin by noting, as we have above, that Mahfouz has always been conscious of the need to continually develop his technique and style; both *Al-Maraya* and *Hikayat haratina* provide evidence of that. At the same time however, Mahfouz was also conscious of the emergence of a younger generation of writers, with life-experiences and aspirations very different from his own. One such is Jamal al-Ghitani who has expressed unequivocally the extent to which his own career as a writer has been inspired by Mahfouz and his writings (in a television special on Mahfouz, Al-Ghitani declares that he memorized whole passages of the *Trilogy* by heart). During these very same 1970s al-Ghitani had been working on a revolutionary new novel which was eventually to appear in print in 1974, namely *Al-Zayni Barakat* (1974; *Zayni Barakat*, 1985). The revolutionary quality to which I have just referred lies in the extent to which the author makes use not merely of history as a source of commentary on present-day realities (in this case, the secret police) but also of actual texts from the heritage of Arabic narrative. Bearing in mind the close friendship between these two great writers, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that, after Mahfouz had served as the great pioneer of Arabic fiction for so many years, he began to appreciate the new directions in which the younger generation that owed so much to him were taking Arabic fiction, and embarked on some experiments of his own. *Malhamat al-Harafish* may be considered one such example, and we will now consider some others from the more recent period.

THE 1980s AND BEYOND

The assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in 1981 brought Husni Mubarak to the Presidency of Egypt and, in spite of the continuation of certain policies—both national and international—that had characterized the Sadat era, the strident tone that had characterized intellectual and cultural life in Egypt seems to have been somewhat tempered. By now Mahfouz was entering the 7th decade of his life, but he continued to publish a whole stream of fictional works. Following his previous patterns, some of these works picked up on themes and techniques that he had employed earlier. *Al-Baqi min al-Zaman Sa`ah* (1982) for example, is another family saga that, as it were, updates the *Trilogy* to the year 1979, albeit in a concentrated format that continues to reflect the more allusive style that he has adopted since the novels of the 1960s. One of the most accomplished of the works from this period is *Hadith al-Sabah wa-al-Masa`* (1987), which, at least on the surface, appears to replicate the model of *Al-Maraya* in being structured around an alphabetical

¹⁵ For *Malhamat al-Harafish* and *Layali Alf Laylah* (to be discussed below), see Nedal al-Mousa, “The Nature and Uses of the Fantastic in the Fictional World of Naguib Mahfouz,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* Vol XXIII, part 1 (March 1992): 36-48.

listing of “characters.” What emerges however is a typical piece of Mahfouz planning: a carefully wrought narrative in which the histories of three separate Egyptian families are interwoven over the lengthy period that goes all the way back to Napoleon’s invasion of the country in 1798.

These and other novels of this period may be considered as continuations of one particular strand in Mahfouz’s lengthy career. In the context of generic change and the role of the younger generation in fostering such experimentation, there are other Mahfouz titles that immediately attract our attention. Two among them bring the heritage of the past immediately to the would-be reader’s attention: *Layali Alf Laylah* (1982; *Arabian Nights and Days*, 1995) and *Rihlat Ibn Fattumah* (1983; *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, 1992). In the case of the former, the narrative begins, as is the case with Tawfiq al-Hakim’s renowned early play, *Shahrazad* (1934), after the 1001 nights are over. Mahfouz cleverly utilizes tales culled from the world’s most renowned collection of popular narrative and interweaves them, along with their principal characters, into an episodic novel that does not merely indulge in a modern version of the fantastic (even though there are some genies present in the novel) but rather serves to illustrate the realities of political power and power-making and the role of corruption in that process. As with the fictions of Al-Ghitani and others, so with Mahfouz: the lessons of the past, and especially those of the narrative past, provide reflections of an awareness of human foibles that are eminently adaptable to modern fiction in its ongoing quest for modes whereby to criticize present social and political realities. *Rihlat Ibn Fattumah* invokes the tradition of travel literature from the Arabic heritage, and most notably that of Ibn Battutah. The impetus for many, if not most, Arab travelers in earlier centuries was of course the pilgrimage to Mecca, an obligation that frequently required journeys across vast distances. Ibn Battutah, the renowned traveler from Tangier¹⁶ was one such pilgrim who, having reached Mecca, decided to continue his journey to China, perhaps heeding the words of the Hadith: “*utlubu al-‘ilm wa-law fi al-Sin*” (Seek Knowledge though it be in China). Mahfouz’s Ibn Fattumah, beginning in an Islamic homeland whose principles cause him some doubts sets out on a journey which turns out to be a lifetime. Passing through a series of different societies in which the varying relationship between belief and social norms is a constant source of investigation and debate—paganism, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism, our traveler—having started his visits in a pagan land called “Mashriq” (the East, sunrise) eventually reaches the land of “Ghurub” (sunset). The wars between the lands he has previously visited, the political debates in which he has engaged, and indeed the wives he has married, are all left behind as he arrives in a land where there is no authority structure and the only purpose is to prepare oneself for the journey to the land of “*jabal*”; and here, of course, we hear an echo of that allegorical figure outside the walls in *Awlad haratina* of many years earlier. What a wonderful and allegorically perfect ending to this novel (a chapter entitled “*Bidayah*” [Beginning]) just as Ibn Fattumah’s manuscript come to an end just as the caravan is turning towards the final target of the journey of a lifetime. In a brief afterword on this novel and its place in Mahfouz’s output, I must say that, when we bear in mind the furore that was aroused by the publication of *Awlad haratina* many decades earlier and its revival at the time of the Nobel award, I am struck that more has not

¹⁶ Whence the title of Tim Mackintosh-Smith’s wonderful recreation of Ibn Battutah’s journeys, *Travels With a Tangerine: a journey in the footsteps of ibn Battutah*, London: Picador, 2001.

been said about Mahfouz's remarks on Islamic practices in this novel. Just to cite a single example, at one point Ibn Fattumah is discussing Islam with the shaykh of Al-Halba, the capitalist society. When Ibn Fattumah suggests that the kinds of freedom advocated in the Islam of Halba are contrary to Islamic practice, the shaykh retorts: "If our Prophet—May God bless and preserve Him!—were to be resurrected today, he would totally reject this aspect of your version of Islam."¹⁷ To be sure, it is a character in a work of fiction who is speaking, but the accumulation of this and other comments suggests that the allegorical mode is once again fulfilling its primary generic purpose.¹⁸

While both the above mentioned works clearly participate in the broader movement to explore completely new directions in Arabic novel writing, there is an additional work that seems in many ways to encapsulate earlier trends in Mahfouz's career as a writer while providing yet further evidence of his desire, as it were, both to explore new fictional avenues and to "come full circle." The work in question is *Asda' al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah* (1994; *Echoes of an Autobiography*, 1997). The title here is something of a tease, in that those many people who may have been hoping to find in its pages anything remotely approaching an orthodox autobiography will have been disappointed. Consisting of over 200 short, paragraph-long segments, the work does certainly contain some wistful reminiscences of earlier days, a tone which is also characteristic of another late work of fiction, *Qushtumur* (1988 [the name of a café]) in which fond memories of youthful days in the then leafy suburb of Al-'Abbasiyyah are recorded. The narrative voice in *Asda' al-sirah al-dhatiyyah* is that of an old person looking back over a lifetime:

These old photographs bring together members of my family; others are of friends from the old days. I looked at both sets till I was flooded in memories. All the faces look bright and serene, a picture of life; there's not the slightest sign of what lies hidden beyond. And now they've all gone; not one of them is left. Who can say whether the happiness was real or just a fanciful dream.¹⁹

While this aspect of nostalgia links this work to others of its period and, at an earlier stage, to descriptions in *Hikayat haratina* to which we have referred above, it becomes yet more individualized at about the half-way point in the succession of sections, when the narrator introduces the reader to the succession of thoughts by Shaykh 'Abd Rabbih al-Ta'ih, a name that, needless to say, is full of potential symbolic significance: the servant of his Lord, the wanderer in the wilderness. With the arrival of this figure in the narrative, the presence of traditional *hikmah* (aphoristic sayings) so prevalent in pre-modern Arabic literature and especially in the language of Sufi discourse becomes an overriding factor:

¹⁷ Najib Mahfuz, *Rihlat Ibn Fattumah*, Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1983, pg. 95; a slightly different translation in Naguib Mahfouz, *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, pg. 86.

¹⁸ *Rihlat Ibn Fattumah* is the subject of two excellent articles published recently [2004]: Michael Beard, "Master Narrative and Necessity in *Ibn Fattouma*," *Edebiyat* Vol. 14 nos. 1/2 (May/November 2003): 21-28; Wen-chin Ouyang, "The Dialectic of Past and Present in *Rihlat ibn Fattouma* by Najib Mahfuz," *Edebiyat* Vol. 14 nos 1/2 (May/November 2003): 81-108.

¹⁹ Najib Mahfuz, "Asda' al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah," *Al-Ahram* 11th Feb. 1994 and later Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1995. I discuss this work in more detail in Roger Allen, "Autobiography and memory: Mahfuz's *Asda' al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah*," in *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic literature* ed. Robin Ostle, Ed De Moor, and Stefan Wild, London: Saqi Books, 1998, pp. 207-16.

Shaykh `Abd Rabbih al-Ta`ih said: The only thing more stupid than a stupid believer is a stupid infidel.

Shaykh `Abd Rabbih al-Ta`ih said: The present is like a light that flickers between two shadows.

Shaykh `Abd Rabbih al-Ta`ih said: The most powerful people of all are those who forgive.²⁰

How far these terse spiritual maxims seem from the language of the *Trilogy*. And yet this curious and utterly original blend of modern fragmented narrative and thoroughly traditional aphoristic discourse emerges as perhaps the most poignant of capstones to a trend in Mahfouz's thought that Western scholars have tended to downplay in their desire to link the Arabic novel with its Western analogues. The title of Mattityahu Peled's study, *Religion My Own*, published in the early 1980s had already pointed in the right direction, but a selection of the works published since that time seems to confirm its centrality to the author's ongoing concerns. The interest can already be seen in some of the early essays of a graduate student at Cairo University, but then the urgent needs of an Egyptian society beset by World War II and its aftermath presented an urgent list of agenda that Mahfouz's series of novels endeavored to address. In this context, *Awlad haratina* of 1959 is not some outlying work but merely one in a succession of fictions that, for all their wonderful variety in terms of structure and technique, address themselves to the burning issues connected to the role of religion in a modern society as it seeks for an identity and political structure of its own: thus, the masterly short-story, "Za`balawi" of the early 1960s, the strong Sufi overlay of many of the novels of the 1960s, and then, more obviously, the focus of *Hikayat haratina*, *Rihlat Ibn Fattumah*, and *Asda' al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah* from the later years. I might add, incidentally, that a similar tracking process could also be used with the Pharaonic theme, another constant in Mahfouz's output that has tended to be downplayed in assessments of his overall achievement. After all, Mahfouz's first published book was a translation of James Baikie's famous introductory work on Ancient Egypt, and Mahfouz's first essays in novel form consisted of three novels set in that same period.²¹

And to bring things right up to date, I have just received a further selection of Mahfouz's musings (over 100 of them, in fact), under the heading "Ahlam" (Dreams). Since I have cited relatively little of Mahfouz's own writing in this study, let me compensate now by providing a sample of his most recent creativity. Here is the first of these "Dreams":

I'm riding my bike hither and yon. It's hunger that is driving me, and I'm desperately searching for a restaurant suitable for someone with a limited income. I'm forever finding them shut. I happened to look in the direction of the clock in the square. Beneath it I spotted my friend. When he gestured at me, I rode over to him. He knew all about my situation and suggested that I leave my bike with him;

²⁰ "Asda' al-Sirah al-Dhatiyyah," 8th April 1994.

²¹ All three of these early novels have recently been published (by the American University in Cairo Press) in English translation: *Abath al-Aqdar* (1939) as *Khufi's Wisdom* (2003); *Radubis* (1943) as *Rhadopis of Nubia* (2003) and *Kifah Tiba* (1944) as *Thebes at War* (2003). Raymond Stock has also published a collection of Mahfouz's short-stories on the same theme: *Voices from the Other World* (2002).

that would make the search that much easier. I did as he suggested and carried on with my quest. As my hunger intensified, I came across the family restaurant. Even though I was fully aware how expensive it was, hunger and despair combined to push me towards it. The owner was standing by a curtain at the entrance. However, no sooner had he pulled the curtain back than a dump full of garbage appeared in the place where the plush dining-room was supposed to be.

“What’s happened?” I asked in consternation.

“Hurry over to the young kebab-seller,” the man replied. “You may be able to catch him before he closes up shop.”

Losing no time I made my way back to the clock, but I failed to find either my bike or my friend.²²

CONCLUSION

It is, I believe, sufficiently clear that I have not used this wonderful occasion to engage in a deep discussion of a selection of individual works by Mahfouz or even to comment exclusively on certain strands in his creative output. The list of novels and short-story collections is so long that such a project would be impossible in the time available. What I have tried to do however is to place Mahfouz’s achievement into a broader historical and generic perspective, and at the same time both to offer an appreciation of who he is and what he has achieved and to problematize that very same achievement within that larger framework that is virtually demanded by the award of the Nobel Prize in 1988.

Naguib Mahfouz is, without the slightest doubt, the Arab writer who managed to master the many and variegated techniques of the novel genre and to apply them to a profound and sustained consideration of the ills of his native country and, more specifically, of its urban middle-class. He himself lived the life of a bureaucrat for many decades, and he writes about the tensions involved in the daily lives, education, and careers of that class with an unsurpassed artistry. The novels begun in the 1940s and continued into the ’50s establish the validity and potential reformist power of the novel genre across the Arab-world region, and the 1960s is the decade in which content and technique are combined in their most enduring form. All this is crowned, albeit at something of a chronological distance, by the Nobel Prize of 1988, with its focus on the *Trilogy* and his pre-1967 works.

It is the absence from that citation of any mention of post-1967 works and the above-mentioned phrase “the Dickens of Cairo” which, in my opinion, point to some more wide-scaled issues. While it is true that, at the time of the award of the Nobel Prize, the *Trilogy* itself had not yet been published in English translation (and behind that lies another tale), it is also the case that, even after the Nobel award and the American University in Cairo Press’s systematic project to translate the majority of Mahfouz’s oeuvre into English, the more experimental works that we have alluded to above have not sold particularly well in Western markets. It appears to be “the Dickens of Cairo” that most appeals to the Western readership (I invite you to visit any bookstore of Borders or Barnes & Noble [or Waterstones, say, in Britain] and check for yourselves). I often wonder whether it is the English title

²² See Akhbar al-adab no. 543, 7 December 2003.

of the second volume in the *Trilogy*, namely *Palace of Desire* [1991] (a dutifully accurate rendering of the Cairo street-name *Qasr al-Shawq* [1957]), along with the wistful scene of languid palm-trees on the cover, that manage to evoke Arabian Nights-type thoughts in the potential buyer and thus account for the fact that it sells more copies than the first volume, *Bayn al-Qasrayn* [1956] (*Palace Walk* [1990]).

The period following the June War of 1967 led to what my great Oxford mentor, Albert Hourani, termed “a disturbance of spirits” (a chapter title in his famous *A History of the Arab Peoples* [New York: Warner Books, 1991]). The profound investigation that followed such an event, involving a search for the essence of what it meant and means to be an Arab, a nation, and a collectivity of nations, had inevitable consequences for literary genres and their role in society. A search into the heritage of the past for exemplars and models led almost axiomatically to an increased resort to history and its textual modes as a source of creative inspiration. However, it also showed up the many ways in which attempts to provide conveniently generalized summaries of a vast swath of Asian and African territory (and literary creativity) under the single epithet “Arab” or “Arabic” were increasingly less valid and useful. In the context of this summative evaluation of Mahfouz, it is perhaps possible to suggest that his early career coincides with a more unified historical approach to the development of Arabic fiction; in such a context, it seems reasonable to declare him the foundational figure. After 1967 however, the scenario changes, not merely in the creative environment itself but also in the critical and evaluative context (and yes, just for the record, I include my own attempts at encapsulating “*The Arabic novel*” (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982 and 1995) within this frame of reference. I do not believe it is a useful gesture at this point to produce any further editions of that work, which are representative of a period of modern Arabic literature scholarship that now confronts a much more variegated subject. Thus, a number of excellent Egyptian novelists have, as it were, emerged from Mahfouz’s shadow in recent years: Jamal al-Ghitani, of course, but also Edwar al-Kharrat, Khayri Shalabi, Sonallah Ibrahim, Ibrahim `Abd al-Majid, Salwa Bakr, Radwa `Ashur, Miral al-Tahawi, May Telmissany, Sumaya Ramadan, Halah al-Badri, `Ala` al-Aswani, being just a few of the more prominent names. In this sphere as in others with the developmental history of modern Arabic literary genres, Egypt may have provided the early fostering ground for the fictional genres (not least because, following the civil unrest in Syro-Lebanon during the 1860s, large segments of the literary elite of that region emigrated to the more hospitable soil of Egypt). By now however, chronological differentials no longer exist—with the possible exception of the Gulf States. Some of the most radical experiments in the Arabic novel have involved such names as the late and much lamented `Abd al-Rahman Munif (d. 2004), Ilyas Khuri, Rashid al-Da`if and Huda Barakat of Lebanon, Ibrahim al-Kuni of Libya, Rashid Abu Jadrah of Algeria, and BenSalim Himmich of Morocco, again to name just a few.

The Arabic novel thus continues to fulfill its function as an advocate and a reflector of change, and as such, it is involved in a process of continual change itself. The career and achievement of Naguib Mahfouz is the best possible illustration of what has been achieved within the Arabic tradition and an inspiration for those who will determine the road ahead.

GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Note: a Bibliography of works by and/or about Naguib Mahfouz , even ones restricted to works in English, would be extremely long. The following is thus intended solely as an introduction to the subject of this presentation:

Allen, Roger, "Najib Mahfuz," in *Nobel Laureates in Literature* ed. Rado Pribic. New York: Garland Reference Library of the Humanities Vol. 849, New York & London, 1990, pp. 251-57.

-----, "Najib Mahfuz," *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Yearbook 1988*, Detroit: Bruccoli Clark Layman, 1989, 3-14.

Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz ed. Trevor Le Gassick, Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1991.

El-Enany, Rasheed, *Naguib Mahfouz: the pursuit of meaning*, London: Routledge, 1993.
Naguib Mahfouz: from regional fame to global recognition ed. Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993.

Peled, Mattityahu, *Religion My Own*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1983?

Somekh, Sasson, *The Changing Rhythm: a study of Najib Mahfuz's novels*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973.