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**THE PORTRAYAL OF EGYPTIAN  
WOMEN IN SELECTED NOVELS  
OF NAJIB MAHFUZ**

**by**

**SHAHINAZ M. A. ABDEL-HADY**

A thesis submitted to the University of Durham in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of M.A.

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15 AUG 1996

***TO MY FATHER & MOTHER***

*"And indeed my strength and effort of conformity is from none but Allah; to Him I entrust myself and to Him do I return"*

*"The Holy Qur'an"*

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## **Introduction:**

The purpose of this study is to examine Maḥfūz's views on Egyptian woman, and the social and intellectual currents in Egypt during the British occupation and the period after it through his social works. This thesis is based on one year of research. It is concerned with his childhood, his works before and after the revolution and the portrayal of Egyptian women in some of his social novels.

This thesis consists of two parts. The first contains two Chapters. Chapter one deals with his childhood, the influence of Western and Eastern writers on his works and his future, and the impact of Jamāliyya and 'Abbāsiyya the famous quarters of Cairo on him. This chapter also deals with his personality and life.

Chapter two attempts to define the principles and conventions, literary or otherwise, underlining the work of Maḥfūz and his political beliefs through his works, from the 1919 revolution, through the 1952 revolution until the death of Sādāt.

Part Two is entitled "The portrayal of Egyptian Women in Selected Novels of Najib Maḥfūz". This part consists three chapters.

Chapter three undertakes the discussion of the urban upper-class, Cairene woman. I have chosen three females from different novels to represent them: Iḥsān in al-Qāhira al-Jadida, Ḥamīda in Zuqāq al-Midaqq and Nefisa in Bidāyā wa-Nihāyā.

Chapter four will deal with the peasant woman in his works. We will discuss the circumstances and the reasons which bring her to the city. These characters are portrayed in: Nūr in al-Liss wa al-Kilāb, Riri in al-Summān wa al-Kharif and Zohrā in Mirāmār.

Chapter five is a critique that deals with his treatment of women in the chosen works.

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\*\* I have used the spelling employed in the English translation (The Beginning and the End), published in 1985 .

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**PART ONE**

**NAJIB MAHFUZ'S BIOGRAPHY  
AND HIS WORKS**



"No writer of the modern Arabic world has enjoyed a success in literature to approach that of Najīb Maḥfūz. His work has become appreciated as a voluminous and sharply focused reflection of the Egyptian experience through the turbulent changes of the twentieth century. His fame within the Middle East is consequently unrivalled and the importance of his published works has been widely noted abroad. Many of his stories have previously appeared in English and other foreign languages and he has received honorary awards and degrees from Denmark, France and the Soviet Union. His achievements are all the more extraordinary for his having spent thirty years in various departments of the Egyptian civil service in which he reached an administrative position of importance before his retirement."

Trevor Le Gassick (tr.), Maḥfūz N. *The Thief and The Dogs*, (1992) p. 5.

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**MAHFUZ'S LIFE**

## **CONTENTS OF CHAPTER ONE**

### **Biography**

- 1-1 His childhood.
- 1-2 Maḥfūz's Education.
- 1-3 The impact of Jamāliyya and ʿAbbāsiyya.
- 1-4 The influence of Eastern and Western writers in Maḥfūz's works.
- 1-5 Maḥfūz's professional life.
- 1-6 A personal sketch of Maḥfūz.

## BIOGRAPHY

### 1-1 His Childhood and his Family.

Maḥfūz was born(1) in December 1911, in an old quarter of Cairo, Jamāliyya, the setting of several of his novels . Though he only lived in Jamāliyya up to the age of 12 (in 1924 his family moved to the new Cairo suburb, al-Abbāsiyya) we can say that he has never left Jamāliyya, or in other words that it has always lived in his mind(2). Maḥfūz describes his childhood in the following words:

*"I grew up in a stable family. The atmosphere around me was one which inspired the love of parents and family. The family was a basic, almost sacred, value of my childhood, I was not one of those who rebelled against their parents or rejected their authority".(3)*

Maḥfūz tells us that although he was the seventh and last child in a family which already had four boys and two girls, he was virtually deprived of natural fraternal relationships. This was, he informs us, because the youngest of his brothers was ten years older than himself.

He states that he did not have the kind of brother or sister that he could play with, go out with or confide his secrets in. There was, between him and them, the kind of barrier which existed between a child and his parents. (4)

Maḥfūz describes in an interview with Ghītānī, the family house in which he grew up in Jamāliyya. The description seems largely to tally with that of the house of Aḥmad Abd al-Jawwad's family in the Trilogy. He also tells us that the roof was where house provisions were stored, poultry raised and various potted and creeping plants grown.(5).

About his parents Maḥfūz does not say much and about his brothers and sisters he says next to nothing. He stresses that the fearful character of

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\*Before Cairo the family moved from Rosetta

Abd al-Jawwād is not modelled on his father, but the head of the neighbouring family in Jamāliyya whom he used to visit as a child with his mother.

He describes his father as having been an old-fashioned man in possession of a gentle temperament. He spent most of his evenings with his family. He used to be some sort of a book-keeper or an accountant(6). His father had been a civil servant (7) until he took early retirement to manage the business of a merchant friend of his. (8) Maḥfūz emphasises that patriotism is one basic value which he acquired from his father in his childhood :

*"My father always spoke enthusiastically about our national heroes....I grow up in a home where the names of Mustafa Kamil, Muhammad Farid and Saad Zaghlul were truly sacred....The strong emotion with which my father spoke about political figures would make you feel as if they were his personal enemies or friends . My father however was no exception here, this was the public spirit which dominated the country during my childhood."(9)*

Religion is another important value in Najīb's family, whereas culture was absent: 'You would not have thought', he tells an interviewer, 'that an artist would emerge from that family'. Maḥfūz painfully fails to elaborate on what he calls the purely religious climate at home during his childhood. (10).

As for his mother, Maḥfūz states that she was of a somewhat nervous temperament and that there was little that she shared with the character of Amina in the novels of the Trilogy. Najīb continues that when his sisters

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\*But Adham Rajab, a lifetime friend of his who had known him well during his adolescent years, states that Maḥfūz's father was so strict with his family that the young Maḥfūz's friends were never able to visit him at home. He added that the writer's eldest brother was also strict, and he surmises that the character of the fierce patriarch Abd al-Jawwād must have been based on those two models(11).

married, and after his father died in 1973, he was devoted to his mother who passed away some thirty one years after her husband on May 3rd 1968. When he was as young as four she would take him to look at the Pyramids and the Sphinx or the Museum of Antiquities, and especially to the Mummies' room. (12)

This piece of information is of particular interest when we consider that Maḥfūz was to develop a strong interest in Ancient Egyptian history, which would manifest itself in his first three novels which were devoted to this subject.

It is worthwhile to mention here that Maḥfūz remained attracted to Jamāliyya and always hankered after it, despite moving with the family to ʿAbbāsiyya around the year 1924, when he was 12 years old(13).

## 2-2 Maḥfūz's Education and Intellectual Influences:

Najib's education, in common with his generation, began at the Kuttāb where he learned religion and the principles of literacy before joining the primary school(14). In Ḥikāyāt Ḥārātina (The Fountain and the Tomb) he tells us how he discovered reading at primary school when a friend lent him a detective story to read. From that time on, he began reading. (15) During the primary stage and the early years of secondary education he moved on from detective stories to historical and adventure novels, all read in translation. He mentions the names of Sir Walter Scott and Sir Henry Rider Haggard. (16)

He also started reading classical Arabic literature. Maḥfūz mentions by way of example al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn by al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Amāli by al-Qāli, al-Iqd-al-Farīd by Ibn 'Abd Rabbih. He also mentions how he used to imitate the style of these sources in his composition at school.(17) The effect of this classical reading in fact survived his school days and can be seen in the propensity in his early short stories and novels towards outdated clichés and flowery style, and throughout his career a purity of phrase and a correctness of grammar. Maḥfūz tells us also that as he matured he turned more towards classical poetry and mentions in particular the names of al-Mutanabbi and Ibn al-Rūmi.

During his primary school years, the idea of writing was never far from his mind. He started writing during school holidays. His method was to rewrite a novel he had read, adding in some details from his own life. As he advanced through his teens he discovered Mustāfa al-Manfalūṭi (1876-1924) the Egyptian sentimentalist whose prose style influenced a whole generation of educated Egyptians during the early decade of the century. (18) After Manfalūṭi he lists the names of Ṭāha Ḥusaẓn (1889-1973), 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād (1889-1964), Salāma Mūsa (1888-1956), Ibrāhīm al-Māzeni (1889-1949), Muḥammad Ḥusaẓn Haykal (1888-1956), and (to a lesser degree) Maḥmūd Taymūr (1894-1973) Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm(1898-1987) and Yaḥya Ḥaqqi (1905-1992). He admits his indebtedness to these writers for his emancipation from the traditional way of thinking. World literature

provided him with a new outlook on classical Arabic literature, as well as offering him models of the short story, the novel and drama. (19)

ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād whose enquiries into the principles of aestheticism and other philosophical issues held considerable attraction for Maḥfūz, appears to have helped push Maḥfūz in the direction of selecting philosophy as the subject to study for his first degree.

Maḥfūz tells us that during his secondary education he excelled in mathematics and the sciences. He was going to study either medicine or engineering, until he started to read the philosophical articles by ʿAqqād. (20)

Maḥfūz goes on to say that:

*" Philosophical questions began to stir deep inside me, and I imagined that by studying philosophy I would find the right answers for the questions which tormented me, that I would unravel the mysteries of existence and man's fate."(21)*

Thus he joined King Fuʿad I University as a philosophy student between the years 1930 to 1934. The agony which his choice caused his father is briefly remembered in Maḥfūz's memoirs. (22)

### 2-2-1 Mahfūz as an Author:

The question why a person should decide to become a full-time author may seem pointless, as it is commonly assumed that the possession of talent and the inner urge to write sufficiently explain one's choice of this troublesome profession. (23) But matters are frequently rather more complicated, as the ambivalence of Maḥfūz's life-long attitude towards the literary occupation demonstrates.

After his graduation in 1934, Maḥfūz undertook an intensive reading in philosophy, in order to start working towards an M.A. degree. (24) However, he chose the subject "Sufism in Islam". His M.A in philosophy was never completed and, within two years of graduation, his orientation towards philosophy was deflected in the direction of literature. He began seriously to choose between philosophy and literature and at last he chose the field of literature. (25) But philosophy in its basic sense, as a search for meaning in life, remained central in Maḥfūz's work. (26)

## 2-3 The Impact of Jamāliyya and Abbāsiyya on Maḥfūz's works.

### 2-3-1 The Impact of Jamāliyya:

Most of Maḥfūz's novels in this early realistic period are set in Jamāliyya, for example Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Midaq Alley), al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (New Cairo) and al-Thulāthiyya (The Trilogy) as well as later works such as Awlād Harātina (Children of Gebelawi), Hikāyāt Harātina (The Fountain and the Tomb), the Harāfish and many others.

Jamāliyya continues to haunt his work in various disguises and lends many typical characters and physical features to it. The Hara with its warring futuwwās and their gangs, its mystery, "takiyya",\* its ancient sabīl\*\* shops, cafés and the adjacent Qarāfa\*\*\* all these components which make up the distinctive features of Maḥfūz's work in the past twenty years, originate in the Old Quarter of Jamāliyya. (27)

Jamāliyya images were impressed on the novelist's consciousness during his childhood. Maḥfūz himself stresses the importance of Jamāliyya or the Hara on his works through his creative life; he admits that Jamāliyya was reflected in his works and he still goes back to it for his background. (28)

The Hara has changed greatly since his childhood, however, since it was, in a sense, a model of Egyptian society. He tells us that in those days all the classes of Egyptian people were represented in it, from the very rich to the very poor, and that blocks of flats where whole families lived in single rooms with common facilities, stood in close proximity to majestic mansions surrounded by gardens. (29)

One of the main features of the Hara as Maḥfūz knew it in his

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\* Takiyya: is a charitable place where people gather to eat

\*\* Sabīl: is a charitable place where passers by have access to water.

\*\*\* Qarāfa: is an old name for a cemetery

boyhood was the Futuwwa, a character type that was later to play a major symbolic role in his fiction such as Children of Gebelawi and Harafish. He tells us that in those days every Hāra had a Futuwwa and he describes one of them, whom he was able to watch at close quarters, in his capacity as cafe owner and manager after retirement from thuggery in the following terms: *He is a quiet character, very gallant and possessing an attractive personality*. Also, Maḥfūz emphasises the nationalist role played by the futuwwas during the popular uprising against the British occupation in 1919. (30)

Another feature of the Hāra was to figure centrally in his work. In 1919 when Maḥfūz was 7 years old the "Quarter" was united against the British occupation. It was then that Maḥfūz first came to experience the meaning of nationalist feelings about the events of that period:

*"From a small room on the roof (of our house) I used to see the demonstrations of the 1919 revolution. I saw women taking part in the demonstrations on donkey-drawn carts.....I often saw English soldiers firing at the demonstration.....My mother used to pull me back from the window but I wanted to see everything. The one thing which most shocked the security of my childhood was the 1919 revolution. "* (31)

Here Maḥfūz describes the murder of Anwar the son of a neighbouring family, like Fahmī (a character in the Trilogy) a student at the law school at the time of the revolution.

He tells us:

*"that morning I learnt that our neighbour Anwar al-Halawani had been killed in a demonstration with a bullet fired by an English soldier. Thus I came to know for the first time the meaning of the act of murder in real life experience. I also heard for the first time about the bullet as one of the achievements of civilisation."*(32)

Around the year 1924, when Maḥfūz was 12 years old, the family moved to ʿAbbāsiyya (a quarter in Cairo) but he always remained attracted to and hankered to move back to Jamāliyya.(33)

### 2-3-2- The Impact of Abbasiyya

Next to Jamāliyya, ʿAbbāsiyya appears to be the only other place to have made a permanent impression on both Maḥfūz's consciousness and his art. All other Cairene districts that serve occasionally as background for action in his novels, appear only in their capacity as realistic details. The same description applies to his Alexandria in Autumn Quail, The Search, The Beggar and Miramar. (34)

One can notice that, while Maḥfūz owes his many recreations of the Hara to Jamāliyya, he owes the description of the Khalwa to the old ʿAbbāsiyya. In works like Children of Gebelawi and Harafish, he annexes the Khalwa of ʿAbbāsiyya to the Hara of Jamāliyya. In this personalised world-picture the Khalwa is the scene for murders and clandestine burials and bloody warfare among rival gangs.

It is the scene where some of the wildest human positions are set and where inner loneliness is enhanced by the emptiness outside. But paradoxically the Khalwa is also a place of refuge from brutality to the world of soul-searching. He is also indebted to ʿAbbāsiyya and the many friends he made there during his adolescence, for a number of the fifty-five characters that constitute Mirrors. In his old age Najīb expressed homesickness for ʿAbbāsiyya (35) in his novel Qushtumur 1988 and in a powerful short story entitled Niṣf Yawm (Half a Day); But above all, Maḥfūz owes to ʿAbbāsiyya one of the most powerful experiences of his life which was to be recreated in the story of Kamāl's unrequited love for ʿAyda Shaddad in the Trilogy. (36)

The germination of his key experience in the novel was apparently quite strong in Maḥfūz's early youth and, in an almost mystical way, it had a

strong hold on the author's consciousness for the rest of his life. In his memoirs, he tries to rationalise the experience in the following terms:

***"In Abbasiyya I experienced true love for the first time. It was an abstract relationship because of age and class differences. There was actually no form of communication whatsoever (between the two parties). Had this happened, the experience would perhaps have not acquired much of (the halo) that I bequeathed on it.."***  
(37)

The effects of this relationship were later to appear in the experience of Kamāl's love for ʿAyda in the (Trilogy). (38) This passage, written when the author was nearly 60 years old and more than forty years removed from the experience, shows how he is still haunted by it and still unable to explain it. He often describes the encounter in near mystical terms:

***"As soon as my eyes caught sight of the girl's face I embraced one of life's bursting secrets. And again I saw her in the carriage for a few seconds, no more, but that was enough for me to lose all will power."*** (39)

It is worthwhile mentioning here that Cairo in Maḥfūz's novels has more than mere romantic imaginative validity, it is a recognisable physical presence; its powerful impact upon the lives of characters is as memorable as that of Dickens' London, Dostoevsky's St Petersburg or Zola's Paris. (40)

## 2-4- The Influences of Eastern and Western Writers on Mahfūz's works

### 2-4-1 The Influences of Eastern Writers on Mahfūz's Works.

It is beyond doubt that Mahfūz has given an important impulse to the Egyptian art of story writing, and this is due to the Egyptian writers whose ideas appear to have appealed to and influenced the intellect of Mahfūz during its formative years. One of them was Salāma Mūsa, whose socialist and evolutionist outlook on life can be found in almost every book that Mahfūz has written during more than sixty years of his creative life, and whose passion for Ancient Egypt can be traced in the novelist's early Pharaonic short stories and novels. (41) Some of Mahfūz's very early writings were printed during the 1930s in Al-Majalla al-Jadīda published by Mūsa, including Mahfūz's first novel, Ābath al-Aqdār (Game of Fate), and prior to that his translation from English to Arabic of a book about Ancient Egypt. In his memoirs Mahfūz recalls his brief personal acquaintance (42) with Mūsa during his undergraduate years. Elsewhere, Mahfūz admits:

*" From Salama Musa I have learnt to believe in science, socialism , and tolerance".(43)*

As for the other writer, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, Mahfūz states that he has been influenced by Tawfiq through his Āwdat al-Rūh (Return of the Spirit). Mahfūz says that he found it more akin to drama than to fiction . (44)

About Ṭāha Ḥusayn, Mahfūz informs us that he admits that Ṭāha's novel Shajarat al-Buṣ (Tree of Misery, 1944) was instrumental in focusing his attention on writing a saga novel, before he wrote his own Trilogy. (45) Ābbās Maḥmūd al-Āqqād is the writer whose enquiries into the principles of aestheticism and other philosophical issues appear to have helped push Mahfūz in the direction of selecting Philosophy as the subject of his first degree at King Fuād I University between the years 1930 to 1934. (46)

Mahfūz came to the conclusion that both Ṭāha Ḥusayn and ʿAbbās al-ʿAqqād were thinkers whose concern with the novel was only secondary. (47)

#### 2-4-2- The Influence of Western Writers on Mahfuz's Works

Najīb Mahfūz has devoted half a century to literature and has played an outstanding role in developing the technique of novel writing. He rejects fanaticism and welcomes differences of opinion and belief.(48) He read every thing he could lay hands on of western writers, such as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Zola, Camus, Dickens, Joyce, Kafka.....

He stated that :

*"The writers who influenced me are the ones I liked. I liked Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Maupassant....Of modernist writers, I liked Proust and Kafka. As for Joyce..... he was just a writer that you had to read..... Ulysses was a terrible novel but it created a trend... In the theatre, I liked Shakespere immensely.... Both his grandness and ironies entered my soul and made me feel at home with him... Next to Shakespeare I liked Eugene O' Neill much and also Ibsen and Strindberg. In the contemporary theatre I was truly shaken by Beckett's Waiting for Godot .As for Chekhov's theatre, I found it flaccid and boring."(49)*

He went on to say:

*"In American literature I consider Melvile's Moby Dick among the world's famous novels, if not the most famous. Out of Hemingway's work I only enjoyed The Old Man and the Sea, but his other work left me surprised at the fame he has acquired. I did not like Faulkner; he is too complicated. I also liked Dospassos, but none of them has written a Moby Dick." (50)*

Mahfūz was influenced also by the pre-Revolutionary Russian writers, and by Proust and Thomas Mann (51). He is sorry that since reading Tolstoy's War and Peace early in his life he has not had the time to read it

effect of social and political upheaval on the lives of individuals, i.e. The Trilogy.(52)

The Egyptian critic Ibrāhīm Fathy recollects that when he once asked Maḥfūz who were his models, he replied "*Bernard Shaw, Flaubert, Balzac, Zola, Camus, and Dostoevsky.*" (53)

Two things which Maḥfūz is happy to admit that they have influenced him, are James Joyce in his use of the internal monologue on the one hand and the surrealism and theatre of the absurd (whose influence can be spotted in some of his short stories and one-act plays written in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel) on the other hand. (54) With regard to his use of the internal monologue he has this to say :

*"The internal monologue is a method, a vision and way of life; and even though I use it, you cannot say that I belong to its school as such. All that happens is that I sometimes encounter a Joycean moment in my hero's life, so I render it in Joyce's manner with some modification .."*(55)

With respect to the impact of philosophy in Maḥfūz's works, it is worthwhile mentioning here that Badr (1987) and El-Enany (1993) point to the thoughts of the philosopher Henry Bergson, and his ideas on the duality of body and spirit, and his elevation of intuition over scientific reasoning as a way of knowing, arguing that these ideas are important for the understanding of Mahfuz's popular articles (56) on philosophy and history between 1930 and 1945.(57) Another Bergsonian notion active in Mahfuz's creation is perhaps that of the two moralities, one based on intelligence and the other on intuition. We can find its expressions not only in the creativity of art and philosophy, but also in the mystical experience that has been a key one in Mahfuz's works from Radwan al-Husayni in Zuqaq al-Midaqq (Midaq Alley) to Ali al-Junaydi in al-Liss wa al-Kilab (The Thief and the Dogs) Umar al Hamzawi in al-Shahhadh (The Beggar) and Abdullah al-Balkhi in Layali Alf layla wa layla (Thousand and one Nights). (58)

Umar al Hamzāwi in al-Shahhād (The Beggar) and Abdullāh al-Balkhi in Layāli Alf layla wa layla (Thousand and one Nights). (58)

## 2-5- Mahfūz's Professional Life

After graduation from the Department of Philosophy at the secular King Fu'ad I University in Cairo in 1934 Mahfūz became a civil servant in the cultural sector (where he remained until he retired in 1971) (59)

He served in a wide variety of government departments in various capacities and under different political regimes. In 1934 he joined the administration of King Fu'ad I University as a clerk, (there for example he picked up the model for Aḥmad Ākif hero of Khān al-Khalīli)

In 1938 he moved to the Ministry of Awqāf (religious endowments), where he worked as a parliamentary secretary to the Minister, and where there were stories which were later to provide his fiction with a great many characters and situations, as Qalb al-Layl.

In 1945, he was transferred to al-Ghūri library in Jamāliyya, his own birth place. His duties at the library appear to have been so scant as to allow him on the one hand to wander in the area and spend time in its cafés', watching human types and imprinting pictures of places on his memory and, on the other hand, to indulge in a major reading project -it was at that time, he tells us that he read Proust's (A la recherche du temps perdu) in English translation. It was a period of his life that he enjoyed fully, he informs us, chatting with lower-class women who came to apply for loans. Many of those women later came to populate his fiction, especially in the realistic phase. (60)

From the late 1940s up to the early 1980s Mahfūz worked as an occasional freelance film scenario writer. He wrote the scripts for twenty-five films, many of which are today counted among the classics of the Egyptian cinema industry. (61) Significantly, though, there are to date some thirty-four films based on his own work, for none of which did he write the

literary style, particularly in his use of the montage technique and flashbacks which began to feature noticeably in his works from the 1960s onwards. (62)

The early 1950s brought Maḥfūz's connection with Endowments to an end and saw him move to the seemingly more appropriate sphere of information and culture.

In 1971 he retired at the age of 60, and was invited to join the host of distinguished writers at Al-Ahrām newspaper. The great novel he serialised in Al-Ahrām was Qushtumur in 1988. He has also contributed a short weekly column on topical, non-literary issues for the last fifteen years or so. (64)

It is worthwhile mentioning here that Maḥfūz is now almost deaf and partially blind. He claims to live only to write. "If the urge should ever leave me", he said, "I want that day to be my last." (65)

## 2-6- A Personal Sketch of Najib Mahfuz

Maḥfūz remained a bachelor until the age of 43. For many years he laboured under the conviction that marriage, with its restrictions, would hamper his literary future (compare Kamāl's bachelorhood in the Trilogy). His prolonged bachelorhood gave him the opportunity to know many women, all of whom he tells us were later to appear in his fiction. In 1954, however, his defence against marriage collapsed and he has since enjoyed a happy and stable marriage which has produced two girls (66), Umm Kulthūm born in January 1957, and Faṭīma, named after Maḥfūz's mother, who was born in August 1959. Maḥfūz likes to keep his private life to himself. An Egyptian writer living in Cairo said about Maḥfūz:

*"He totally separates work and home life. He's a quiet person who does not make any enemies. He just carries on working, quietly, he's very dedicated."*(67)

When he married in 1954, he moved from the family home in ʿAbbāsiyya to an apartment overlooking the Nile in Giza where he still lives. It is worth mentioning that the Nile did not play a major role in his fiction until he wrote, with his great creative imagination, his novel Tharthara Fawq al-Nīl (Chatter on the Nile) in 1966. (68)

As for his personal life, Maḥfūz continues his writing in the mornings and his reading in the afternoons. (69) He has had to organise the second half of the day so carefully, to have the time to read and write. This is even more so since a chronic allergy in the eyes rendered him incapable of writing from April to the end of the summer, so he only has the winter months for his creative pursuits. In spite of poor health, nothing would stop him from sitting at his desk for two or three hours every evening until the work was completed. (70)

No account of Maḥfūz is complete without mention of Maḥfūz's Maqha (cafe) and the important role it plays both in his life and fiction. In

his youth, in common with men of his generation, the café acted as a social club. In his mature years Maḥfūz has used the Cafés, of Cairo and Alexandria (in the summer) as literary salons where he meets with his literary peers. (71) In the ancient Fīshāwy Café where they all gather every evening in the presence of the master, or at his flat overlooking the great river Nile,(72) he influences the younger generation of Egypt's writers.

There is hardly any novel by Maḥfūz in which the Café is not one of the most important elements. Two of his novels actually have as their titles the names of the Cafés where the action unfolds: Karnak and Qushtumur. At least the first of these is known to be closely based on Maqha ʿArabi, a favourite haunt of Maḥfūz in ʿAbbāsiyya. (73)

Maḥfūz in all his life has hardly left the centre of Old Cairo and has travelled abroad only three times, once to Yemen and once to Yugoslavia, both visits being on short official missions. The last journey was to Britain, where he received treatment for a heart attack. He very much wished to travel to Europe and study in France in his youth, in the manner of Ṭawfiq al-Ḥakīm and other Egyptian writers, but there were no opportunities available and he had become too set in his ways. (74) His dislike of travelling is so strong that when he has awarded the Nobel Prize in literature from the Swedish Academy in 1988, he refused to travel to receive it in person.

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**CHAPTER TWO: MAHFŪZ'S**  
**WORKS UP TO 1981**

## **CONTENTS OF CHAPTER TWO**

- 2-1 Maḥfūz's works before the 23 July revolution.
- 2-2 Maḥfūz's works after the 23 July revolution from 1959 to 1967.
- 2-3 Some comments on Maḥfūz's works of the 1960s.
- 2-4 Maḥfūz's works from the death of Naṣṣer to the death of Sādāt.
- 2-5 Some comments on Maḥfūz's works from 1970 to 1981.
- 2-6 The development of Maḥfūz's political beliefs through his works.

### 3-1. Introduction:

No novelist in all Arabic modern literature has reached as large an audience in his lifetime as Maḥfūz. He is not only a novelist but also a philosopher and writer of short stories. His works are known for three things: his mastery of the novel form, which is still relatively new in Egypt, his modernisation of literary language, from classical Arabic to the Arabic of the streets; and his ability to describe the contradictions peculiar to Egypt. (1) Moreover, the relation of his fiction to his philosophy is very strong as we can see in his novels such as Awlād Ḥaratina (Children of Gabalawi), Al-Shahhādah (The Beggar) and Al-Sarāb (Mirage).

It is worthwhile mentioning here that Maḥfūz's works cast light on more than half a century of social development, in which he spread his transparently veiled cloak of social criticism to cover the old Egyptian monarchy, the British presence during WWII and the subsequent regime which came to power with the Free Officers' Revolt of 1952. (2).

This chapter is divided into six sections:

The first will deal with Maḥfūz's works before the 23 July revolution, the second will deal with Maḥfūz's works after the 23 July revolution from 1959 to 1967; the third will discuss some comments on Maḥfūz's works during 1960; the fourth will deal with his works after the 23 July revolution to the death of Sādāt; the fifth some comments on Maḥfūz's works from 1970 to 1981; and the sixth will deal with Maḥfūz's political beliefs in the light of his works.

## 2-1. Mahfūz's Works Before the 23 July Revolution.

Najīb Maḥfūz has some twenty-seven novels to his name and ten collection of short stories.(3) Maḥfūz's career as a novelist began with three novels set in Ancient Egypt. His preoccupation with the history of Ancient Egypt goes back, however, many years to 1931 when, while still a student, he published a translation of an English text with the title Ancient Egypt by James Baikie. The translation, entitled Miṣr al-Qadīma, appeared in the publication al Majalla al-Jadīda (The New Review).

Maḥfūz has been asked why he translated a book on ancient Egypt. The answer he gave was that it was an experiment undertaken to improve his elementary English with the translated book. There is no doubt that his translation of a book on ancient Egypt had an influence on his early historical novels (5) such as ʿAbath al-Aqdār (The Game of Fates), Rādūbīs and Kifah Tība (Struggle of Thebes). (6)

Maḥfūz then turned to the world around him and he gradually moved to what critics usually call the social novel or the realistic novel of contemporary life. Between 1945 and 1957, Maḥfūz published six of his best known works of city life. (7) The titles of those novels are Khān al-Khalīlī 1945, al-Qāhira al-Jadīda 1946 (New Cairo), Zuqāq al-Midaqq 1947 (Midaq Alley), al-Sarāb 1948 (Mirage), Bidāya wa Nihāya 1951 (The Beginning and the End) and al-Thulāthiyya 1956-1957 (The Trilogy).

These novels paint a vigorous and scrupulous picture of the lower middle classes in Cairo of the years before 1930, and the years after the second world war with the minute details of their daily lives vividly and lovingly portrayed (8), with their darkness, ruthless poverty and frustration. (9)

As mentioned before, Maḥfūz began his career as a novelist with historical fiction, publishing three novels in this genre between 1939 and 1944. In these works the imaginative reconstruction of the ancient Egyptian past is less important than Maḥfūz's use of the distant (10) pharaonic setting

as a vehicle for commentary on the political and social situation of Egypt. (11)

His first novel in 1939 ʿAbath al-Aqdār (The Game of Fates) is set during the reign of Khūfū, builder of the Great Pyramid and second king of the fourth Dynasty in the time of the Old Kingdom. (12) The action begins when one day Khūfū asks a soothsayer how long his descendants are to reign over Egypt. The soothsayer answers that though the king himself is to rule undisturbed until the last day of his life, none of his descendants would sit on the throne after him, but rather a boy just born to a priest of the God Ra. Immediately the king sets out at the head of a military campaign to protect his throne against the young would-be usurper, but rather than thwarting the designs of fate by killing the new baby he kills the wrong baby unwittingly and saves the right one from further danger. (13)

Maḥfūz seems keen to record that the failure of human endeavour is not always comprehensible in the simple terms of cause and effect.

In 1943, Maḥfūz published his second historical novel Rādūbīs, set during the short reign of (Merenre) towards the end of the sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom. There is implied criticism of the tyranny of king Fārouk in Rādūbīs and a pronounced feeling of nationalist resentment against foreigners (and hence the British). (14) This story is about the young Pharaoh who loves Rādūbīs; that love takes possession of the king to the detriment of the affairs of the state and feeling and pride of the Queen, his sister and wife. More tragically, the affair gives the clergy a moral weapon to use against their opponent, who is finally killed in a popular uprising which he bravely faces without protection. (15)

Kifāḥ Tība (The Struggle of Thebes), Maḥfūz's third novel, which appeared in 1944, deals with the struggle of the Egyptians against the foreign rule of the Hyksōs. (16) This novel revealed a feeling of nationalist resentment against the foreign British occupation (17) on the one hand, and an aristocracy of Turkish stock on the other hand. (18)

Maḥfūz is happy to admit to this historical untruth: he was trying to mix history with the social Utopia he had been dreaming of, as he puts it(19). However, it was a wise decision when Maḥfūz abandoned pharaonic times for contemporary Egyptian and specifically Cairene settings. (20)

In the novels of the realistic phase which begins with Khan al-Khalīlī and ends with the Trilogy (1956-57) Maḥfūz portrays a panoramā of Egyptian urban society roughly from the time of the national uprising against British rule in 1919 to the end of World War II. (21)

Khān al-Khalīlī, published in 1945, describes one year in the life of a Cairene family during the second world war from September 1941 to August 1942 during the German air-raids on Cairo. (22) Khān al-Khalīlī is a sensitive treatment of a middle-class family whose hopes of happiness slowly fade away, ending in death. (23) The family decides to escape from the modern quarter of al-Sakākīnī, where they have lived for a long time, to the old religious quarter of Khān al-Khalīlī in the neighbourhood of the shrine of al-Ḥusayn; they believe that al-Ḥusayn will protect the area and that the Germans should know better than to unnecessarily invoke the wrath of Moslems by bombing their holy places. The symbolic aspects of the family's flight can hardly be missed:

It is a flight from the dangers of the new to the safety of the old. Maḥfūz uses in his story, two of his characters to advocate respectively the old and the new (a technique that he used again in the story of al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (New Cairo) and in al-Sukkariyya (Sugar Street). The old is represented by Aḥmad Ākif, the eldest son and provider for the family. The new is represented by Aḥmad Rāshid, a lawyer. The lawyer is a well-read socialist (24) who believes that modern society has no place for religion and that social progress can only be achieved through dependence on science: "Just as religion saved us from idolatry, science must save us from religion". (25)

In 1986 Maḥfūz published his second social novel al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (New Cairo). It starts out by introducing three university students, representatives of different trends in Egyptian culture. One, Āli Ṭāha, is

open to socialism and science, Ma'mūn Raḍwān is a deeply committed Muslim, and Maḥjūb 'Abd al-Da'im a self-centred nihilist. (26) The novel concentrates on Maḥjūb, who is driven by poverty to accept employment in return for agreeing to marry the mistress of his boss, and continues his relationship with her. Although at first the future looks rosy and he obtains promotion, they both soon come to a bad end when their arrangement is uncovered in a scandal. (27)

(New Cairo) paints a gloomy picture of a changing society suffering from moral and political corruption and desperately searching for values.

Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Midaq Alley) was published in 1947 as was Khān al-Khaīlī, one of Maḥfūz's best novels. Although Zuqāq al-Midaqq as a novel deals primarily with the problem of poverty in an old Cairene quarter, and it also overlooks socio-cultural dimensions. (Midaq Alley) is a novel about a specific place or location. It is about a small alley, off the Ṣanādīqiyya street in the old Cairene quarter of al-Ḥusayn, which consists of two houses with three flats each, and five shops of various sizes and business pursuits. (28) It introduces a number of characters who are mutually complementary and none of whom could be characterised as secondary. Two figures, 'Abbās the barber and his friend Ḥusayn, leave the alley to try their luck in the modern world, as embodied for them in a British Army Camp during world War II. The one, Ḥusayn, leaves the alley because he hates living there; the other friend, 'Abbās, is a delicate, honest young man, whose sole ambition is to make a little money and marry the orphan girl he loves, Ḥamīda. (29) Ḥamīda is a beautiful young orphan who was raised from baby-hood by an old friend of her mother; then Ḥamīda left the alley and disappeared to enjoy the lights and adventures of the modern city.

The other characters are, Zaiṭa the Crippler, Dr. Boōshy the dentist, Kirsha the café owner, Sheikh Darwīsh the mystic and Sayyid Riḍwan al-Ḥusayni who acts as mediator in the inhabitants' quarrels and represents the moral authority of the alley. (30) At the end of the story 'Abbās learns of Ḥamīda's disappearance, and he attacks her, only to be beaten to death himself. Maḥfūz's preoccupation's in this period are illustrated in the careers of the alley's younger generation, Ḥusayn, 'Abbās and Ḥamīda when they

of the alley's younger generation, Ḥusayn, ʿAbbās and Ḥamīda when they come into contact . This story is only one of the many sad changes in the lives of the outside world and it is there that Ḥamīda and ʿAbbās come to grief.(31) In the end Sayyid Riḍwān goes to Mecca for pilgrimage, to ask forgiveness for all the people of the Hara's sins. (32)

In Al-Sarāb (Mirage, 1948) Maḥfūz takes a momentary break from old Cairo with its seedy streets to pay a visit to al-Manial, a decent middle-class area in the south-west of the capital, where lives a wealthy family of Turkish descent. (33) Maḥfūz here appears to be concerned with the representation of psychological rather than physical or naturalistic reality. In the process of doing so he vacates his hitherto habitual position of omniscient narrator and hands us over to his protagonist, Kāmil Ru'ba Lāz, to tell his own story. (34)

This is the story of a very acute case of psychological impotence, in a man of strongly libidinous nature. Since childhood his libido has veered away from reality into the creation of fantasy, and become fixated on unconscious ideas of an incestuous sexual object -his mother. (35) Kāmil Rūba Lāz was the youngest child of a divorced mother already deprived of seeing her two other children by their father, who has legal custody of them. He grows up in an abnormal atmosphere completely isolated from the outside world by his over-loving, over-protective mother who also instils in him a hatred of his father, whom he does not meet until he is 17. The boy grows up a social misfit without friends, and a failure at school. He has no relationships with girls. When he is 26 he marries (36) a beautiful woman who looks very much like his mother except for her brown eyes. The unhappy wife tries to find happiness with another man, an extrovert young physician who happens to know her husband's predicament, and who later causes her death by attempting an abortion for which he is unqualified. Soon after his wife's death Kāmil's mother dies too.

However, Al-Sarāb constitutes an important milestone in the literary development of Najīb Maḥfūz in that it forms "a natural conclusion to the previous stages of the downfall and collapse".

Maḥfūz returns to old Cairo through his novel Bidāya wa Nihāya, (The Beginning and the End) which was published in 1951, and shows a marked degree of mastery in the art of writing and in handling the material. The work is remarkable also because of its deep insight into the problems of Egyptian society which emerged after the treaty of 1936. It is the story of a lower middle-class family which gradually falls apart as a result of the sudden death of a minor civil servant, who leaves behind him a widow, three sons and a daughter. (37)

The hero of this story, Ḥasanaḡn, ends his young life by drowning himself in the Nile, certain that he is left with no alternative. He has just confronted his sister, a very unhappy young woman, who was caught in a police raid on a brothel, and ordered to throw herself into the Nile. Nefīsa, the sister, whose story of moral decline is externally quite flawless, is psychologically a rather "stylised" figure. His interior monologue towards the end of the novel, when he watches her body lying on the quay by the Nile, (38) is revealing:

*"O God, I am finished" "what right have I given myself; am I really aroused to defend the honour of our family? I am the worst of the whole family" (39).*

In the final chapter of the novel Ḥasan the eldest brother dies the death of a thief and Ḥasanaḡn and Nefīsa drown in the Nile. Ḥusaḡn alone does well by marrying the lovely girl and faces a future glittering with hope. (40)

Maḥfūz's characters Ḥasanaḡn and Maḥjūb in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (New Cairo) are very much alike in their tension and constant anxiety. They are always fearful, believing themselves to be victims of hidden forces which are constantly persecuting them. Ḥusaḡn, the middle brother, when he finished high school gave up his study like Aḥmad Ākif in Khān al-Khalīli, and assumed the responsibility for his family.

Maḥfūz's last and most mature work in this realistic manner is his monumental al-Thulāthiyya (The Trilogy). In 1956 he published the first volume of his Trilogy Bayn al-Qasrayn (Between the Two Palaces) and in

1957 he published his second and third volumes Qasr al-Shawq (Castle of Desire) and al-Sukkariyya (Sugar Street). It will be clear to many readers that this was the beginning of a great literary event. This work is an enormous personal testimony and portrays the political scene of Egypt, and the daily life of the middle-class Cairene family of ʿAbd al-Jawwād during the period 1917-1944.

Bayn al-Qasrayn begins with a detailed account of the family of a middle-aged merchant, Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawwād, his wife Amīna, their two sons Fahmi and Kamāl and two daughters Khadīja and ʿAisha as well as his son by a previous marriage, Yāsīn, whose mother was divorced before he was born. (41)

The events of Qasr al-Shawq begin five years later. The shock of gloom lies over ʿAbd al-Jawwād's family. Yāsīn leaves the family house to live in his own house, marries and divorces, and eventually marries an old flame who had meanwhile been his father's mistress. He has a son by his first wife. Khadīja has two sons and ʿAisha has a daughter and two sons. Kamāl, now a young man, falls in love with the sister of an aristocratic fellow student. (42)

The volume ends on an equally sad note: ʿAisha's sons, together with her husband, die suddenly in a typhoid epidemic and together with her daughter she moves back to her parents' house.

The last volume in the trilogy, al-Sukkariyya, covers the period 1935-1944, and concentrates on the lives of the third generation. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Jawwād is now an old man, a house-bound invalid who eventually dies of a heart attack during a raid on Cairo. Amīna, who has never got over the loss of her son, leads a gloomy existence in which she tries to comfort her bereaved daughter, ʿAisha. Kamāl is now a school teacher(43), Yāsīn's son becomes a shrewd and compromising politician, while Khadīja's two sons embrace two diametrically opposite ideologies, the one becoming a Muslim Brother, while the other joins the left and meets and marries a fellow journalist, Sawsan. The hapless ʿAisha loses her daughter, who dies in labour,

and her death almost unhinges her mind. We see her for the last time as an old-looking woman .(44)

The novel ends with both Communist and Muslim Brothers in gaol for their political activities, and the dying of Amīna, while Khādīja's grandson is about to be born. (45)

It is a gloomy picture of Cairo which Maḥfūz paints in these five novels, and there is truth in the view that he allows his natural pessimism to overwhelm him. (46)

## 2-2 Mahfūz's Works After the 23 July Revolution, 1959-1967

Mahfūz's novels written after the revolution display a considerable degree of continuity, in form and style, with those written before 1952. Although Mahfūz has continued to experiment with form, he uses symbols when he passes through an experience that triggers an emotion or gives birth to an idea or a view which might be regarded as, in essence, a political issue. These novels may serve as an introduction to the world of Najīb Mahfūz.

After the Trilogy, he spent five years in silence. The next fiction he wrote was Awlād Hārātina (Children of Gebelawi) 1959. This is the mark of his return.

Since that time he has explained many times the reason for those five silent years. He has said that he felt that the society he had been writing about for years had changed overnight and that many of the social ills which had moved me to write were remedied by the new regime". (47)

Children of Gebelawi is a novel in five parts with each of the sections named after, and appearing to highlight the lives of, five major figures who have influenced world religions: Adham (Adam) Jabal (Moses) Rifa'a (Christ), Kāssim (Mohammed) and 'Arafa (a twentieth century scientific type), who murders the founding ancestor or Jabalāwī (God) in the quest for modern, more relevant knowledge. (48).

Its realistic level, concerned with the political and economic organisation of the Hāra, conceals an allegorical level of metaphysical discussion. (49) The story is set in a poor quarter of traditional Cairo, with its cafés, its drug peddlers and prostitutes, its poets and strong men (Futuwwās). (50) This novel was originally serialised in the Cairo daily al-Ahrām between September 21st and December 25th 1959. It has never been published in a book in Egypt, and had to wait eight years before being published in Lebanon. This is the only book that Mahfūz has published outside Egypt. (51) We notice that Awlād Hārātina, which marks the first period's last phase and the beginning of the second period, expresses Najīb's

attitude towards the 23 July revolution (which is well known.) He did not forgive it for the gap which quickly appeared between its principles and practices specifically, the principle of the 1952 revolution as an example of a revolution which was corrupted by the dominant power.

One notices that the first realistic novel which Maḥfūz wrote in the era of the revolution was al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb (The Thief and The Dogs) The character of Raʾuf Alwan is an example of how the revolution will be corrupted by power and those who take advantage of it. After this, almost all the novels of the sixties were to criticise the different sides of the revolution's weakness, as Maḥfūz witnessed it. We can call these novels "searching for the way in different thought". In al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb (The Thief and the Dogs) the hero Saʿīd was willing to view all people as equal, similarly, in al-Tariq (The Search) Ṣābir's aim was to search for his father (al-Raḥimī) which means the search for himself through his father's money. In al-Shahhād (The Beggar), Umar al-Ḥamzāwī searches for the meaning of life but ends up insane, and in the story of al-Summān wa al-Kharīf (Autumn Quail) ʿIsa, when the revolution takes over the power, feels that he is lost and finds all his friends to be hypocrites (swimming with the tide) but ʿIsa refuses to follow them. ʿIsa aims to search for a role in life; he wants to change his life. But how? That is the point, he asks himself; Aren't there any new trends which will make me love life?

In 1961 Maḥfūz published his novel al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb (The Thief and The Dogs). The action takes place over a short period of time, nearly sixty days, and the pace of events is quite quick. (52) Saʿīd is a thief just released from prison. Having been betrayed by his closest friends he is intent on punishing the traitors. He comes to believe that his mission of revenge is symbolic, and it is in fact aimed at all traitors and bullies. (53)

Raʾuf Alwan was his mentor in days gone by and a proponent of theft as a means to redistribute wealth. Raʾuf has meanwhile become a successful journalist whose only advice to Saʿīd is to start a new life. Saʿīd betrayed again tries to take revenge but his efforts end in the death of an innocent man. Hunted by the police, and with public opinion whipped up against him

by Ra'uf's newspaper, he finds shelter with Nūr, a prostitute who loves him, but when she disappears and he has to go out in search of food, the police corner him and gun him down in a graveyard. (54)

Sāid's dream reflect the realities as in a concave mirror, but also conveys with greater force the brutality of these realities.(55) The consciousness of Sāid with its movement between impressions of the present, plans for the future and memories of the past is also vividly portrayed. (56)

Al-Summān wa al-Kharīf (Autumn Quail), which was published in 1962, is set in the social and political realities of present-day Egypt. Īsa, the protagonist of al-Summān, his promising career in ruins following the 1952 revolution, refuses to compromise with the new realities. He cuts himself off from mainstream society destroying himself as a person (57), because he can not find a way to make his peace with the new society. His engagement to Salwā is broken because her father, the friend of the deposed King, wanted to find a way to the new rulers. This leaves him deeply scared, especially as the girl later marries his cousin, a supporter of the new regime. During his withdrawal to Alexandria, he shelters a homeless prostitute, Rīrī. In hysterical fear, he throws her out when she discloses that she is bearing his child. He then marries a rich widow, in order to secure "a life-long insurance". He soon finds that a life without action, without posterity, is unbearable. Then, accidentally, he comes across Rīrī and her daughter. Without hesitation he decides to put an end to his past and join his "natural family". But Rīrī, now married, refuses to have anything to do with him. (58)

Yet there is great shallowness in the character of Īsa because of the author's lukewarm and ambiguous attitude to him, and because this character, unlike the hero of al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb, fails to express anything which has a significance beyond the plain narrative.

In 1964 Maḥfūz published his third novel of this period, al-Tariq (The Search). The search involves a mysterious journey from Alexandria to Cairo (59). It concerns a playboy, whose mother (a former prostitute) reveals to him on her deathbed that he is the son of a wealthy (60) aristocrat from

whom he should seek financial support. He then sets out on a search for his father. (61) Under these conditions the dream of having a father somewhere suddenly looms out from beyond time and place, with the promise of freedom, dignity and peace. It is a mysterious journey through the world of white slavery, blood, drugs and unemployment. (62) First Ṣābir looks in Alexandria, then in Cairo. Ṣābir meets Karīma, a woman of fire, who was the landlady of the hotel at which he stayed. Her husband was eighty. At another point in his life Ṣābir meets Ilhām, a different woman whose sweet nature was so unlike the fiery Karīma. The relationship between them was in sharp contrast with his relationship with Karīma.

Both women are given an appropriate name: Karīma, which means "generous," gives her body; and Ilhām, which means "inspiration," gives her soul. At the end of the story Ṣābir's tragedy comes as the answer to the big question: What shall I do with my life? How can we secure freedom, dignity and peace? (63)

The metaphysical search is carried on into the author's next novel al-Shahhād (The Beggar) published in 1965. It begins with ʿUmar el-Ḥamzāwī, a successful and happily married middle aged lawyer with two loving daughters. (64) ʿUmar loses interest in his work and in life. He asks: *don't we live our life knowing full well that it is going to be taken away by God?* The answer of the client came but it was an answer that ʿUmar himself was never able to dismiss from his mind. (65) His search leads him along many paths. A new love leaves him spiritually thirsty and so he indulges in mystical kinds of sex, in his search and he lives like a drop out and a recluse, lost in his wild visions. The novel describes an existentialist experience relating to the loss of the meaning of life. (66).

Tharthara fawq al-Nīl (Chattering on the Nile) was published in 1966. Tharthara is iconoclastic whereas Mīrāmār is a novel of worship. The difference is reflected in their forms. Tharthara is an author's story, told largely from the point of view of a narcotic outcast. Mīrāmār consists of the stories of four different persons as told by themselves, each one representing a particular experience. (67) Tharthara takes place in an ʿawwāma (houseboat), rented by Anīs Zakī, who not having recovered from the loss of

his wife's baby, escapes from harsh reality to the houseboat. Then the heroes of the novel were faced with a moral dilemma regarding the need to report an accident in which their car was involved in the death of a pedestrian.

One can see that the novel, full of moral ambiguities emphasising the absurdity of life, is at the same time a criticism of Egyptian society in the mid-sixties.

These qualities are even more visible in Mirāmār, published in 1967. As if exhausted by the metaphysical search which spanned the last three novels, Maḥfūz drops it altogether in Mirāmār.

Mirāmār is Maḥfūz's last story to cover the aberrations of the 1952 revolution before the 1967 debacle. As in (Chatter on the Nile), it brings together a group of different people in a confined space (the pension Mirāmār here replaces the ʿawwāma there). Each of the patrons of the pension represents a section of the contemporary society of Egypt, with Zohra the peasant maidservant standing for Egypt. (68) The patron's male character is that of the Wafdist journalist ʿAmir Wajdi who in manner is reminiscent of the hero of Autumn Quail. The most abhorrently depicted on the other hand, is Sarḥan al-Buḥairy, the representative of the lower middle class. (69) Most interesting perhaps of Maḥfūz's creations in this novel is the character of Manṣūr Bāhi, the socialist renegade. (70)

Mirāmār paints a gloomy picture of society utterly lacking in values; it is a bitter attack on the shortcomings of the revolution and on the emptiness of its socialist slogans and undoubtedly prophesies Egypt's military defeat by Israel in The Six Days War. (71)

## 2-3 Some comments on Maḥfūz's Works of the 1960s

Throughout Maḥfūz's fiction in the 1960s we have realised that he pictured his heroes in a negative way, so that they refused to face the revolution, and they could not bear the outcome of this revolution. Moreover, they showed a negative reaction when they committed crimes and abandoned the remaining morals in their lives, when the revolution disappointed them and wasted their dreams. This reveals the weakness in Maḥfūz's characters.

As an example, the hero in The (Thief and the Dogs) is indeed a victim of opportunism, when Ra'ūf Alwan encourages him to rise portraying him as Robin Hood.

As far as I am concerned, that hero would have fallen into the aforementioned mistakes because of his illiteracy, though if he was aware of his religion and culture, he would not have followed the opportunist Ra'ūf Alwan, and would have fulfilled his expectation that he was doing the right thing.

In al-Tariq, we may realise that what Ṣābir did was return to his depravity. He is an illegitimate child, whose mother brought him up on illegal money. It is natural therefore, that he collapses and kills. We cannot expect such a person to do any thing right, because he has not been brought up by a good family which cares for its progeny. He is also uneducated, which is why he refused the job Ilhām offered him, believing himself not to be qualified enough for it.

The hero in al-Summān wa al-Kharif refuses to face political reality. Instead, he finds that the only way to forget all the destruction that has happened to him is to immerse himself in lust. This eventually produced the birth of an illegitimate child, whom he did not accept.

In al-Shahhād the long-awaited revolution has taken place. The hero hopes it will succeed, but instead he finds himself in despair of it, and day by

day he finds this desperation has increased. According to the heroes in those novels the reader may get into confusion when he see a person who is at the peak of fame, falling down to the lowest level because of trivial shocks which the strong believer can easily endure.

On the other hand we find Riḍā Ḥammād, a character in al-Marāyā (Mirrors) who is a member of a tragic family despite its members being successful. It has faced a bitter fate. The father who is a well-known doctor, loses his job because of his enthusiasm for the Wafd party (a nationalist party). The mother who has died had been one of the pioneers of the Women's Renaissance Society. All this and more happened, when Riḍā was still a child, as his sister had died in England during a mission, while his brother had died as a martyr in the 1919 revolution.

When Riḍā was jeopardised by defamation and was detained after the revolution, his son was still a teenager in secondary school. This boy lost his nerve, refused to go to school and withdrew to the house, until Riḍā was obliged to place him in a mental hospital. As result of all these events the mother collapsed, then became crippled and died.

One therefore might think, that Riḍā's end has come but in fact, it has not, for he left his old quarter for Miṣr al-Jadida and dedicated himself to his office and profession. His last ten years were perhaps the most successful ones. (74)

Through this overview we can deduce the moral basis in Riḍā Ḥammād, and we can realise that it was the factor of religion more than any other factor. His religion was built upon a strong, pure ideology without superstition or fanaticism, which helped him in overcoming all the troubles that he faced.

Yes he did stand and oppose any leftist opinion and he was not able to develop throughout time. It is due to his moral personality; probably the thing that supported him in facing the catastrophes that overtook his life. He concentrated all his effort on his work, faced life with a steel determination and remained on friendly terms with his friends.

As we observe, the Holy Qur'an regularly encourages patience in facing obstacles, as in the following Verses:

Allāh says:

*"Who say, when faced With calamity To God We belong, and to Him Is our return "Surah (2)156 .*

*"They are those on whom (Descend) blessing from God, And Mercy, And they are the ones That receive guidance." Surah(2)157.*

*" Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss In good or lives or the fruits (Of your toil), but give Glad tidings to those Who patiently persevere." Surah (2) 155.*

From these verses, the following meaning of Ṣābir is to be understood here, viz : patience, perseverance, constancy, self-restraint, refusing to be cowed down. These virtues we are to exercise for ourselves and in relation to others; we are to set an example so that others vie with us, and we are to vie with them, lest we fall short; in this way we strengthen each other and bind our mutual relations close, in our common service of God. (75)

#### 2-4- Maḥfūz's Works from the Death of Nāṣṣer to the Death of Sādāt

The importance of these works lies in the period from the military debacle of 1967 to Nāṣṣer's death in 1970. Maḥfūz began to write a series of novels in which he continued his description of evolution of Nāṣṣer's Egypt. These novels were published intermittently in the seventies and the early eighties, and novels such as Mirrors, al-Karnak, and Ḥubb Taḥt al-Matar (Love in the Rain). From the eighties Najīb started writing novels which talked about Sādāt's era such as al-Bāqī min al-Zaman Sa<sup>c</sup>a (There Only Remains an Hour) 1982, Yawm Qutil al-Za<sup>c</sup>im (The day the leader was killed) 1985, Ṣabāḥ il-Ward, (A very good morning to you) 1987, and Ḥadīth al-Sabāḥ wa al-Masā' (Talk of Mornings and Evenings).1987. These novels

draw attention to the open-door policy, which had been imposed by force on Egypt for over 3 years. It is concerned with the investment of Arab and foreign capital and free-trade areas, opening the door too widely to foreign capital without taking into consideration what may be able to protect the national economy and also protect Egypt's economic independence. It also gives privileges to foreign capital which exceed those given to national capital. All these developments have been opposed by the Egyptian people, objecting to the Open-door policy by different means. These reactions began with resentment and ended by transforming this resentment into candid public action through demonstrations and strikes.

Mirrors (1972) consists of fifty- five character sketches ranging from five to fifteen pages. When Mirrors was first published, Maḥfūz described it as a work of a special nature more akin to biography. (76) The novel is a panorama of Egyptian society over a period of fifty years (i.e. the 1919 revolution to the late 1960s in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the 1967 War with Israel.) (77) Appropriate pauses are made at the turbulent 1930s; the national struggle under the leadership of the Wafd party, the emergence of the Moslem Brotherhood and other political groups; Egypt during World War II; and the 1952 revolution and the radical changes it brought about in the political, economic and social structure of society. Each sketch of this novel carries as its title the name of the character it portrays.

The sketches are arranged alphabetically, which makes cross-reference possible when one character or a related incident is mentioned in the account of another. The book is a heap of images, broken in the flux of time, each a fragment of human flotsam carried forward by the eternal current. (78)

After Naṣṣer's death in 1970 Maḥfūz published his Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love in the Rain) 1973 which sheds some light on the years between 1967-1970 and the time of war between Egyptian and Israeli forces across the Suez Canal, until Naṣṣer accepted a temporary cease-fire shortly before his death in September 1970. (79) The novel depicts a demoralised society with city people sunk in a bottomless pit of apathy hardly aware of the war

going on at the front. The fact dawns on people that they have been living in a myth from which the military defeat has shocked them into reality. (80)

Mahfūz forces out of the blue and virtually on the last page of the novel, a Palestinian freedom fighter with enthusiastic, forward-looking words. It does not work. (81)

Al-Karnak unlike the timely Tharthara fawq al-Nīl which could have cost Mahfūz his career, made a safe appearance.(82) This novel was written by December 1971, but did not appear until 1974, a year after the novel Hubb Taht al-Matar (Love in the Rain) which exposed the torture in detention camps and the fate of political prisoners under Nāṣṣer's regime. It was published during the Sādāt period. By that date the apparent liberalisation of the Sādāt regime was promoting the appearance in print and in the theatre of what was to become a flood of works critical of the policies of Nāṣṣer's era.

Many of these polemical writings deserve careful analysis and it could be argued that this novel has a place amongst them. It depicts with remarkable clarity the trauma of a cluster of typical Egyptians; its convincingly intimate portrait of what it meant to live in Cairo in the middle and late 1960s constitutes a scathing critique of the repression of Nāṣṣer's policy state. ( 83)

Hikāyāt Hārātina (The Fountain and the Tomb), carries on from where Mirrors broke off. It was published three years after Mirrors in 1975 (84). (The Fountain and the Tomb's) scenes and characters were drawn from the novelist's child-hood and the work is set in Jamāliyya. It is a memory of the place and a living register of its people and their history. The story is largely an extended internal monologue which begins with a description of the protagonist's feelings on the day of his retirement after a long and futile career in the civil service. (85)

Let us now turn to a group of stories which give a picture of Sādāt's era and which Mahfūz wrote in the Seventies. The first novel we shall discuss is (There Only Remain an Hour).

Al-Bāqī min al-Zaman Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>a is a document of the political history of twentieth-century Egypt, from the time of the nationalist uprising against the British in 1919, to the Camp David agreement and the peace treaty with Israel in 1979. It stops short of the assassination of Sādāt in 1981 although it was published after the killing of Sādāt in 1982. The novel must have been written during his life time, as it makes no mention of the event. (86)

Al-Bāqī min al-Zaman Sa<sup>ʿ</sup>a is written with simplistic symbolism, each of the characters standing for one or other of the political ideas or forces rife in Egypt during the last three quarters of a century. The most important character is Saniyyā, the grandmother, who represents the spirit of Egypt herself. The novel is written in one long piece of about 190 pages without chapter divisions. It is a novel of the history of modern Egypt. The book ends with a family gathering in the old derelict house. (87)

Maḥfūz goes on to present the life of the Sādāt regime through his next novel Yawm Qutil al-Za<sup>ʿ</sup>im (The Day the Leader was Killed) which was published in 1981. The events are actually set from 1919 to 1981 and the novel reaches its climax with the killing of President Sādāt on October 6th, 1981. It should be pointed out here that the 70s and 80s will long be remembered for their so-called Infitāḥ or the open-door policy initiated by Sādāt which was bent on dismantling Nāṣṣer's Arab socialist system. The novel was to be carried out through series of the apocalyptic parading. It is against this background that we are introduced to the characters: three generations of Muḥtashīmīs, all suffering from an acute sense of alienation. (88) Muḥtashīmī is the grandfather, Alwan his grandson and Randa the latter's fiancée. The grandfather is an old man in his eighties who has lived a long life during which he has been witness to political events from the time of Saād Zaghlūl to that of Sādāt. As for the grandson and his fiancée they belong to the lower middle class. They have been engaged for many years but they are still unable to rent and furnish a flat under Sādāt's open-door policy. Thus the engagement is broken, and the girl is married to her wealthy boss, (89) who is one of the beneficiaries of the Infitāḥ system, who will force her into participating in his nightly business ventures. It is too late when Randa realises that *"I had sold myself for nothing... I now discover that I am no more than simply a means to an end."*(90)

At the end of the story <sup>C</sup>Alwan, the ex-fiancee of Randa, kills her husband and we realise that Maḥfūz connects this killing with Sādāt's killing. The story thus ends to tell us to be on the look-out for fresh hope. And the killing of the leader is an end which points to a new beginning.

In 1979 Maḥfūz wrote his Layālī Alf Layla wa Layla (A Thousand and One Nights) though he did not publish it until 1982, nearly a year after Sādāt's death. We therefore may wonder whether he intended to have it published after the death of Sādāt, or if there was some other reason. (91)

If we look at (A Thousand and One Nights) from an Arabic nationalist's viewpoint, we find that it is one of Maḥfūz's most political novels artistically portraying, interpreting and chronicles the 1970s.

The violence that pervaded the Arab world from the 1970s is represented by the Palestinian commando actions and debacle in Jordan, the assassination of King Faiṣal in Riyāḍ, the bloody sectarian conflict in Lebanon and Egypt, the military clash on the Western Ṣaḥara' in Morocco, and the political assassinations of leaders all over the Arab world. (92) All this bloody violence must have left its finger-prints clearly on the bloody, violence, and intensive man-slaughter that is concealed under the cover of the nights.

(A Thousand and One Nights), a carefully crafted work of Maḥfūz, represents the personality of Sādāt through his hero Shahrayār. As Shahrayār was attracted by Shahrazād's tales, Sādāt was attracted by Western Democracy. But when the symbols and slogans in Shahrazād's tales became true life, Shahrayār turned to a devil who wanted to destroy everything around him. Sādāt did the same thing when he could not implement a western style regime, to which he was attracted in his own life. (93)

Thus Sādāt states in his book al-Baḥth<sup>C</sup>an al-dhat

*" Building the human being is the real aim, there is no doubt that the value of human being absolute ".(94)*

At the same time as he was saying this, we find him fiercely oppressing the Arabs in Egypt. Moreover, he was obliged at the end to send 1500 of his thinkers and leaders to jail without trial.

Thus Sādāt had turned into a devil or worse. He was a ruler who admired other political systems, such as western democracy. That is what Shahrayār does when he admires his tales while they are far from him, but when it came to his own house and affected him, he would have preferred to deal with it democratically, but was not sure how to go about it, so he became stressed and turned into a devil.(95)

We can understand more about Sādāt's regime through Maḥfūz's following stories Ḥadīth al-Ṣabāḥ wa al Masāʿ, (Tales of Morning and Evening). This work, published in 1987, contains sixty-seven sketches of characters drawn mainly from three families whose members are all related. Its beginning is in the late eighteenth century, at the time of the arrival of Napoleon in Egypt, and it concludes with occurrences from the post-Sādāt era, covering a period of nearly 200 years. The three main families of the novel, namely those of Yazīd al-Miṣrī, Muʿāwiya al-Qalyūbī and ʿAtā al-Marākībī, together represent all sections of Egyptian urban society. (96) This is conveyed through the portrait of Rādiya Muʿāwiya al-Qalyūbī, a member of the second generation who lives for a hundred years, to Naṣṣer's era. On the one hand he promoted some of her grand children to heaven, while on the other hand he sentenced their elite to either hell or jail therefore she was in a confused position not knowing whether to curse him or to pray for him. (97) She inherits her superstition from her mother and continues to influence subsequent generations with them. (Tales of Morning and Evening) is a sad novel, always beginning with birth and always ending with death.

Ṣabāḥ al-Ward (A Very Good Morning to you) published in the same year as (Tales of Morning) is referred to in the author's list of publications as a Majmuʿa (collection), and is a new kind of Trilogy. Yet it is not like the old Trilogy which was divided into three novels, each leading up to the next by some kind of inevitability. The two are different in their concretization of

that tripartite notion. But it is similar to the old (Trilogy) in its use of the generation paradigm. And it is very similar to what the author does in real life even though their names and some of their traits have been altered. In (A Very Good Morning), we get this same focus but, this time, it is in the context of the Infitāh (The Open-door economic policy) which was to come in the wake of Naṣṣerism. (98) The story is divided into three parts, the first part entitled Umm Aḥmad (Mother of Ahmad), the second part entitled Sabah al-Ward (A Very Good Morning to You) and the third part entitled Asʿad Allāh Masāʿak (May God Grant you a Happy Evening). (99)

The stories give us a few examples about the Infitāh in the Egyptian context becoming a deprived community amidst a circus of thieves. The individual, furthermore, is repressed: the Nile itself is no longer able to show anger. (100)

From the foregoing one can deduce that Maḥfūz reflects on the political atmosphere through his hero's mother, grandmother and grandfather. It shows the generations' solidarity towards every idea, despite the opposition shown to every idea before victory is achieved. Those heroes lived from before 1919 to the death of Sādāt or before his death. They included the likes of Saniyā the grandmother in There Only Remains an Hour, Muḥtashim, the grandfather in (The day the Leader was Killed) Raiyā in (A Very Good Morning to You) the example of Umm Aḥmad, in (Tales of Morning and Evenings).

If we go back to Maḥfūz's first historical fiction, (The Struggle of Thebes), we will find that the grandmother he describes plays an effective role. The auspices of her sacred motherhood which had continued throughout generations ceased when she welcomed the continuous victories of King Aḥamus's son. She reached out to him, as she did with his father, grandfather and his great grandfather before him. Thus motherhood continues every time, at war and peace, and extends across generations as a symbol for solidarity as much as the continuation of the revolutionary spirit.

This mother's motherhood is not restricted to the natural meaning of mother, but she exceeds these interpretations to the values to which a nation

attaches importance when it carries the name of a nation. Aḥmus's mother [the sacred mother] therefore did not die till the end of the novel, because she extends her hands to everyone, and resists throughout the generations.

## 2-5- Some comments on Maḥfūz's works from 1970 to 1981:

These novels cast light on the faultiest aspects of the open-door era, represented in the hero's inability to marry the woman he loves because of the high cost of living on one hand, and the emergence of a rich faction due to the Open-door policy, and business on the other hand.

Ḥadīth al-Ṣabāh, also describes the open-door era. on the one hand, we can see that the hero of (The Day the Leader was Killed) was not able to buy a flat, Adham in The (Tales of Morning) on the other hand his father buys a ninety thousand pound flat. The matter shows the distinction between the peoples situation during the time of Sādāt's regime. Moreover, there is a connection between the hero Anwar ḤAllām and ex-president Sādāt, in (The Day the Leader was Killed) who both died on the same day.

## 2-6- The Development of Maḥfūz's Political Beliefs Through His Works

We have now given a general view about Maḥfūz's works which were written during the years of 1919 to nearly the end of 1980. We therefore, can ask ourselves why did Maḥfūz concentrate in his literature on the political aspect more than any other aspect?

Ibrahīm ḤAmer believes that Najīb is a political writer of the first order. He has a clear point of view with a historical dimension. His social outlook has remained firm and presents a coherent ideology. Ibrahīm claims that Maḥfūz records the events of the national liberation struggle of Egypt in its various stages. Ibrahīm continues that he does not mean that he plays the

part of a historian, but that he records the most important events and their impact on the daily life of the ordinary individual. Maḥfūz himself emphasises:

*"In all my writing you find politics. You may find a story which ignores love, or any other subject, but not politics; it is the very axis of our thinking."* (101)

Highly politicised in his thinking and writing, he has never been politically active in the formal sense of joining a political party or occupying a political office under any of the many regimes that his life has seen. His political awareness started blossoming as we have seen at the rather early age of 7 with the eruption of the 1919 revolution. The national struggle during the period of the 1920s and early 1930s had two objectives which are closely related, namely independence from the British and the establishment of true democratic government. (102)

The first most direct treatment of political and national issues in Maḥfūz is to be found in the famous Trilogy which deals with political issues during a period that stretches from World War I and the 1919 revolution to the incident of February 1942. (103)

During the years up to the 1952 revolution led by Jamāl Ābd al-Naṣṣer (1918-70) this national struggle was led by the Wafd party which had arisen from the 1919 revolt. Maḥfūz evinces great sympathy for the party and its leaders in his novels dealing with that period. His sympathy for the Wafd, however, never took an official form. (104)

Another political movement active at the time was socialism whose ideas were attractive. The influence of socialist thought figures very strongly in his first two social novels, Khān al-Khalīlī and al-Qāhira al-Jadīda. Unlike socialism which is idealised in Maḥfūz's work, Islam is critically delineated and finally rejected as unsuitable for modern times. The two models are contrasted in the two novels mentioned above and in the Trilogy. (105)

The situation in Egypt since the revolution has made it almost impossible for writers to express their political views frankly, and the allegorical works of Maḥfūz since 1959 are in sharp contrast with his writing before 1952. His first novel after his silence was Children of Gebelawi. Politics is now a subject which cannot be discussed and most of these six novels from al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb 1961 to Mīrāmār 1967 may be classed as novels of psychological development in which "the hero becomes temporarily isolated from society in an active quest of self and the source of his being". (106)

The shock of the 1967 defeat had a stunning effect upon the Egyptian literary scene, from which Maḥfūz was no more immune than other Egyptian writers. Although he wrote many short stories marked by their dark, irrational and surrealistic vision of reality he did not write any more novels until 1972, when he published Mirrors which signalled yet another phase in his development as a novelist. (107) The novel is a panorama of Egyptian society over a fifty-years period beginning from 1919 to the late 1960s in the aftermath of the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel.

These events are applicable to his other later novels such as al-Karnak, which paints a gloomy picture of the secret policy against various opposition groups during the period from 1965 to 1970.

In 1970 it was the death of Naṣṣer and the new establishment under Sādāt's regime. Maḥfūz began to write a series of novels in which he painted a picture of Sādāt's era such as There Only Remains an Hour 1982, Before the Throne 1983 and The Day the Leader was Killed. (108)

1974 was the year wherein the open-door policy was introduced. This policy was highlighted in Maḥfūz's works between 1976 and the end of 1980.

I would like to cast further light on the people's opposition to the open-door policy. In spite of the fact that patience is known as one of the characteristics of the Egyptian people, they did not respect the new officially

applied policy. Poor people in particular declared their resentment and opposition using different methods such as demonstrations, strikes...etc.

This opposition increased with the increase of the pressure of the new Egyptian Capitalism that aimed at putting an end to the old economic policy of Egypt .

In the January 1977 uprising, the escalation of the opposition eventually took a revolutionary form that spread all over the country as the government carried on with their new policy. Some of the slogans being repeated were :

***"We live five in a room, while he is dressed up to the nines"***

These slogans were created by the public, during the Sādāt era, to point out the difference between the life of the president and the lives of the poor people.

***"Tell the one asleep in Abdeen, the poor sleep, hungry"***

In this slogan the people tried to express their suffering to their leader (Sādāt) and to attract his attention to their daily lives, as most of them slept hungry, while the president as well as the privileged minority were enjoying themselves.

***"Anwar Bek, a pair of shoes has reached 6 pounds"***.

As for the third slogan, it shows that the cost of living for Egyptian people had become too high. The people were trying to mock the president with this slogan.

***" Striking against hunger and poverty is legal"***

In the previous slogan we realise that Sādāt's era was quite liberal, that the people were able to hold legal strikes against poverty and hunger .

***"Wake up, ye MPS. Sayyid Mar'i's millions are on the increase"***

Sayyid Mar'ī, Sādāt's brother in law and one of the beneficiaries of the open-door policy, according to this slogan has become a millionaire not only because he was the chairman of parliament, but also because of his relationship to Sādāt.

***"No, No, No to their open- door policy" (109)***

As a result it is obvious that the shouts of Sādāt's November march were against the open-door policy, and also against bourgeois intruders.

In 1977 Sādāt signed the Peace Agreement (Camp David) as he realised that his country needed a reprieve from struggle with Israel, Sādāt in a dramatic move, flew to Jerusalem, to negotiate an agreement with Prime Minister Menachim Begin. There was deadlock for over a year until President Carter invited the two leaders to Camp David where they finally compromised.(110)

On 26 March 1979 Sadat and Begin signed the Camp David Agreement which returned Sinai to Egypt. Other Arab countries were shocked at this Camp David Agreement.(111)

Mahfūz expressed his opinion about Sādāt's Peace Agreement, when he shed light on the character of Saniyyā in (There Only Remains an Hour), and her reaction against it. Saniyyā's central hope lies in Sādāt's promise to bring prosperity to the nation. Saniyyā's hopes were dashed on the symbolic level in the novel as in reality.

1981 was the end of Sādāt's era when he was assassinated at the hands of Islamic militants (Jihad). Mahfūz portrays this event through his novel (The Day the Leader was Killed).

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**PART TWO**

**THE PORTRAYAL OF EGYPTIAN WOMEN  
IN SELECTED NOVELS OF NAJIB MAHFUZ**

#### **4-1 Introduction:**

Woman always has been and will remain an attractive subject to authors and thinkers. Thinkers often come into conflict because their opinions about woman are affected by their view of life, and their philosophy about society. They have always remained faithful to the values of their various beliefs.

Writers, moreover, are distinctive in their points of view about woman. Though they all have been inspired by her aspiration-what is known as their creative artistic textile, they show their sympathy to her, ask for her contentment sometimes, and rage at her at other times. Woman is one of the most interesting aspects of the required reform in changing society. The role played by female characters in many Arabic novels at the present time reflects the prevalent attitude towards women. Female characters are portrayed in their roles of mothers, sisters, servants, ect., but it is the role of the sweetheart, lover or sex-object that is the most dominant.

Maḥfūz depicts women in various situations and different social levels.(1) He opens-up the deprived and angry lives of women in the poor and not so-poor areas of Cairo. He has written of the first women students at the Egyptian university, where he matriculated only two years after women were first admitted. He has written of the changing reaction to women's education in the course of half a century. He has focused on changing marriage customs. He proceeds from a time when neither men nor women could see their prospective partners, to a more recent time when women have sometimes propositioned men. He has written about powerful women who were part of what he calls the "women's renaissance" or who were members of the women's Wafdist Committee. These were women who did not have to bow to society's conventions. Above all he has entered the Cairene and Alexandrian underworlds and has fully fleshed out the lives of prostitutes who are not merely symbols or projections of fantasy but often present complex personalities who use their humiliation against their humiliators.(2)

The relationships Maḥfūz's men initiate with women are always explicitly grounded in asymmetric power. Women's insubordination, or any hint of autonomy, threatens these men's fragile identities and represents the final stage in their alienation. They cannot confront, and therefore they escape. Women challenge, thereby stunting any possibility of growth. Their conception of masculinity is too rigid to accommodate interaction with women on the basis of equality. The women, however, enter into relationships for a variety of reasons. Because they are less programmed in their needs and desires, they are more difficult to understand. Yet Maḥfūz seems to be saying something else. In an interview with Salwā al-Nāimī, Maḥfūz states :

*"Our world is masculine and one cannot imagine it otherwise... Women continue to struggle to become part of social life."(3)*

George Ṭarābīshī has analysed Maḥfūz's portrayal of women in Ḥadrat al-Muḥtaram (Respected sir) and Mīrāmār, although Ṭarābīshī is more interested in ʿUthmān Bayyūmi's mystical quest and in the development of the four male characters in Mīrāmār. The avowed subject of his inquiry, Ṭarābīshī calls ʿUthmān's struggle with women, not so much a struggle between selfishness and life, ʿUthmān escapes women because they are the mirror in which he sees reflected the barrenness of his soul. His relationship with Qadriyyā is not with her but with himself. This is also true for the four men in Mīrāmār, who use Zohrā as a reflection of themselves. Zohrā is a symbol, but she is a "living symbol" who is skilfully drawn despite her symbolic role. Ṭarābīshī concludes that Zohrā's future is in her own hands.(4)

Maḥfūz's women, therefore, are much more than symbols; they are as critical to the development of the plot as are the male protagonists. These women would like to-and quite often do-escape their need for men. To understand the significance of Maḥfūz's female characters, we must strip away the sexist bias that has informed his readings and instead view his

works from a feminist perspective. When we read Maḥfūz's novels, and come across a woman with a complex personality who is motivated by individual goals that have nothing to do with men except as instruments of her advancement, we label her amoral. (5)

Maḥfūz is at all times aware that the Egyptian woman is a doubly-oppressed human being. The women in his novels are at the very centre of action. In Bidāyā wa-Nihāyā (The Beginning and the End) the female protagonist is equally by important as the male; in Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Midaq Alley) Ḥamīda is possibly more prominent than any of the other people presented in the novel. Furthermore, all the female characters are genuinely Egyptian. Of a different order is the plight of the younger women. They have matured in a rapidly changing world, but belonging as they do to the poor or lower middle-classes, they remain subject to severe medieval restrictions. If they are beautiful and attractive, they can marry; otherwise they face the prospect of becoming spinsters or of being married to old or illiterate men. They have no means of rebelling against this vicious circle, and in the few cases in which they try to do so, end up in prostitution of one kind or another. (6)

Indeed, this extreme form of degradation of woman takes up a great deal of Maḥfūz's attention. For example, two of the heroines in the novels discussed (Zuqāq and Bidāya) take to outright prostitution, a third in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda becomes the concubine of a statesman. In fact these three women are the main female characters of the novels in question. The function of these women is, then, to underline with greater intensity the depressing social conditions. Their characterisation, however, goes beyond illustrating these conditions. In all these cases his characterisation impresses one as being an answer to the challenging, nagging question: How does a young woman become a prostitute? We might deduce this from the following pages and analysis.

Maḥfūz has depicted among his vast cast of women strong, moral individuals who have been able to survive despite disgrace at their trespassing on men's turf. But he also portrayed weaker women who have not been able to overcome the obstacles. They do not live in a world apart

from this universe, and they cannot be reduced to a few types. What draws many of the women characters together is the terminology: beautiful or ugly daughters, piously self-sacrificing assertive mothers. A woman who sells her body retains control not only of that body but of its surplus value. She is doubly empowered: she is in control of the illusion that is surrounding her and she is in control of man's desire and burgeoning need for her body and not that of any other woman.

When Maḥfūz was asked why most of his heroines are often chosen from the ʿawālīm or professional dancers and entertainers, he explained that at the turn of the century, working-class women led glamorous lives which intrigued and captured his imagination. Upon reflection, these were the only possibilities for work which gave these women a certain degree of independence at that time. His heroines, though shackled by social conventions and prejudices, nevertheless struggle in creative ways to gain their rights. For instance, Ḥamīda, the beautiful heroine of Zuqāq al-Midaqq, dreams of and covets a better life beyond the confines of her neighbourhood, where choices are limited. (7)

To understand the underlying view, or rather the vision, of the author vis.-a-vis the position of women in society, and the contradictory attitude towards woman and her role in society, we may consider a few examples:

In al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (New Cairo) one of the male characters, Aḥmad Budair, asks some university student colleagues of his about their opinion of women. Māmūn Raḍwān, one of the Muslim Brothers answers: *"My own words, I tell you that woman is the security of this world and a lower path to the security of the hereafter."* On the other hand, ʿAlī Ṭahā a Progressive socialist, says: *"Woman is man's life partner as they say. "But in my opinion it is a partnership which should be based on absolute equality in rights and duties."* (8)

In Khān al-Khalīlī this duality of outlook towards woman in society is further accentuated and elucidated during a sharp conversation between Aḥmad ʿĀkif, a young liberal thinker, and Aḥmad Rashīd, a young socialist. Aḥmad ʿĀkif: *"The real woman is the prostitute, she is the real one since*

*she puts off the real mask of hypocrisy from her face and does not feel the need to claim love, and purity."* Aḥmad Rashīd protests against the marriage of the rich and ugly Sulaymān Ḍatta to a poor yet beautiful young girl, Karīma al-Ḍattār, and explains that injustice and imbalance in the relation of wealth in society, and abhorrent practices will disappear: "*Look how money exploits beauty : the ugliest thing is that the beautiful (girl) surrendered herself and agreed to marry this accursed monkey Their being together will not be marriage. It will be nothing but a double crime which amounts to theft on the one hand and to rape on the other.*" (9)

From the above one can see that Maḥfūz has grasped the complexity of human life, which is neither wholly good nor wholly evil, and has tried his best to portray it in all its contradictions and complexities: birth and death, light and darkness, spring and autumn, town and country, vulgar and sophisticated, religious and agnostic, selfish and moral and so on.

When looking at Maḥfūz's works, we can easily discern at least five main types of woman, each of which serves a specific purpose in his literary works. The main types of Egyptian women he portrayed in his novels belong to what could be identified as the poor, the middle class, the aristocratic, the mother and the modern woman (the revolutionary woman). Both the aristocratic and the modern types of women are used either to criticise aristocracy or propagate modernity with little or no effort to make them an integral part of their setting. He is most successful in portraying the urban poor, the middle class and the mother types. This is mainly because his early life and upbringing were closely associated with these three types of Egyptian females from the early 20th Century up to the advent of the Egyptian revolution in 1952. Maḥfūz used every possible facet of the social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances prevalent at the time to elucidate, develop and breathe life into his characters. None of the characters exceeded her social limits. Each one of them emerged, developed, matured, and finally withdrew or faded away in the novel without any redundancy in description or lack of adequate setting. His novels usually end where the natural sequence and development of events come to a close. Amīna dies at the end of the Trilogy but a child is born while his father ḌAbd al-Muḥmin is being put into prison. Gone is the past; welcome to the future.(10)

In this part I will take one out of the five categories "the poor" and I will discuss a number of examples, in two groups:

The Urban Poor:

which is dealt with in chapter three, concentrates on the Cairene woman, as portrayed in three women: Iḥsān Sheḥātah in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda (New Cairo) Ḥamīda in Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Midaq Alley) and Nefīsa in Bidāya wa Nihāya (The Beginning and the End).

The Peasant Woman:

which is deal with in chapter four concentrates on the peasant woman as portrayed in three women: Nūr in al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb (The Thief and the Dogs) Rīrī in al-Summān wa al-Kharīf (Autumn and Quail) and Zohrā in Mīrāmār .

Each one of these poor women was victimised by the cruel social and economic conditions and the corrupt social relation surroundings.

Chapter five

is a critique that deals with his treatment of women in the chosen works.

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**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**THE URBAN CAIRENE WOMAN**

**CONTENTS OF CHAPTER THREE**

3-1 Iḥsān in "al-Qāhira al-Jadīda"

3-2 Ḥamīda in "Zuqāq al-Midaqq"

3-3 Nefīsa in "Bidāya wa Nihāya"

### 3-1 Iḥsān in al-Qāhira al-Jadīda

In 1945 Maḥfūz wrote his al-Qāhira al-Jadīda "New Cairo" previously known as Faḍiḥa fi al-Qāhira. In this novel, he portrays a poor woman of Cairo in Iḥsān's character.

Iḥsān is a fairly marginal character in New Cairo. Furthermore, her relative value in the gallery of Maḥfūz's characters is unimpressive. She is rather superficially portrayed; although she goes through many ups and downs in the course of the novel, she seems to be characterised in a flat manner. She is different from Nefīsa, being beautiful, and also she differs from Ḥamīda, being well-educated. She is a beautiful girl of eighteen years old, her face is enlightened by her ivory-like complexion and fascinating black eyes contrasting with her white complexion. (1) Iḥsān has gained a relatively adequate education in the Egyptian capital Cairo. (2)

She is aware of two major aspects about herself; her beauty and her poverty. Her beauty is the ultimate one. It enables her to capture the hearts and affections of the students in the hostels. As poverty was an objectionable fact in her eyes, her strong feeling towards her seven brothers and her responsibility towards the family's poverty have strengthened her will to act upon raising the family's standard of living. (3) She is always afraid of losing her beauty through starvation. In fact, without her mother's recipes her body could have starved.

As for her parents, her mother was one of the belly dancers of Muḥammad ʿAlī Street before her marriage to Muʿallem (Master) Sheḥātah. Her father was a drug addict and a gambler. He was able to work as a male prostitute because of his good-looks and moral degradation...until her mother married him and gave him whatever she earned, so that he might use it in business. Nothing remained for him but a small cigarette shop. He used to say to comfort himself:

***"Really!! I have lost my whole life, but on Ihsan we can depend"(4)***

Her parents did not in fact show any respect for morality at all. Their marriage began with them as lovers.

Ihsan is able to examine people from the way they deal with her. Before Āli Tāhā, she knows a rich law-student. She feels from his behaviour that he is aiming to enjoy her company and have fun, and therefore she becomes cautious about her relationship with him.

It is miserable that her parents, greedy for the young man's money, encourage her to approach with him. She realises how miserable and sorrowful her life is. When she sees him sitting side by side with her father in the shop, her rage and pride grow and she thinks that her father is bargaining with her honour. She feels dishonoured, and then she breaks her relationship with the youth without leaving him any hope! (5) But her honourless father rebukes her for leaving the wealthy youth and says to her:

*"You are responsible for us all....especially your seven brothers."*

So how will the naive girl defend herself from these dishonourable motives?

*"Can't they wait till she completes her study at the educational institute, and finds an honourable job?" (7)*

As soon as Āli Tāhā comes, she finds in him true love, faithfulness, and nobility. Her heart chooses him from the student hostel where she admires his youth and good looks. Two subjects have in fact struggled within her heart since the first instance, namely; her heart and her family, or in other words; Āli Tāhā and her seven younger brothers. He saves her from drowning in a sea of fear and tension, and brings back her self-respect and pride. She loves him and puts her hope in him. He intends to marry her as soon as practicable. On the face of it she lacks many of the basic motivations. (8) Her father was not at all happy with this relationship and described Āli as:

*"A poor youth who can't even smoke cigarettes" (9)*

It is as if in his eyes a rich man is a man who can buy cigarettes from his shop . But she is sure about him, and believes that he is the one who can provide her with a good honourable career, and help her achieve her deeply felt desires. Ālī Tāhā truthfully wants them to be able to get along with each other, heart and soul, so that their life can be organised and perfect, that he might find in her a lover, a partner and a respected counterpart. He loves her madly, but he hopes that in the future he might make of her a wife who is not an ordinary middle-eastern woman.

The reality is completely different. He speaks about equality, the rights and sufferings of the poor but he does not feel for her situation and her needs. She was obliged to yield to what her parents forced her into. She is in need of his hand, to support her but he is in one world, while she and her circumstances are in another. One day she says to him:

***"How hypocritical you are!!...Do you consider clothes trivial while you yourself do wear elegant clothes! " (10)***

Something strange has happened which has started a new chain of developments. A story that began with a look, has led to prostitution. She is coming back home one afternoon, when she feels a piercing gaze upon her. She sees a great man who could be either a Pacha or a Bey, elegant and handsome with a small moustache. The second day, coming from the same direction, she finds the same elegant man looking at her with his piercing gaze and she feels a car coming along beside the pavement where she is walking. She looks to her right and sees a marvellous car passing by and sees the same eyes looking through the car window at her. She feels happy and proud of this man's behaviour. He attracts her:

***"Though he is old, he looks more handsome and great than Ali, and if my heart had not spoken its final word on that mater, I would have thought about that man" (11)***

No sooner had she experienced this event, than she finds her parents coming to her again, forcing her into something she has feared and encouraging her to seize the chance:

***"He wants good of you!! He wants good of us!! God wants you to be one of the mistresses and brings goodness to your brothers!! Open your eyes!! Your father is begging you as well as your mother, while your brothers are crying for your help!!" (12)***

She spends that night sleepless, thinking of what her father has said to her, and when the car passes her the next day, the door opens. She hesitates at first but eventually she gets in.!

But one must wonder, how all these incidents have come to pass. Wasn't she in love with <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī Ṭāhā? Was it that love that controls our sights and ears. She faces a lot of circumstances which sooner or later will drag her to this conclusion. She always wants to be wealthy, she is suffering from her family's poverty. She obstructs the law-student not because she refuses his attitudes, but because it is the first time she feels such an emotion, but when her parents try to lead her on to what they want, they give her an unconditioned freedom. Had <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī Ṭāhā not been there she could have come to this end much sooner!

She has to choose between either <sup>ʿ</sup>Alī Ṭāhā and the Bey, between today's husband and her husband in the distant future, between luxury and hardship, between safety and the struggle for life, and between a wealthy life for herself and her family and a life that is mostly dominated by poverty and sorrow. She chooses in the end, with weeping eyes, to become the mistress of the cabinet minister and then marries his secretary, a pimp. (13) She convinces herself that she is sacrificing herself for her happiness and others' happiness. She says:

***"I love Ali, but I still love my brothers, and I must not be selfish. It is for this reason alone that, I should obey my father. I don't love the Bey, nor the wealth... and only God knows this!" (14)***

Iḥsān has been agitated with thoughts in her soul. "She became accustomed to saying no" and aimed to narrow her view on her situation.

The love which ʿAlī Tāhā started has diminished and the hope which Qāsim Fahmī had given to her has died. Nothing remains for her but the animal instinct which her parents have nurtured in her from the very beginning.

She is a materialistic girl, and so she leaves the past and forgets about it. Besides, the past will never come back, neither will its symbol... ʿAlī Tāhā. There is nothing to worry about but her husband and their mutual life. Their happy life has ended so quickly, their affair has been discovered and became common knowledge till they moved to Aswān.

In conclusion, we can ask ourselves why and how Ihsān herself accepts prostitution. The following reasons suggest themselves:

- 1- Her parents are immoral people, who have encouraged her and forced her to sell her beauty and bring home some money which will sustain or help them and their other seven children;
- 2- She has inherited some immoral traits from her parents who both have dubious pasts. She is herself fond of luxury and wealth, and hates poverty.
- 3- Though she retains her attachment to ʿAlī who saved her for a while from falling, her love for him is nevertheless (15) not a love that blinds and deafens; not a love that would withstand violent tests and furious temptation. (16)

### 3-2 Ḥamīda in Zuqāq al-Midaqq

Before embarking on a discussion of Ḥamīda, I would like to shed some more general light on Midaq Alley. This novel was written in 1946. It describes the life of the inhabitants of a poor alley in Cairo during and after World War II. Najīb Maḥfūz explicitly portrays most of these inhabitants as superstitious, rapacious, ignorant, and corrupt.

Turning to Ḥamīda the heroine of Zuqāq al-Midaqq we find ourselves encountering a portrait whose vitality and spontaneity by far surpasses that of other female characters in this group of novels.

Ḥamīda, a young girl whose parents are not known, has been brought up by a poor foster-mother in Zuqāq al-Midaqq. Her beauty has contributed to her self-assurance. (17) She is shrewd, sharp-witted and headstrong. She is also an ambitious person who can not visualise her future in the alley and who dreams of wealth and happiness. (18) Ḥamīda believes that she is better than those who live in the alley. She says to herself:

*"Oh, what a shame, Hamida. What are you doing living in the alley? And why should your mother be this woman who can't tell the difference between dust and gold-dust?" (19)*

She despises the uncouth manners of the people, and is disgusted by the prospects of poverty, children and concealed slavery at home. She feels that life in the alley is an enemy to her, and thinks she does not know how to deal with it. She is so strong and determined that Maḥfūz can ironically describe her as "most unfeminine". Here he sets up the norm of femininity : Weakness, hesitation and loving children. Ḥamīda knows this norm, and she objects to the feminine condition. (20) She is constantly beset by a desire to dominate and conquer. It also reveals itself in quarrels which were repeatedly flaring up between her and other women of the alley. (21) They all hate her and say nothing but unkind things about her. Perhaps the most commonly said thing about her is that she hates children and that this unnatural trait makes her wild and totally lacking in the virtues of femininity. It was that which made Mrs Kirsh, the Cafe owner's wife, nursed

her, hoped to God to see her a mother ..., Suckling children under the care of a tyrannical husband who beat her unmercifully!" (22)

The relationships with her woman neighbours and friends in the alley were fragile. People like Mrs Kirsh who suckled her, the baker's wife and even the wife of Raḍwān al-Ḥusaḃnī are not spared the sting of her tongue. One day she hears Ḥusaḃnī's wife describing her as foul-mouthed. Ḥamīda watches closely until a day when Mrs Ḥusaḃnī goes up to the roof of her house to hang out her washing. In a flash, Ḥamīda goes to her own roof, and shouts in scornful sarcasm:

***"Oh what a pity, Hamida, that you have such a foul mouth! You are unfit to live among the fine ladies of the alley, daughters of Pashas that they are" (23)***

Meanwhile Ḥamīda feels that she is also better than those Jewish girls, and she does not hesitate to criticise them, even though in fun. This girl's frock, for instance, was too short while that one's was simply in bad taste. A third girl was too obvious, the way she stares at men. So it was that one day she said to her mother:

***" The Jewish girls have the only real life here."***

her mother shouts:

***" You must have been conceived by devils"***

***" Maybe I am a Pasha's daughter, even if illegitimately." (24)***

The local barber, ʿAbbās, has long wanted to marry her, but Ḥusseīn Kirsh, the son of the café owner, tells him that if he wants her he will have to change his life. He is always encouraging him to work with him in the British camp, which is better than his lazy life. He says to him:

***"What a bashful simpleton you are! Your body is asleep, your shop is asleep, your whole life is sleeping. Why should I tire myself out trying to wake you up ? You are a dead man..."***

He continues:

***"All right, but she is an ambitious girl, and you will never win her unless you change your life..." (25)***

The barber was so excited that he has difficulty in finishing his job. He has a lazy dislike for change, dreads anything new, hates travelling, and if allowed would make no choice other than the alley. If he spent the rest of his life there, he would be happy. The truth is that he loves the alley. (26) The alley appears wonderful in his eyes :

***"Our alley is wonderful. I never wanted anything more than to live in it peacefully." (27)***

But ʿAbbās's meeting with Ḥamīda opens a new way of life for him. They meet frequently and their conversations revolve around their future. Before travelling he says to her:

***"You are the cause, Hamida it is because of you, you! I love our alley and I am deeply grateful to God for the livelihood he provides me from it. I don't want to leave the quarter of our beloved Hussein to whom I pray morning and night. The trouble is I can't offer you a life here which is worthy of you so I have no alternative but to leave..."(28)***

Ḥamīda accepts his proposal of marriage because he will change his life because of her. She is aware that he is the best man she can hope for among those who have proposed. She says to herself:

***"This humble young man and her own greedy ambitions...could ignite her natural aggressiveness and turn it into uncontrollable savagery and violence"(29)***

But he comes nowhere near her image of a future husband. In life she is aware of the great gulf between this humble young man and her greedy

ambition. However, once he is gone to the distant army camp, he is out of her mind and heart. Ḥamīda is no longer able to consider ʿAbbās as a possible husband;

*"These thoughts confused her and strengthened her fears that Abbas was not the ideal husband for her. She realised that her indifference towards him would never permit them to live together happily. But what was she to do? Had she not bound herself to him for ever? "*

She blames no one but herself for not learning anything that might help her in choosing whoever she wishes. She says:

*" Oh God why had I not learned a profession, as my friends had? If I knew how to do something I could have waited and married when and whomever I wished, or perhaps I might never have married at all"(30)*

Later, when Salīm ʿAlwān, a rich old man in the alley, proposes, she is ready to break her promise to ʿAbbās. She is represented neither as an individual who is religious nor as a mature person who can protect herself from her evil impulses. She feels very happy and her face glows with happiness when her mother tells her about Salīm ʿAlwān's proposal. She says:

*" What good news. "*

Here at last is the story of fortune, for she has always dreamed of the man who could give her all the luxury and freedom from drudgery she prayed for . She could think of no cure for her hunger for power other than a great deal of money. (31) Then her mother asks her:

*" What do you think ?"*

Ḥamīda shouts in full angry scorn:

*" That barber"*

***" Have you forgotten that he is your fiancée? "***

No she has not forgotten, but in this case, to forget and to remember are really one and the same. She shakes her shoulders indifferently:

***" He must go" (32)***

Like most of the women in the same alley also suffering from poverty, their hearts are filled with grief, greed, misery and hopelessness. Some of them are toiling hard to feed their hungry families while others are denied all chance of a decent life or even the slightest glimpse of hope to improve their lot. Elsewhere Maḥfūz informs us that most of the female characters in the novel do nothing against corruption except complain verbally or sometimes shout. Ibrāhīm el-Sheikh (1991) thinks that Ḥamīda willingly becomes a prostitute.

***" Her case was different to the majority of other women who had been forced by necessity or circumstance into their present life and were often tormented by remorse. Hamida's dreams of clothes, jewellery, money and men were now fulfilled and how she enjoyed all the power and authority they gave her." (33)***

Turning to the alley, poverty and corruption continued to dominate the life of most inhabitants, until the Second World War broke out. All inhabitants immediately felt the economic and social impact of the war. It was the general elections which brought Ibrāhīm Farag, a pimp, to the alley. Farag managed to contact Ḥamīda and gradually led her astray, (34) by bringing her into his snare, after he had followed her for a time. His skill in analysing Ḥamīda's mind is apparent when he says to her:

***" ...This isn't your quarter, nor are these people relatives of yours. You are completely different. You don't belong here at all."***

His words please her, then he continues :

***" How can you live among these people? Who are they compared to you ? You are a princess in a shabby cloak, while these peasants strut in their new finery..." (35)***

Farag knows that Hamīda is a whore by nature. He says to himself :

***" Delicious, no doubt about it . I am quite sure I am not wrong about her. She has got a natural gift for it...She is a whore by instinct. She is going to be really priceless pearl. " (36)***

Farag is indeed a professional seducer who is well trained in identifying candidates for his School. He uses his skill in analysing Hamida's mind, and accordingly attacks her weak points. She herself was predisposed to do anything including prostitution to achieve more money, power and luxury, but she wanted also to protest and rebel against poverty and revolt against her oppressors, particularly in the alley. (37) Hamīda was attracted by his:

***" Tall, slim body." "Her eyes rested for a long time on his hands, noting with astonishment how beautiful they were. " (38)***

The girl was dominated, the moment he set his eyes upon her. She sees in him qualities which she has never seen before in a man, strength, money and a fighting disposition. She is attracted to him and yet she has an uncontrollable desire to choke him. She thinks that he followed her because he is in love with her, but eventually she discovers that he himself has never known love and it seems strange to the romantically inclined girl that his whole life should be built on this sentiment. He was an ardent lover, until she succumbed; after that, he continued to court her for a short time. When his mission was accomplished he dropped his role of lover for that of the flesh merchant. She is shrewd enough to detect something sinister about Farag from the beginning, that he is :

***" A tiger waiting for an opportunity to leap. " (39)***

Yet, he attracts her by the very fact that he is a man of the "New World". He wants to open her eyes to the world around her because he knows her ambitions to know the world around her. When they arrive at Queen Farida square she says:

*" This is the end of the road"*

*" But the world doesn't come to an end with Mouskey street "*

*"Why can't we stroll around the square ? "*

*" I don't want to be late as my mother will be worried. "*

*" If you like we can take a taxi and cover a great distance in a few seconds" (40)*

The writer describes her feeling when she hears the word "taxi"!

*"The world rang strangely in her ears. In her whole life she has only ridden in a horse-drawn carriage and the magic of the world taxi took long time to die away. Only now she remembered her old cloak and slippers and her heart sank."*

Later when she discovers that Farag is nothing but a pimp, she goes mad with rage. She describes how when one day he asks her to stay in his apartment. She shouts:

*" You are trying to corrupt me .What an evil wicked seducer you are! "*

he smiles and says:

*" I am a man "*

but she interrupts him:

*" You are not a man; You are a pimp! " (41)*

Farag and Ḥamīda are made from the same mettle. Both of them have been searching for wealth, power and luxury, and consequently, they walk in the same way.

When she is back home after that visit, we promptly learn that she has already made up her mind to choose between staying in the alley and escaping from it. The choice was made in the man's arms, in his own house. (42) She made her choice to escape as it was the one she really wanted. The first thing that came to her mind was her mother; she remembered how the woman had sincerely loved her from the bottom of her heart, so that she had only rarely felt a sense of not having a real mother. She says to herself:

***"I have no father and no mother"(43)***

She manages to leave the past behind her, and sets all her thoughts on the future and what it might bring. She does not care about the people in the alley. What will they say about her escape? When she hears the voice of Radwān Ḥusaṣnī, one of the alley people, she asks herself:

***" What will he say tomorrow when the news reaches him? let him say what he likes; curses on all the alley people! " (44)***

She then goes to the kitchen and finds a bowl of lentils which her mother has left her to cook for their lunch. She stands up, talking to herself:

***" This is the last day I will do any cooking in this house... Perhaps it's the last time in my life I will do any cooking. When will I ever eat lentils again ? " (45)***

That does not mean she dislikes lentils, but she knows that they are the common dish for the poor. Not that she really knows anything about the rich people. Ḥamīda was persuaded to leave the alley by the smooth-tongued Farag who persuaded her to leave the alley because she is different from the others who live in this alley. He says to her:

*" ...Why you should go back to the alley ? To wait like all those other poor girls until one of the wretched alley men is kind enough to marry you to enjoy your beauty in its bloom and your glorious youth and then cast you out in the garbage can...? "*

*" Oh God, are you one day to become one of those alley brides? Getting pregnant, having children,.... only beans to eat; your beauty fading away and getting fat ? No, No. I don't want to believe that ."*

*" ...Your beauty is exquisite.. when someone like you wants something you just have to say- so be it - and so it is ." (46)*

She makes her decision as an individual with complex interests and goals, who sees no serious difficulty in choosing the path she will follow. There is simply her dull past and an exciting future. The truth was that she realised she had chosen her path. She chooses prostitution because her choices are limited, not because she is forced to. When Ḥamīda went with Farag to his dancing school, she shot a stubborn challenging glance at him and asked coldly :

*" Do you think I am going to do the same as they ? "*

he smiles and then he speaks:

*"No one has power over you and no one wants to force you into anything. You must make up your mind..."(47)*

It is not surprising that Ḥamīda makes up her mind without any one to force her to choose that way. From the very beginning, Ḥamīda chooses her path of her own free will. Experience has shown her that her future life will be gaiety and pleasure, mixed with pain and bitter disappointment. Ḥamīda realises that she has arrived at a critical point in her life, she stands perplexed and is not sure where to turn. When eventually she gives way to the eloquence of Ibrāhīm Farag, it is because she wishes to do so. She has entered into her new life with no regrets, her natural talents make a stunning

display; indeed in a short time she has thoroughly mastered the principles of make-up and clothes, and she has now learned oriental and western dancing. It is not surprising that she has become so successful. Farag knew that from the very beginning when he said to her :

*" I know you quite well now, I can read your heart like a sheet of paper...Will you agree to learn dancing and English and master everything in the shortest possible time.... "* (48)

Ḥamīda has rejected her destiny as a traditional Egyptian woman and the convention of marriage is not important for her. She is not condemned by her circumstances to sell her body. Her case is different to the majority of the other girls who have been forced by necessity or circumstances into their present life and are often tormented by remorse. One day she recalls how miserable she was the first time when Ibrāhīm Farag said he did not want to marry her. She asked herself if she really wanted to marry him; the answer, in the negative, came immediately. Marriage would have confined her to the home, exhausting herself with the duties of a wife, housekeeper and mother, which she knows she wasn't created for. (49) She chooses to emulate the Jewish factory girls whose economic freedom gives them the means to dress well and the appearance of control over their lives and their bodies. She thinks carefully of her options and the choices which are offered outside. (50) Among the reasons that lead Ḥamīda to her end as a prostitute are her aim to be rich, because of her ability to live in tolerance with the poor people in the alley, and her instinct for conflict and emotional control over others. Her physical attraction, her lack of experience and her wish to discover the unknown, encourage her to have a love affair with the pimp. (51)

But why does Ḥamīda choose not to work in the factory like the Jewish girls and obstinately choose the most compromising of all women's occupations? Is it because the rewards are more immediate and less strenuous? Or is working in a factory or even only as a seamstress, as does Nefīsa in The Beginning and The End. Yes it is she who finds it of no more value and no less shameful than earning a high wage as a prostitute. There are other reasons which led her to choose this way: the social environment

which Ḥamīda has been brought up in end her psychological make-up as an ambitious girl are interwoven to form her tragedy. She has no job, no education, and her experience of life is limited. All of this evolves from the fact that she has no religious, moral or human values to believe in .

Ḥamīda's story in the alley is soon finished, after her escape to Farag's school. When ʿAbbās next meets her some two months later she is outwardly a different woman, an accomplished prostitute. ʿAbbās is unable to believe his eyes and says :

*" Hamida ! Is it really you ? Oh God, how can I believe my eyes? How could you have ended up like this ? "*

But she hates seeing him as she doesn't want him to bring up the past. She says to herself when they stand face to face:

*" What bad luck threw him in my path " (52)*

she answers his question and says:

*" Don't ask me about anything . I have nothing to say to you ...."*

He is still in shock that she has chosen this path and left him. He asks:

*" ...I want to know what went wrong between us. Didn't you accept my proposal ? Didn't I go away for the sake of our future happiness together ? " (53)*

She now feels uneasy with him and only asks herself:

*" When will he drop the subject ? When will he understand ?  
When he will go away ?"*

then she replies :

***" I wanted one thing, and the fates wanted another..." (54)***

She feels that ʿAbbās is sympathetic to her, and that he still bears love to her when he tells her:

***"I came back yesterday from Tell el-Kebir...Do you know what brought me back ? "He showed her the box containing the necklace. " I brought this for you. I planned to marry you before I went back.."***

As she gazes silently at the box, he asks her:

***" Do you have any regrets about your new life ? "***

In a tone of mock sadness, she answers:

***"You don't know how unhappy I am"***

Ḥamīda finds ʿAbbās easy prey. It occurs to her that she could conscript ʿAbbās against the man who has been using her heartlessly. Now she speaks in her frailest voice:

***"I am a poor, miserable creature ? Abbas. Don't be angry at what I said. ....You see me only as a prostitute. But it's what you said, I was betrayed by a devil...I am asking you to forgive me...He sends me into the street after having robbed me of the most precious thing I had...He is responsible for all my misery.. But it's too late now..."***

he says to her:

***"how awful, Hamida! Both of us are miserable because of that low bestial criminal....I won't be happy until I smash his head in...." (55)***

This of course pleased Ḥamīda, as he has fallen into her trap even faster than she hoped. She is especially happy when he says:

***"What you did will always stand between us" .. "But that monster must suffer. Where can I find him ?"(56)***

The moment she feels that ʿAbbās wants to help her she wants death for him and for Farag. She wishes death on both of them, preferring that both get out of her life by killing each other.

As Ḥamīda tells him to come on Sunday afternoon to smash Farag's head, he comes but finds her sitting surrounded by soldiers. His anger makes him forget about his enemy other than her, he shouts "Ḥamīda" and takes one of the empty beer glasses, not really aware of what he is doing, and hurls it at her face. The angry men fall on ʿAbbās like wild animals. Blows, kicks and glasses fly in all directions, until they kill him. (57) After what has happened she says to herself:

***"My ties with the old world are broken now. I will sell my jewellery and take a respectable job somewhere far away... Anyhow, it would be easy to go to Alexandria. I could be...free there, away from the parasites." (58)***

From the beginning of the novel, Maḥfūz is keen to suggest that she is someone who is not attracted to a conventional life-style, that she hates children, and that Farag the pimp sees her as a whore by nature, totally lacking the virtues of femininity. (59)

She succeeds in achieving her material desires, but because of social morality she loses her respectability and is regarded as a fallen woman. Her mind fails to grasp the power of this morality. The success of this character, as Sasson Somekh (p 87) sees, is particularly due to the technique of presentation. Ḥamīda's physical appearance is dynamic and plays its part in the progress of the story. (60)

In my opinion the tragedy of Ḥamīda is that her dreams and ambitions are more than her life can offer.

It is noticeable that the novel opens at sunset and ends at sunset on the alley. It exists as criticism of the real world. The novel is a cry in the ears of the authorities; this is your society, or by far the greater part of it, which receives nothing from you but neglect and contempt (61)

### 3-3 Nefīsa in Bidāyā wa Nihāyā

Bidāyā wa Nihāyā,\* was written in 1949. This work is remarkable because of its deep insight into the problems of Egyptian society which emerged after the treaty of 1936. It is a story of a family whose head, the father, dies and leaves its members to face life alone. One of these members, Nefīsa, will be described in the following lines.

Nefīsa \*\*is of a different kind, a kind that does not have the simplicity of candour. Nefīsa's character might be seen as a further cry of protest by the author against the abuse of women in society. (62) Nefīsa has the same thin oval face as her mother, a short, squat nose and pointed chin. She is pale, and a little hunchbacked. She is identical to her mother except in height, which she shares with her brother, Ḥasanaḡn. She is far from handsome, almost ugly. It is her misfortune to resemble her mother, whereas the boys resemble their father. In grief she is completely undone, and she looks extremely ugly. (63) When she was twenty three, her father died and left her with her mother and three young brothers to face life, with no income to make ends meet. Under these circumstances, two daily duties devolved upon Nefīsa's shoulders: to do the shopping and buy the necessities for the house from the street to fill the gap made by the servant's departure and devote most of the daylight hours to her work at the sewing machine. She had been a respectable girl but now she has become a dressmaker. Dressmaking is her hobby, which she finds herself involved in so much that her neighbours and friends often asks her to make dresses for them. But now her feelings have changed and she is overcome by shame, humiliation and degradation. Her sorrow over the death of her father has doubled. She weeps bitterly for him and in doing so, she weeps for herself as well. She says to herself :

*"He must be suffering for us now. To think how much he loved me ...He used to say to me whenever he heard my ringing*

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\* See Chapter two p. 27

*laughter. "Laugh my girl! How dear your laugh is to my heart! "*  
*He also told me that a sweet temper was more precious than*  
*beauty, as though he sought to console me for my ugliness. Oh*  
*God! how nice ! How sweet he was, .... until I die I shall never*  
*forget him.... poor father, what an abhorrent and tragic thing life*  
*is. Father dead and I a dressmaker!..."(64)*

Maḥfūz clarifies to the reader that when Nefīsa sees the merchant with the long mirror outside the house, she asks herself:

*"Why are we brought into this world only to become obsequious*  
*slaves of food, clothing and shelter? "(65)*

There are two hearts that are concerned with her future; one is dead and the other is engrossed in her worries, and she is terribly lonely. She says to herself:

*"How dreadful! When our circumstances were much better, no*  
*husband...suppose that such a husband agrees to be married to*  
*a dressmaker, who will pay my marriage expenses? Why should I*  
*think of a husband and marriage? No use, I shall remain as I*  
*am as long I live." (66)*

Since her family has dismissed their servant, Nefīsa frequently goes to the grocery store to buy what they need. Thus begins her relationship with the young man accidentally, and it becomes closer as time goes on. She asks herself whether he really shows interest in her or is she only imagining so? In spite of the fact that she knows that she is not beautiful, has no father and is poor, she feels that she is somewhat better than Sulāimān who is only an apprentice in his father's shop. She thinks:

*"But Sulaiman is an obscure person. Will Hasanayn accept him?*  
*My brothers are all proud, and I don't think our poverty will*  
*diminish their pride...None of them will accept Sulaiman, and*  
*nobody better than Sulaiman ...How can I make sure that he is*  
*really interested in me ?" (67)*

She is flattered by his attentions and even encourages him when he first begins with her. Through her life she has not found a single heart with love and compassion interested in her. Nefisa starts paying attention to her appearance, she applies kuhl to her eyes, and colours her lips with light lipstick. Sulāimān's nice treatment gives her a measure of self-confidence, reassurance and hope. Once he says to her: *"You want sweets; you are nothing but sweets."* His words please her heart, she feels an urge to say *"Don't tell lies..."* But she keeps silent and reminds herself *"who knows?"* Perhaps she is not as ugly as she thought. In the beginning she refuses his desire to meet her every Friday in "Rod al-Farag" street because she is not easy going and she wants him to know that she is not one of those girls who quickly agree to go with any one, but in the end she agrees when he asks her over again.

*"... We must meet!" "I have much to say"*

*"What is it you want to say?"*

*"You will know it in due time..."*

*"I have told you, I am not one of those girls!"*

*"Miss Nefisa! I am a man of the world, and I can judge people."*

(68)

From this, one can deduce that both Farag in Midaq Alley and Sulāimān in The Beginning and The End share some characteristics. Farag for Ḥamīda *"Is the man of the new world"* who will open up this world for her to live in and enjoy. Sulāimān for Nefisa *"is the man of this world who can judge people."* But both of them are wild animals, they attract them by their desire.

Once more Sulāimān asks, *"Shall we meet, then next Friday?"* She hesitates a bit, then murmurs. *"By God's will"* This is the beginning of the love she is so eager to experience. Yet she is at once frustrated and worried, not knowing how this affair will end, and how her family will react to it .

Suddenly the affair takes a more serious turn; he promises to marry her, but makes it clear that they will have to wait until the death of his father. He says to her:

***"Don't have any doubts about it. We shall marry as I have told you. I make this promise before God." (69)***

He promises her that it is natural for him to tell his father first, and then they can go to her mother to ask for Nefīsa's hand. He tries to tell her that he loves her and wants to marry her but the problem is that his father wants him to marry the daughter of Ḥamm Gobrān el-Tūnī, the grocer, but he will refuse and will continue to refuse, he cannot tell his father that he has proposed to another girl, because if he does he will dismiss him. He wants her to trust him but she feels insecure and worried. She asks him:

***"What is to be done, then ? "***

***"We have to be patient. No force in the whole world could deflect me from my goal." (70)***

She keeps her affair with the grocer's son secret from the whole family, of course, waiting till he will be in a position to ask for her hand to marry him, even though she knows that it will be almost impossible to persuade her family to agree to what they are sure to regard as an unequal marriage. (71) Nefīsa feels afraid of any of her brothers seeing her, as she does not want to harm them or any scandal to befall to them. This is a good opportunity for Sulāimān to express a long-cherished desire. He says to her:

***"...Listen to me. Why don't we go to my home and stay for a while, where no one can see us ? "(72)***

She shows astonishment at his suggestion and says:

***"How can I possibly go home with you ? Are you mad?" (73)***

He uses words that do not make her feel she will be harmed if she goes with him, telling her that he loves her, wants to take her to a safe place

away from watchful eyes and to talk about their love and their future. But in the end he leaves her to shame and torment. (74)

One day she is shocked when a good neighbour comes to ask her to do some quick sewing for Sulāimān's bride. After the neighbour has gone she rushes to meet her lover . She tells him:

***"Follow me at once!" " Don't you have any news to tell me ?"***

He says:

***"You mean the business of the marriage..."***

He says complaining :

***"It's my father,"***

She cries sharply:

***"Always 'my father'! " "Are you a man or a woman?" (75)***

She blames herself that she has trusted and loved him, and asks herself how she could have loved him and how she could have degraded myself so much as to yield to him? She loses her temper and punches his face in fury until his nose bleeds; she continues to seize him by his clothes, as if to obstruct with all her might his persistent attempt to escape. Suddenly he snatches his coat, freeing it from her grip; he no longer feels that he owes her anything and threatens to call the police. He cries to her:

***"Don't touch me!" "Go away!...you have no claims on me." "I didn't force you! You came home with me of your own accord. If you touch me I will call the police!" (76)***

After what has happened between them the whole thing seems to her to be a dream, and she feels that everything is broken with him. She feels

miserable. When she is alone, she feels miserable because her major earnings from her work are swallowed up by the family's urgent needs . She remembers Muḥammad al-Fūl, the one who had asked her to ride with him in his car. She talks to herself:

***"...Shall I allow myself to fall? And why should I stop it ? I won't be losing anything I haven't already lost. But, after all, isn't it better to think this over for a long time?"(77)***

At last she gets into the car with him. After what happens between them, he throws a silver coin at her feet and drives away.

One day when Ḥusaḃn is travelling to Ṭanta his mother says to him:

***"Don't forget your family.. I must tell you that we... still need your help until Hasanayn gets a job and Nefisa gets married"***  
(78)

The word "marriage" pierces her soul, and she thinks about her disclosed secret. Does mother still have such hopes ? Doesn't she know that I would rather die than marry ? She so remembered the hours of her weakness when she had been seduced, overshadowing the sexual urge brought about by her despair and poverty. (79) When her brother becomes an officer he wants her to leave her work as a dressmaker. He says to her:

***"It's high time that you took a rest!"***

she says :

***"Do you mean that I should give up my work ?" (80)***

Her face is troubled, her soul is disturbed and her heart flutters with fear and worry. He asks her to stay at home as a respectable lady, and she certainly welcomes this. But what is done cannot be undone. She could easily make pretexts for her loose behaviour, pretending that her object was to earn money to support her starving family. (81) But in fact, she seeks this

on the pretext of covering up her position in front of her own self. She was searching for a outlet of her potential powers, and to rehabilitate her poor womanhood. Her income from tailoring really does lift some pressure from her family. But psychological and physical necessities have played their role. She therefore, under the pressure of tradition and the "conservative environment", seeks a mask with which she can achieve her aim. In other words, she uses poverty as a mask for her physical needs because of the psychological combination, the necessity which pushed her to prostitution was materialistic, as the sexual and psychological pressures play a major role. (82) She becomes torn between a wretched past and an irrepressible thirst for sexual gratification. She could resolutely face the torture of sexual deprivation. Yet she has an undeniable desire for life, and her despair, torture and fear are merely its manifestations. In spite of it all, she was expecting an appointment with a man and did not expect to miss it. (83)

We might find that the pattern of Nefīsa in this novel is different from Ḥamīda's in *Midaq Alley*. Hamida is beautiful, ambitious and poor, while Nefīsa is ugly, desperate and poor. Both of them, came to the same end: prostitution as a profession. Nefīsa, however, practises her profession, in despair and defeat, especially in the beginning. As for Ḥamīda, she practises it gaily and victoriously.

One day Nefīsa is arrested in a certain house in al-Sakākīnī with a young man. She confides to the police that her brother is an officer, and when the officer tells Ḥasanaḡn, he can't believe what he is hearing and tells him:

*"Please let me see her "*

When she enters the room he takes her out of the police station. He is wondering what to do with her. He turns to her with surprise, then he raises his hand and with full force slaps her on the face. Mutely she staggers backwards and feels the back of her head crashing onto the ground. She quickly sits up, she hangs on him as if pleading to him to stop and begs him not to kill her for fear of losing his career and job. Instead she prefers to commit suicide by throwing herself in the Nile to save him. She says :

*"Stop" "Don't! I am not afraid for myself but for you. I don't want any harm to come to you because of me." "What will you say when they ask you why you killed me? Let me do the job myself so no harm comes to you, and nobody will know anything about it."(84)*

Finally she throws herself into the Nile, or rather, she does nothing to stop herself from falling. Her protracted scream sounds like a groan, conjuring up the image of death for anyone unlucky enough to hear it.

Bidāyā wa Nihāyā appears to be a symbolic novel, as it portrays the problem of fatherhood in a middle-class community. The death of the father in this class without fulfilling his mission as a father towards his children, threatens a basic necessity in the lives of this class's children, especially for those classes who have obtained qualifications, i.e. the certificate which guards them from deprivation and the unknown. Thus the title of the novel was so expressive about the context in the beginning, the death of the father, which succeeded in the collapse of the family, wretchedness...and suicide. (85)

These different examples of Cairene women who sell their love and emotions differ in their aim and motives. In al-Qāhira al-Jadīda we find Iḥsān is nothing but a seller of her flesh without any aim or ambition but to gain money for the poor family to survive. As for the case of Ḥamīda, in Zuqāq al-Midaqq it is a means and not an aim. It was not a means to gain money only, but to seek a new life from that of the Alley, which bores her and which she wishes deeply to change. To find her way one day to a new world, which is filled with lights, fame, happiness and real life. She wishes that she can feel the beauty of life and its blessing of clothes, home and food. In Nefīsa's case, in Bidāyā wa Nihāyā, the aim is a little different. She is forced to sell her flesh for deep psychological causes, and so despises her body. This was all a result of her sense of ugliness which she feels deeply even though she has a well-built female body.

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**CHAPTER FOUR: THE PEASANT WOMAN**

**CONTENTS OF CHAPTER FOUR**

4-1 Nūr in al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb.

4-2 Rīrī in al-Summān wa al-Kharīf.

4-3 Zohrā in Mīrāmār.

## 4-2- Peasant women

The most outstanding group of women of this type portrayed by Najīb Maḥfūz are Nūr in al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb, Rīrī in al-Summān wa al-Kharīf and Zohrā in Mīrāmār. If we are to compare these with the three women in the early Cairene novels such as al-Qāhira al-Jadīda and Bidāyā wa-Nihāyā, we shall discover that we are dealing with three different sets of characters, which portray one identity. Nūr, Rīrī and Zohrā come from the village, not as in the early novels from the slums of Cairo. Finally, and most importantly, Nūr, Rīrī and Zohrā are amongst the most natural, most loveable feminine characters in Maḥfūz's novels.

### 4-1 Nūr in al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb

Due to her family's deprivation and being a daughter of an Ūmda's\* ordinary servant, Shalabiyā (Nūr) runs away from her village. She thinks that she may find a suitable job in the city, but her hopes are dashed to pieces. She falls into the hands of a pimp who prepares the way for her to become a prostitute, and when she decides to face the fact and becomes a prostitute, she changes her name from Shalabiyā to Nūr.

In the case of Nūr, Maḥfūz makes use of her name's literal meaning and gives it a symbolic significance. In the process of structuring his material she is contrasted to darkness many times. (1) When Sāid first goes to her flat, we read :

*" What darkness! Turn into a bat, it's better for you.. When will Nur came back? "* (2)

As for the metaphor of her name:

*"On her coming , darkness dissolved and his tired heart sprang to embrace the world with its food, drink and news."* (3)

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\* Umda is the head of the village



The other symbolic aspect is structural. It emanates from the nature of Nūr's dramatic role as an auspicious character. Despite her association with a world of depravity, she provides Sāid with a physical psychological space of her love, thus exhibiting the space-giving quality of light. (4)

Nūr appears in chapter five of the novel where she meets Sāid in Mr Ṭarzān's café soon after his release.

*" Nur appeared at the entrance. Unprepared she stopped in amazement as soon as she saw Said, remaining a few steps away from him [Tarzan]. He smiled at her, but looked closely. She had grown thinner, her face was disguised by heavy make up and she was wearing a sexy frock that not only showed her arms and legs but was fitted so tightly to her body that it might have been stretched rubber. What it advertised was that she had given up all claims to self-respect; so did her bobbed hair, ruffled by the breeze. "*

She runs to him as their hands meet:

*" Thank God you are safe "*

he asks her :

*" How are you Nur?"*

she answers:

*" I'm fine".(5)*

Sāid thinks of taking advantage of his relationship with Nūr, who may be useful to in the execution of his plans, so when he meets her in Ṭarzān's cafe he tells her:

*" I went to Tarzan's cafe to get a gun and try to arrange something with an old friend, a taxi driver, but now look how luck sent me this your friend's car"*

she tells him;

*"You see. You never think of me"*

Sāid smiled and said:

*"it's not true" he said*

*" You are very dear to me"*

*"You are only thinking about that poor fish"*

*"He forms a part of my thinking of you" (6)*

Nūr was the most honest to Sāid after his release when he did not find anyone to stand beside him. She knows that he is a victim of society as much as herself. His attitude toward his society changes because of his mother's illness. He had to face the injustices of society, because the people around him could not help, whether they were poor or rich. The poor, like him, have no money to offer; while the rich think only about increasing their wealth. Never having known love themselves, they have none to give to others. For that, Nūr sympathises with him; therefore, when he asks her if he can hide in her home without any one's knowledge, she says :

*" don't worry, I' ll keep you hidden all right... I will get some food for you...."(7)*

Nūr is opposed to those respected people such as Raūf Ālwān. She is honest with Sāid whereas Raūf is not. She offers him food and shelter, which respectable people do not. She, whose name Nūr means light, is the only light and hope in his life after his betrayal by his wife and by Raūf. (8)

Nūr has been worried about him because she knows his situation and this appears in this conversation between them.

*"Why do you need a gun and a car ?"*

*"They are the tools of the trade"*

*"Heaven! When did you get out of jail?"*

*"The day before yesterday"*

*" And you are already thinking of doing that again?" (9)*

When she knows that he has killed Rā'ūf Ālwān's guards she tells him:

*"...You will kill me with worry!"*

*" My soul rises, you mean! You are simply murdering me! Oh, when will this nightmare end ?" "You don't know good from bad."*

*"You really are very good to me. I want you to know I'm grateful."*

*" But I am so worried; all I want is for you to be safe."*

He whispers:

*" We will escape and live together forever." (10)*

When she learns about his latest exploit, she feels a great shock;

*" You are even more cruel than I imagined.. I just don't understand you but for heaven's sake have mercy and kill me too " "You are busy thinking how to kill, not how to escape, and you will be killed, too. Do you imagine you can defeat the whole government, with its troops filling the street?"*

*"Sit down and let's discuss it calmly.. I don't ever want harm to come to you."*

She says with anger:

*" I will never believe a word you say ; why do you murder doorkeepers ?.....I feel as if the most precious thing in my whole life is about to die"*

***"That is just your imagination... I will remind you of that some time ." (11) he said.***

One should always keep in mind that Nūr's help for Sāid comes from her love to him and particularly from her fear of losing him. She knows that he is not in love with her but because she wants a secure life she feels that she is in need of him :

***"You don't love me. I know that. But at least we could have lived together until you did love me !" (12)***

She cries because she feels that she will lose him :

***"You don't love me ... to me you are more precious than my life itself. I have never in my life known happiness except in your arms. But you would rather destroy yourself than love me" (13)***

She does not want to lose him, even so when he asks her to buy for him an officer's uniform she feels afraid that the police may arrest him, because he is not allowed to wear it.

***" But why do you want it?"***

***"Ah, well, the time has come for me to do my military service"***

She says in anger:

***"Don't you understand I don't want to lose you again?" (14)***

Sāid Mahrān takes refuge with Nūr because he knows that she loves him, especially when she tells him:

***"When you went to jail, no one grieved as much as I did"***

***"That's why I came to you instead of anybody else"***

*"But you only ran into me by chance... you might even have forgotten all about me!"*

*" Do you think I can't find anywhere else?" (15)*

That suggests to us that Nūr was searching for a secure life with Sāid:

*" where is there any security? I just want to sleep safe and secure, wake up feeling good, and have a quiet, pleasant time. Is that so impossible for him who raised the seven heavens? " (16)*

We might now understand that Nūr hates her life as a prostitute and is searching for an honest and respectable life, to feel that she is clean. Therefore she seeks to make Sāid fall in love with her, but she fails because he wants to take revenge on those who have betrayed him, in addition to his view of her as evil:

*"....She isn't the kind of woman who deserves me." (17)*

If Sāid had been able to see Nūr as the only light in his life who offers him love, his end would have been different. She wishes that he would forget about revenge, and live with her peacefully. Yet he is unable to exchange love because she is a prostitute and he loses faith in women because of his wife's betrayal:

*" I no longer have trust in any woman"(18)*

He talks to himself about Nūr:

*"Nur, poor girl, what after all is her love for you but a bad habit, getting stuck on someone who's already dead of pain and anger, is put off by her ageing looks, who doesn't really know what to do with her except maybe drink with her, teasing as it were, defeat and grief, and pity her for her worthy but hopeless efforts. And in*

*the end you can't even forget she is a woman like that slinking bitch Nabawiyya...." (19)*

As a member of society, Sāid shares its beliefs that prostitutes are evil. Nūr, who offers him real love, shelter, food, and her body, he has taken advantage of her. Sāid's failure occurs because he looks at Nūr as complete evil, so he falsifies the actual truth that the individual is a composite of good and evil. Sāid realises this too late, especially when Nūr disappears and his chance of a secure life with love fades. When Nūr disappears Sāid feels:

*"He would soon lose a safe hiding place but also because he knew he had lost affection and companionship as well as Nur, with all her smiles and joking her love and her unhappiness he felt mad, he was aware that she had penetrated much deeper within him than he had imagined, that she had become a part of him, and that she should never have been separate from this life of his which was in shreds and tottering on the brink of an abyss....He silently acknowledged that he did love her and that he would not hesitate to give his own life to bring her safely back...." (21)*

He is wary of her :

*" Nur who was only a woman with no protector adrift on a sea of waves either indifferent or hostile." (22)*

He wants to ask her to care for his daughter Sanā:

*"All I wanted was for her to care for Sana, if my time indeed came..." (23)*

but his time does not come because he surrenders to the police. The police hunt him down as a homicidal maniac, and he meets his death in a cemetery as the police dogs chase after him.

As a result of this, we can deduce that Maḥfūz sympathises with prostitutes who are victims of poverty. He reflects on Nūr:

*"She goes to the bathroom, and returns doing her hair and face. He [Said] follows her hand which forms her face in a new, lively young picture. Like him, she is in her thirties but publicly she lies in order to be younger" (24)*

Maḥfūz is concerned with prostitution in society. He considers that prostitutes are either victims of poverty, or those who have no self-control over sexual impulses, and that they are good-hearted people of whom others take advantage. Poverty and personality could be reasons for prostitution, as in the case of Ḥamīda in Midaq Alley. He compares these fallen women, whom society humiliates, with its respectable figures.

The outcome of this comparison is to show the reader that prostitutes are sometimes more honest and faithful than others. Nūr is more human in her attitude and treatment of Sāid than his respectable wife and Rāūf. The effect of this juxtaposition shows not in their appearance but in their inner humanitarian conscience. (25)

From this, one can see that Sāid's relationship with Nūr proceeds through three stages. The first stage is characterised by his reduction of her to a mere instrument to execute his plans. He keeps her at arm's length, mulling over her physical appearance and even experiencing a sense of superiority over her :

*"I can see that decline setting below your eyes"*

she, like him, is in her thirties, but she openly lies to look younger. In the second stage he draws closer to her with a degree of insight into her inner world. What he experiences is a feeling of sympathy out of his gratefulness, though still tinged with condescension. He tells her once :

*" You are very good-hearted, I must admit"*

In the third stage comes a realisation that his life without her is incomplete with his irrevocable loss of her: (26)

*"He would not see Nur again. He was intensely choked with despair and he was attacked by a severe grief; not because he had lost a caring heart, affection and company... His condition showed that she had been more deeply embedded in him than he had conceived"(27)*

#### 4-2 Rīrī in al-Summān wa al Kharīf

Rīrī is a prostitute who is a victim of an evil upbringing. (28) She has a mother, an aunt and a sister. The only male relative she has left is an uncle in his nineties. She has been a naughty girl since she was young. Her father died when she was ten and her mother had been unable to control or discipline her; she could not keep her away from boys despite the amount of scolding or beating, which were of no use. While she was a teenager, she fell in love with a boy and became infamous in her town Ṭantā for that reason. Her mother hit her, then slapped her on her cheeks until she fell to the ground as if she were dead. She ran away with the boy to Alexandria where he was going to complete his education. He soon deserted her, and got rid of her after a few months, and she found herself alone. It was then that she began her career as a prostitute. (29)

When she appears in the story, she is wearing a cheap cotton flannel dress, the defiant look untainted by reserve or haughtiness, and the very fact that she was walking alone at night. All these things show that she is a corniche girl. Īsā the hero in the story examines her as she walks past him through the narrow space between his bench and the sea wall.

*"she was young and had quite nice features, but her appearance was very common, and she had an air of ready response to some gesture that would take her in, like a stray dog looking for any passer-by to follow" (30)*

She passes him and continues until she reaches the next bench and sits down on it, her eyes fixed in his direction. Īsā is shocked by her youth when he sees her for the first time and asks her:

*" How old are you? "*

she replies proudly:

*"I am not a minor in any case, so relax "*

She has a pale matted complexion, round face, full cheeks, small, full body, and short hair like a boy. Rīrī, like Nūr, is looking for a secure life in an alien world. She has not got a home or house, and she has no-one to care for her. When she meets Īsā, she asks if she can live with him as a servant:

*"I told myself you might need someone as a companion and servant."*

but Īsā thanks her and replies:

*"But I do not need anything like that. Haven't you got a home?" (31)*

No. She replies that she has not got a home, and that she sometimes lives with the woman who owns the café. Īsā continues asking her:

*"Haven't you got any family?"*

*"Of course, but I can't go back to them!"*

Īsā gets more surprised and asks again:

*"Aren't you afraid one of them may see you?"*

*"They are in Tanta. That's where I come from." (32)*

Īsā sees her as one like himself. Her life, however different it may have been from Īsā's, is broken and she looks for a secure life. He thinks that she could soften the harshness of his loneliness. (33) But he makes it clear to her from the very beginning that he is a free man, to all of which she agrees without question. She plays her role adroitly, something above that of a servant and yet below that of mistress of the house. She avoids getting on his nerves in any way whatsoever. She shares his food, cigarettes and drink, but does not ask for a penny apart from that. (34)

As we can understand from this, he allows her to stay with him at his flat as she wishes and also to break his loneliness. However, they are different in their views on life. Rīrī is very knowledgeable about the two spheres of cinema and radio. She can remember the names and pictures of various stars as well as the films, songs and programmes, and she never tires of talking about them, but he has no idea of where she has got them from. She has been worthy of the bright lights, she asks ʿĪsā on one occasion about her wish to be a cinema-star:

*" ...am I good enough for the cinema? ..."(35)*

She is different from him, as she has knowledge about cinema stars while he has not got any idea or experience in that field. His experience is concentrated on political life, which has devoured him as a hero, and then spat him out again as a corpse. One day he asks her about some names and events, but she seems not to know anything around her, and therefore does not receive an answer. He shows his amazement that a human being would exist who does not care about the world of politics.

He asks mockingly:

*" What do you know about the constitution? "*

Her eyes shows no sign of understanding his request. This means that both of them are different but they complement each other- she helps to cure his loneliness, and he gives her security.

Rīrī does not care about the future or what the future brings her. When ʿĪsā asks her:

*" What do you expect from the future?"*

she raises her eyebrows for a few moments and says:

*"Our Lord is great" (36)*

She seems not to think about anything but the present time; she has not bothered herself with what the future holds for her or even what is ahead. Yes, God is great, but there is an proverb; which says "you servant work hard and I will work hard with you," which means he will stand with you so that you can achieve what you want.

One day, Rīrī tells ʿĪsā that she is pregnant by him. When he realises that, his fear turns to pure anger. He yells at her:

***"You poisonous little snake! Is this how you pay me back for giving you a home? "***

and says again:

***" You little devil, are you pretending to be quite that naive? "***  
***"No, never "***

***"Even devils are afraid of people like you ! " (37)***

So he throws her out, when he thinks of the scandal which will afflict him and his party if she reports him to the police. He yells at her:

***" What are you waiting for then? ! " " Don't let me see your face from now on. " (38)***

His situation could have been analysed psychologically as that of a powerless individual who thinks he can overcome the threats of those who benefit from the new regime in Cairo and those of Rīrī in Alexandria by the withdrawal. (39) However, his fear of the girl was even greater than all the tortures he has experienced himself. He starts wondering whether she might be taking steps to create a public scandal. How the newspapers would relish the thought of exposing him!

However, days go by without any of his fears being realised, or any fees for an abortion coming for the girl. (40) After kicking her out of his

house and his life, he sees her in a café, sitting at a table only one away from his!! He ignores her as if he does not know her.

She says in amazement:

*"So you don't recognise me? "*

He answers:

*"I am sorry. Maybe you have mistaken me for someone else "*

She leaves him calmly without any embarrassment and says:

*"God creates forty people who are similar.. I thought you were somebody else " (41)*

Rīrī, like Nūr, is faithful to her man, but his false belief that her class is dishonest and that she is trying to blackmail him or to destroy his reputation makes him destroy her. (42)

After five years, Isa sees Rīrī in a shop named Khudh wa Ushkur (Take and Be Thankful). She was sitting on the chair belonging to either the director or the owner behind the till. When he saw her he remembered how rude he was to her. Consequently, he wonders about the falsity of human relationships and how he was cruel and unpleasant to her. (43)

He talks to himself and says:

*"Riri !! It was Riri, no one else; but she was not a girl any longer. Certainly not! She was a woman now in every sense of the word, and had a personality of her own, which the waiter who kept moving to and fro with orders between her and the customers obeyed to the full. A serious woman and real directress." (44)*

While his eyes are on Rīrī, a woman in a servant's clothes comes into the place leading a little girl by the right hand; the girl looks almost five

years old. He is forced to make a choice. He has either to run away from Alexandria and return to his past sorrows with his wife, or to face his problem to discover the truth whether the girl is his daughter or not. He is no longer influenced or frightened by what other people think or say about him.  
(45)

He says gently: "*Riri* "

She looks at him and asks:

*"Who are you "*

*"I am Isa as you know very well ! "*

*"I don't know you; let me pass. "*

*"We must talk" " There is no other way. I am much more miserable than you can possible imagine! "*

*"Get lost! That is the best thing you can do ! "*

*"...Who's the little girl, Riri ? "...Tell me the girl is my daughter "*

*"The only thing I have got to say to you is; Get lost !!! " (46)*

He hovers for a long time around Riri's place and in front of the building in case he might catch a glimpse of the little girl, but without success. After midnight, Isā waits under the lamp for her; when she sees him she moves away from where he is standing. He stands in her way and says :

*"She is my daughter "*

*"I will yell for the police "*

***"She is my daughter! I know the whole truth. " " ....She has got nothing to do with that man in prison "***

***"She is his daughter" " He adopted her because of his own ideas about what is right. She belongs to him forever and so do I " (47)***

***"You are closing the door of mercy, Riri "***

***"You closed it yourself, so get lost "***

***"But my daughter.... "***

***"You are not a father, you are a coward; you could never be a father"(48)***

Yet Rīrī refuses to tell him the truth whether the girl, Niḡmat, is his daughter or not.

To sum up, we can conclude about this personality;

1- She was searching for a quiet, stable life with a person who might care for her.

2- She was mentally immature. We can realise this from her attitude towards Īsā, during the period of time she is with him after their split in relationship he mentions ***"is no more a homeless prostitute"*** (49)

3- She prefers to live with her aged husband, and refuses to go back to Īsā which if it has any meaning it would be that she has become more decisive in pointing her views.

#### 4-3 Zohrā in Mīrāmār

Amongst the personalities which Maḥfūz has portrayed among the peasant type of woman is Zohrā, whom he has chosen to be the heroine of his novel Mīrāmār.

Zohrā Salāmā comes from a village called Zayādiyā Beḥēira. She was brought up in an ordinary family which consisted of her father, her sister and her husband and her grandfather. Before her father's death she used to go with him to Madām Mariān's pension at Alexandria to sell cheese and chickens.

Zohrā is a beautiful Fallāḥin girl; her eyes are as brown as honey, her cheeks are rosy and round, her little chin is dimpled, her little hands are hard, her fingertips callused, her feet large and flat, but her figure and face are lovely. (50)

Zohrā's journey starts when she refuses to marry an old man. She leaves for Alexandria to escape her fate and the changing values that accompany social change. These changes have uprooted her from her village and thrown her in to the claws of the past as she sets out on her journey to the future. (51) She finds her way to develop her personality. It is the fabric of her entire way of life. (53) She makes up her mind and chooses her future when her sister and brother-in-law come to take her back, she stands proudly in the middle of the Pension room.

*" You shamed us, all over Zayadiyya"*

*" It is none of anybody's business"*

*" If only your grandfather could hear!"*

*"He wanted to sell me"*

*"God forgive you. Come along! Get*

*your things ready!"*

*" I am not going back. Not even if the dead themselves came out of their graves"*

*" It is none of your business. I have a good job. I earn my living by honest work"(54)*

She likes the village, and prefers to live in it but she hates the misery of it. Ṭolbā says to her:

*" I wish you could go back to your village"*

She says:

*" Go to misery?"*

*" I love the land and the village but I hate that misery"(55)*

Zohrā realises that what she really needs to improve herself and would perhaps change Sarḥān's views of marrying her is to know how to write and read. (56) Though Āmer Wajdy warns her that young men such as Sarḥān al-Behīry [a deputy head accountant] are ambitious, she still has hope because she believes that:

*"We are all the children of Adam and Eve" (57)*

Zohrā is represented as a positive individual who through economic independence and learning, wants to make her own way and marry a man of her own choice. She is like Ḥamīda who asks herself:

*"Oh God why did I not learn a profession as my friends did? If I knew how to do something I could have waited and married when and whomever I wish....." (58)*

The point here is that both of them wish to learn and to have a profession but the difference between Ḥamīda and Zohrā is that Zohrā knows her path and how to go through it and therefore she does not fall like Ḥamīda. In other words, we can say that Ḥamīda has chosen the easiest path without being ashamed of earning a high wage as a prostitute. Zohrā wants to build her personality by studying, but Ḥamīda wants to build her personality by earning high wages as a prostitute. Zohrā simply wishes to enjoy her freedom without the interference of anyone. She therefore decides to study to improve herself. When Ṭolbā [who was an under-secretary of state for the Ministry of Awqāf Endowments and a great Landowner] asks her what made her think of studying, she says:

*"All girls go to school now. The streets are full of them"  
"when I learn to read and write, I will try and learn some  
profession, like dressmaking perhaps." (59)*

Like Nefīsa in The Beginning and the End, she tries to support her family by working as a dressmaker. Manṣūr Bāhy [a cowardly intellectual who works for the Alexandria Broadcasting Service] asks her:

*"How did you think of learning?"*

she says :

*"I won't stay ignorant for ever." (60)*

she also says to Sarhān:

*"I won't be a servant any more" (61)*

Zohrā is a demanding woman who can get her rights; she tells Ṭolbā one day:

*"My brother-in-law wanted to take advantage of my situation, so I  
farmed my piece of land on my own"*

*"wasn't it difficult for you, Zohra?"*

*"no" she said " I am strong, thank God, no one ever got the better of me in business, in the field or at the market" (62)*

Maḥfūz eloquently shows a woman like Zohrā who struggles to attain friendship, knowledge, trust and love and who demands respect from the males who encounter her. (63) They perceive her as an object or as an attractive body to seduce, capture, or to sexually subdue. But she rejects such approaches and responds to their advances as a free responsible person.

Ṭolbā says to Zohrā :

*" God keep you"*

*" You worry over me as if I were a child"*

*"You are a child, Zohra"*

*" No. When I have to, I can take care of myself as well as any man"*

*" Zohra, these young men are always ready to play"*

*" I snapped my fingers." (64)*

This conversation between Zohrā and Ṭolbā casts light on the way she cares about herself as a man does, and she is ready to snap her fingers to protect herself. She rejects such approaches and responds to the male advance as a free responsible person. Three qualities have aided Zohrā in her struggle. These are physical strength (she has shown more strength than others do). Sarḥān says:

*"I have not imagined being so... to this extent!"*

Mariān says to Amer Wajdi:

***"She is wonderful, she confides in me happily. She is strong and intelligent, understands everything once I tell her."***

Āmer Wajdī is surprised at her vigour when he sees her fighting back against Sarhān's ex-mistress, "Ṣafiyā" who wants to attack Zohrā.

***"You are a vigorous fighter, Zohra!" (65)***

As for Tolbā Marzōuq, he says about his experience of failure with her:

***"She is as wild as a wild cat, don't get attracted by her dress, and the lady's grey jacket...She is a wild cat!!"(66)***

Ḥosnī Āllām states:

***" A really beautiful girl. A fallaha! How strong"***

she refuses to respond to him. He goes on to say:

***"I go after her through the passage to the washroom and playfully pull her plait of hair, whispering; "The only thing lovelier than music is your face."***

***" She steps back firmly. I try to take her into my arms, but stop at her frigid look"***

he says to her :

***"I have waited so long Zohra!"***

***"you were hard on me, Zohra"***

***"No , you went too far."***

***" I wanted to tell you how much I admire you"***

***"I am just here to work."***

***You are a gentleman. Please be reasonable."(67)***

Sarḥān told Ḥosnī about her:

***"It is not the way you think"***

***" what way should I think then!"***

***"She is a good girl, she is not like that, believe me"***

Ḥosnī says that all of this shows that she is not one of madam's girls. She may even be a virgin.(68)

Zohrā was in love with Sarḥān, one of the residents in the Mīrāmār pension. She thought that there was no difference between rich and poor :

***"We are all the children of Adam and Eve"(69)***

But Zohrā's success in not being misled by Sarḥān derives from her faith in God's Law and Islamic views on sexual love outside marriage. Sarḥān tries to mislead her :

***" We marry as the first Muslims used to marry"***

she asks him:

***" How was that?"***

he answers:

***"I solemnly declare in the company of us two that I take you for my wife, according to the commandments of God and the doctrines of his Prophet" (70)***

As one aware of Islamic Law, and as a person of self-control, in her inner self she prefers to be a servant for the old man than live with a man outside marriage. She answers in the negative:

*" With no witnesses?"*

*" God is our witnesses!"*

but she seems not to agree with what he is saying:

*"Every one else around us behaves as if they did not believe in his existence" (71)*

She asks him:

*"Do you like your sister to live with a man outside of marriage?*

*"(72)*

Zohrā refuses to live with him outside of marriage. He deduces that she is different from what he thought. He says about her:

*"She's really mulish. It hasn't been as easy as I expected"*

But her hope of love and marriage to Sarḥān does not work, because of his evil materialistic sick thoughts. He decides to marry ʿAliyyā, Zohrā's teacher, because she has a job, her family is not poor and her brother works in Saudi Arabia and thus has money to purchase things for him. As a normal individual, she loses her temper and goes to ʿAliyyā's family and quarrels with them, which leads ʿAliyyā's father to scorn Sarḥān who has had an affair with a housemaid.(73) The engagement is broken by the father who tells Sarḥān:

*"Imagine a housemaid taking us to task like that! " (74)*

Zohrā does not give up learning and decides to go on with her plan for a better future. ʿAmer Wajdī says to her:

*"I hope you won't give up the lessons"*

*"No. I will find another teacher" (75)*

Mansūr asks her about her future:

*"What are your plans for the future?"*

*"I am alive, as you see"*

He still worries about her and wants to know what is in her brain. He asks:

*"What about your dreams?"*

*"I will go on."*

He wants to encourage her, saying:

*"You will get over it. You will marry and have children."*

*"I had just better stay away from men, that's all" (76)*

At this critical sad moment, she refuses Mansūr's proposal to marry her, telling him :

*"It's kind and decent on your part; your pity's got the better of you. Thank you. But I cannot accept. And you do not mean it. Please don't mention it again" (77)*

She also refuses the offer of Mahmūd Abu el-Abbās, the newspaper-seller, because he has a bad view of women. When the people in the pension ask her about refusing him she says:

*"Because he thinks woman is an old shoe" (78)*

She once heard him speaking of woman:

*"All women have one thing in common; they are cuddly little animals without brain or religion, and the only way to keep them from going wild is to leather them every day" (79)*

Maḥfūz respects woman as the equal of man. Maḥfūz's Zohrā is represented as a strong individual who can conduct herself in relation to the outside social world.(80) Yet Zohrā is a representative of the liberal view that is being taken of woman's place in society. Her faith in Islam is not a blind one but comes from her point of view in life that man and woman are equal. Furthermore, in the novel Sugar Street we can see that the hero ʿAbd al-Muʿmin says about man and woman in Islam:

*"Islam holds men and women to be equal, except with regard to inheritance" (81)*

This compels me to regard Mīrāmār as Maḥfūz's attempt, at that stage, to discover the realities of Egyptian life, and as reflecting his way, at the time, of evaluating them.

Zohrā, in contrast, is the symbol of the perfect post-1952 "Woman/Egyptian", who withstands the trials and temptation of her environment, and discovers that salvation lies in education.(82)

At the end of the novel, one can deduce that:

1- Zohrā is depicted as a more mature, experienced person, yet with a touch of sadness.

2- Zohrā loses her beloved Sarḥān who really loves her but his materialistic thoughts prevent him from marrying her.(83)

3- Zohrā's journey is the only one that ends in success even if it involves a superficial failure. Nobody will even be able to defeat her triumphant journey of purgation. ʿAmer Wajdī tells her in the end:

*"Remember that you haven't wasted your time here. If you have come to know what is not good for you, you may also think of it all as having been a sort of magical way of finding out what is truly good for you " (84)*

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## **Chapter five**

### **Chapter five: Critique**

Thus, through the present study and analysis of the selected novels, we can conclude that the family factor is an important factor. A family carries the responsibility of the upbringing of a child and the establishing of his personality.

The Prophet Moḥammed (peace be upon him) clarified that the security of Muslim society is conditioned by, and dependent upon, pureness through adherence to Islamic laws. In this he says:(1)

Ḥazrat Ibn Ūmar (R.A.A.) relates that the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) said:

*"Every-one of you is a protector and guardian(of his immediate charge) and is responsible for the action of those persons who are committed to his charge. A ruler is also a steward (and is accountable for those who are put under his charge; a man is steward in respect of his family members of his house, a woman is a steward in respect of her husband's house and his children. In short everyone of you is a steward and is accountable for those who are placed under his care." (2) ( Bukhari and Muslim)*

In addition there is a proverb in Arabic which says "without the aid of an educator, I could have not come to the conclusion of the existence of God!". We can also deduce these values from the Holy Qur'an's description of Luqmān's education of his son. He first begins with the implantation of divinity in his soul. God says:

*"O my son, associate nothing with God, for surely imputing (other gods to God) is a great iniquity." 34:17*

Then after he finishes with the implanting of divinity, he orders him to act upon his beliefs and to show his submission to God, by performing prayers, calling people to do good in God's name avoiding the objectionable, following social etiquette and showing patience with whatever happens to him. Thus he says:

***"O my son, observe the prayer, and enjoin the good turn, and forbid abomination, and persevere in whatever may befall you, for surely that is from firm resolution. And be modest in your walk, and lower your voice, for indeed the most repulsive voice is the voice of donkeys." 43:18***

We might therefore distinguish as a main characteristic of Islamic education that it links beliefs and human beings' behaviour. In general this norm is not restricted to males only but applies to females as well. The Arab poet says:

***"O ye educators, educate your girls on morals, for if you do, either way they will get their aim. You will have to guide them to either the light of guidance, or to bashfulness."(4)***

Islam encourages people to take good care of their female offspring, and bring them up properly. The prophet (PBUH) induced people to treat their daughters and other girls kindly. The prophet says:

***"whosoever puts up with hardship for his or her daughters, and treats them kindly, for him or her, those daughters will become a shield against hell-fire"(5)***

We must educate our fellow Muslims -and especially our youth, for they are the leaders of tomorrow- with regard to the importance and viability of the Qur'anic traditions concerning women, family and society.(6)

Let us put forward this question. Have we felt any of these morals in Maḥfūz's female characters? Of course not, he has attributed these women's failure to poverty, which is one of the pertinent factors, for as Imam ʿAlī -who is one of Prophet Moḥammed's near followers- states:

***"If poverty had been a man, I should have killed him."***

But, as we have mentioned previously, there are some other factors which have control over a person before he commits a sin. He withdraws and thinks about himself and his religion. We have mentioned this in the methodology of upbringing a person, and the establishment of moral consciousness.

For this reason, Allāh has established heavenly laws in every aspect. As an example, in the economic aspect, God has shown everyone how and where to spend his money. If Zakāt (obligatory charity) is collected, there should not be poor people. Furthermore, I would like to take a closer look at these characters, and examine whether or not what we have discussed is applicable to them.

If we are to analyse this kind of female character, of the poor women and the effects and circumstances which forced them into this bad behaviour, we can deduce why every one of them has taken this approach.

### **1-Ihsān:**

Ihsan is a beautiful, educated young lady who falls in love with a bourgeois. She expects him to give her a hand and to help her keep away from infidelity. Unfortunately, he has been overwhelmed and preoccupied with other things. He is used to speaking to her about equity and socialism, saying that the rich must show mercy to the poor. Nevertheless, he does not show any attention to her needs. When she gives up all hope that he might help her, she submits to her parents' wishes, who push her in the direction of depravity. (If not, her brothers will die of hunger). Therefore, deprivation is one cause of her being misled. It is, however, also worth mentioning that family plays a major role. If we examine Ihsān's family, we will find that the father before marriage used to sell himself to get money, while the mother was a belly-dancer. So, when Ihsān is born into the family, the father believes she will compensate him, though the holy Qur'an contradicts the idea that a man could push his girl-slaves into prostitution, the Qur'an states:

*"...But force not your maids to prostitution when they desire chastity, in order that ye may make a gain. In the goods of this life. But if anyone compels them, yet, after such compulsion, is God oft forgiving most Merciful (to them)"(7)*

How about a person who pushes his own child, which is given to him by Allāh the Creator to look after and guide to the right way?! On the contrary, we might find the father thanks God that he has sent him a beautiful daughter who might bring him money.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that a human being is a son of his environment, whether this environment is dependent on love or hate, religion or atheism, co-operation or hindrance. A healthy environment is that wherein the father looks after his children, the mother is sympathetic and brothers and sisters support each other. So even if a person does something wrong, he will repent, reconsider his behaviour and then return to the right path again. But if this environment is a bad one, the father never wakes from his drunkenness, he steals, and does not care for his honour or household. The mother has not got any sense of sympathy for her own children. This all applies in Iḥsān's story; she is brought up in an environment that consists of all kinds of corruption. So, no wonder she inherited her parents' attitudes! And if she wants to be a prostitute, who will prevent her? Therefore we should not expect more than this from a girl who is brought up in such an environment.

Iḥsān was a victim of her family's ignorance of religion, tradition and customs. We therefore should ask ourselves again what would bring a family to such a condition? It is no wonder that society has not aided its members with religion and education which are the human being's main pillars in life, for without them we might fall into a life of corruption.

## **2-Hamīda:**

Hamīda is the daughter of Midaq Alley, ill-treated, beautiful and proud of her beauty. She loves to have control over others, has a vicious tongue, and believes that she is the best one amongst the alley's simple

people. Her dearest wish is to get out of the alley; she wears gold, and controls others with her money. She is an ignorant girl who eats, drinks and dreams of being rich. She thinks that she had to be a daughter of a Pāshā, and thinks her beauty is going to be stifled by this alley and its people. She thinks that she should live in palaces amongst the wealthy, and be served by servants under her orders. On the other hand she is an illegitimate child. No one knows who her parents are, and a lady from the alley has adopted her. But will an ordinary woman be able to educate a child about good morals, while she herself is ignorant and ill-treated? Therefore, she is not able to control Ḥamīda, firstly because she is not her mother and secondly, because she herself has been ill-treated. This is a very good opportunity for Ḥamīda to run away with a pimp to the world of failure and distress to gain a lot of money easily and without honour.

She runs away without paying the slightest attention to anyone because she does not have any relationship with the people of the alley, even with her adopted mother. She does not even feel sympathy towards her and says in the novel when she sees her asleep: "*I have no father or mother to care for me*". Therefore Ḥamīda's failure is due to several factors; poverty which has dragged her down to despair, and her unlimited evil desire to be rich even at the cost of her honour. As for the main cause, it is the absence of a family, as she was an illegitimate child.

No one would expect an animal who was born in the jungle to be tame; he must be an animal and indeed a furious one. Ḥamīda is born like this, she has not found anyone to advise her, care for her, educate her and teach her what is good and what is bad. She has not found the guidance of a father or the sympathy of a mother. This is repeated more than once in the novel.

If Ḥamīda had a family to care for her, she would not have fallen easily. But unluckily, she is a victim of the selfishness of both her parents who have been attracted to lust, and have produced a whore like Ḥamīda. Therefore we have to go back to the Godly command in the matter to do with whoever commits adultery;

***"The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes: Let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter." 24:2***

We might here realise the similarity between the two characters Iḥsān and Ḥamīda. Both of them have slipped down to depravity with respect to their family. To discuss Ḥamīda's character again, we observe that when she flees away she says: *"I have no father or mother to care for me."*

As for Iḥsān, she has got a father and mother but unfortunately they are encouraging her in the way of depravity; her father says to her: *"...God wants you to be one of the mistresses and bring goodness to your brothers!! Open your eyes!! Your father is begging you as well your mother, while your brothers are crying for your help!!"*

Hence, we can conclude that Ḥamīda and Iḥsān are similar characters in a way. Both of them have parents, or in other words, we can call them orphans with parents; Ḥamīda, as we have seen, is an illegitimate child, while Iḥsān is living as an orphan, because she has not been educated properly. By contrast her parents pushed her into prostitution. Both Ḥamīda and Iḥsān are the victims of society, a society which does not depend on Islamic law for its basis of control over its members, and which might otherwise have guided them on the right path.

### **3- Nefīsa:**

As for Nefīsa, she is an extremely important character. She has been raised in an ordinary family, with a father, a mother and brothers. They care for each other. The father is tender to his children and family, and calls Nefīsa "Sukkar" (sugar). The mother is obedient to her husband and also a keeper of the household as a whole. They are not poor, in fact they have a servant. But, as soon as the father dies, the calamities begin, as the only provider has died, and his pension does not cover them. Nefīsa has been obliged to mix with society and with its different classes when she works as a seamstress. Because she realises her ugliness and her lack of physical beauty, when Sulāimān tries to seduce her, she does not believe him. She

knows how ugly she is, but she withdraws from her thoughts when she tries to convince herself that she can be beautiful at least in his eyes.

Because she is less confident about herself and has only a weak belief in Allāh, she falls into this seducer's trap. But what is the real reason for her continuing in this way, where she becomes trapped?

From the novel, we can deduce that lust has controlled her mind. She prefers not to use her reason for the time-being when lust is in control. We can also realise that when her brother, the officer, wants her to sit at home as a respected lady, she welcomes the idea, but when she remembers an appointment with a lover, she does not want to miss it. To sum up, if Nefīsa had not lost her honour, she would not be accustomed to a prostitute's life style. Along with the causes that led her to such a conclusion, we can list:

- 1- The loss of her honour.
- 2- Her strong sexual desires.
- 3- Poverty; which is the major cause of her turning into a prostitute.

To all these causes we can add the absence of her mother's reaction towards all these incidents, and her staying out late at night. The mother only cares that the family must not feel hunger, and so she, just like Sheḥāta in New Cairo, has given Nefīsa an unconditioned freedom. Therefore, Nefīsa is not a criminal but a victim of society and the man who has betrayed her.

#### 4- Nūr:

She is a village girl. Her father is a doorman in the mayor's household. Poverty is one of her main reasons for failure, while a desire for a better life is another. Her wish is to travel to Umm al-Dunyā.\* She thinks of Cairo as heaven. The idea takes over her mind, so she runs away. Her first reason for leaving her village is to find a job and live a happy life, but unfortunately she falls into the hands of a pimp. He consequently leads her into depravity. She gets used to this kind of life, but when she meets Saīd Mahrān, she searches

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\*A literary expression for Cairo (The mother of the world)

for love with him and wishes from the bottom of her heart that they could live an honourable and stable life, away from deceit, lies and social masks. But all her thoughts vanish when she realises that he does not want to get involved with her. Therefore, we can deduce that poverty was a major reason for her fall.

The second reason is her ambition to discover the unknown world, even if it costs her dearly. She travels to Cairo, though she does not know where to go, nor anyone in Cairo. Again, what might be included in this character assessment, is that she was just a teenager. (A period of life that needs a lot of care, a period when there are a lot of uncontrollable desires). Therefore, it is an educational crisis. A proper education should have guided her to the right path. Besides her ignorance, she is not able to read or write and consequently has been a victim of her powerful ambition, and that is why she falls easily.

#### **5- Riri:**

Riri is different. She has a lot of character, she is mischievous, excitable, uncontrollable, headstrong and can act like child. Her father died when she was ten. Her father's death is one of the main reasons leading her to feel free of any guardian who might keep a watch on her. Her mother is unable to exercise any control or authority over her. (She used to hit her to make her more controllable). The girl at last runs away with a man to Alexandria, leaving her mother feeling dishonoured and disgraced.

When the man she runs away with deserts her, leaving her to face life on her own without a friend or a guide, she ends up in the hands of a pimp.

Her story is similar to that of Nūr; both of them having fallen into the hands of pimps, who lead them not only to despair but to depravity and corruption. We later on find her messing around in the novel, unable to feel shame over what she has done on the one hand, and a stubborn desire to acclimatise herself to her new life on the other.

As mentioned before, we realise that this character did not fall because of poverty but because of the pitiful nature of her education and upbringing.

She is a headstrong girl, in need of someone to guide her, someone who can stop her from being defiant. Her father has unfortunately died at a very critical time of her life while she was only ten; if he had been alive, this would not have happened to her. He could have controlled her, and guided her. As for her mother, she is not able to control her, and consequently she is free to do whatever she wants and believes that this is the life she should live.

## 6- Zohrā:

When we study Zohrā's character, we should bear in mind that she is a village girl. She knows from the very beginning where she is heading, unlike Nūr, who likes adventure, or Rīrī, who is uncontrollable.

Zohrā's character, when studied, satisfies the mind and heart of a sensible reader. She is a character who knows what she is doing from the very beginning, she holds the future in her hands and plays with it.

As far as the researcher is concerned, she is the ideal girl who has played an active role in facing difficult circumstances. She is a village girl as Rīrī and Nūr, but she has not copied what they have done. She has not fled because of poverty but because she feels that she is a product that can be bought and sold. She refuses the money and refuses to be sold to a person who is as old as her father, though he was rich. Hamīda, by contrast, was on her way to break her engagement to marry Ālwān the rich man in the alley.

It is worth mentioning that when she runs away she has a clear idea of where to go and whom to approach. She seeks the Greek lady, who used to buy chickens and cheese from her father before his death.

Therefore, Zohrā is completely different from both her counterparts Nūr and Rīrī. Nūr, as we have seen, flees to Cairo because she wants to have some adventures in Cairo (Umm al-Dunḡā); she dreams of having a respectable job so that she might earn money. Thus, this might be the major difference between Zohrā and the other two girls. Zohrā is a mature and strong girl, who sticks to her traditions and believes in them. She is as

beautiful as Ḥamīda, but she does not think that beauty is a thing that is bought and sold to whoever pays more. On the contrary, she wants to support her beauty with education. She feels that education is a weapon for human beings. She is able to overcome whatever difficulties face her through her education, and so prove she can overcome these circumstances. She becomes a valuable, active member of society through honourable work and education.

She is knowledgeable about what is lawful and prohibited and good or bad, according to her religion. She refuses to live with a strange person as a lover and without a marriage contract, though she could have led an easy life with him. She says that she would prefer to marry an old man rather than live with a person without a marriage contract.

In contrast with Ḥamīda, who is ready to do anything so that she can live an easy life, she is a struggling girl: she works as a farmer, a saleswoman in the market and as a servant. She does not care about the low wages as long as they come through legal means. She, like Nefīsa, learns to be a seamstress to help herself gain some extra money but not to get along with men as Nefīsa uses her job!!

Zohrā is the most successful woman of them, because she is governed by her mind and does not let herself be swept along with lust or greed for money. She hates to depend on others, and likes to be independent. That is why she has not fallen into depravity. Thus we recall:

- 1- Her mental maturity, which has pushed her to identify the points of weakness in human beings.
- 2- Her upbringing in a family which gives her determination and the ability to choose the right way.
- 3- Her knowledge about her religion, which we recognise in her refusal to live with Sarḥān without a marriage contract, unlike Rīri who gives herself unreservedly to Īsa and lives with him as a servant.

Zohrā therefore, is the ideal woman, whom in my view every woman of the same style should have as an ideal, if she wants to live a lawful and good life.

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