

Mahfouz's *The Day the Leader was Killed*: The Novel as Political Chronicle

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Abstract: In *The Day the Leader Was Killed*, Mahfouz returns to the use of family structure as a means of chronicling the political and social developments in the Egyptian scene. The study shows Mahfouz's skill to sum up an entire age in a short novel which, despite its shortness, incorporates many of his major themes, even those he dealt with three decades earlier in his trilogy.

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In his book *Real and Imagined Worlds*, Morroe Berger writes, "That fictions and history are related is inevitable, since art must have some connection with life, even if only to oppose it" (162). Chinua Achebe argues that literature "must speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current and the aspirations and destinies of its people" (*Morning* 7). The recent history of Egypt has been the core of Naguib Mahfouz's writing and he was aware of the fact that it is difficult to separate fiction from history. Even in his early historical novels, Mahfouz takes stories not only because they are the facts of the pharoanic past of Egypt but also because when communicated with his imagination they become embodiments of contemporary themes. Mahfouz sets for himself the task of rewriting and re-interpreting the recent history of his country in order to enable his countrymen to understand their past and present and shape their future. He views the Egyptian scene with objectivity which makes him an honest and trustworthy chronicler who fully understands the various forces that play in the socio-political scene. The term political chronicle is used in the sense of examining recent historical events and recording the major events that affected the life of the Egyptian people. In *The Day The Leader Was Killed*, Mahfouz sees his task as rewriting the recent history in the hope of enlightening his people so that history will not repeat itself. The importance of this task is highlighted by the current events in Egypt and some parts of the Arab World. These events have shown Mahfouz in a new light as a man who understood his society and tried to change it. His vision of that change is realized few years after his death.

In *The Day The Leader Was Killed* Mahfouz aims at exploring themes of responsibility in recent history and cutting through the official versions of it not through using documentary evidence, but through creating a synthesis of the historical and subjective perspectives in a way that

reflects a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the private and the public, the personal and the national. Lukács believes that, “a critical understanding of the present is the key to understanding the past” (*The Meaning* 95). Mahfouz, on the other hand, seems to believe that a critical understanding of the past is the key to a better understanding of the present. He seems to share Herman Hesse's view that, “Sometimes all history strikes me as a picture book reflecting man's blindest and most violent craving: the craving for forgetfulness” (16). In *Children of the Alley*, the narrator keeps reminding us at the end of every section that “Forgetfulness is the plague of our alley”. Mahfouz does not want his people to forget the past or be obsessed by it. He wants them to learn from it. All the works of Mahfouz are concerned with Egypt and its problems. He has been identified as the novelist of Cairo of the twentieth century and more particularly of its middle class whose life, development, problems and changes have been his main focus. In novel after novel, he succeeds in creating truthful pictures of the different stages in the political and social history of Egypt. Perhaps, the main reason behind this success is Mahfouz's ability to move from the private to the public, from the particular to the general. El-Enany rightly observes that “the interaction of the public and the private is essential in Mahfouz's world-picture for producing personal tragedy” (*Pursuit* 97). Mahfouz's personal tragedies are always connected with the political, economic, and social conditions of society as a whole. Even when the focus is on the inner world of the individual, the external reality remains of paramount importance.

Although Egypt's problems are Mahfouz's first priority, this does not mean that his novels should be read entirely within the Egyptian context. He is also concerned with justice and the rights of the people to live, express their views and choose their destinies. The appeal of his works is due to the fact that he approaches the questions that preoccupied his countrymen not only from an Egyptian point of view, but also with the belief that the human condition is the same anywhere. Mahfouz's work in Jarry's words, “reflects the problems of time and change, human suffering, injustice, alienation, cruelty and loneliness, and corruption and stupor on all aspects of the human condition” (13). One should add, however, that these problems are placed within a concrete socio-political reality, i.e. the 20th century Egypt. In the post-independence period he is concerned with the failure of the leadership to fulfill the promises of the revolution. To him the promise of national independence from British rule has not materialized for the majority of Egyptian people. He felt that the new regime had failed to fulfill the goals of the revolution and one of the reasons of this failure as shown in *Children of the Alley* and *The Harafish* is that the leaders did not succeed in establishing the necessary contact with ordinary people. This point in particular was proven right by the political upheavals in the Middle East in the first half of 2011. Like many of his post-independence novels, *The Day the Leader Was Killed*,

probes the economic and social problems of Egyptian society and tries to answer the question: why has the revolution failed to create a just social and political order three decades after independence? Mahfouz has been all his life a champion of social justice:

All I can say is that there are certain principles which saturate my very being.... that is why my work must defend them. The most important of these principles is social justice.... and there are other equally urgent needs, such as freedom, truth and knowledge. I can not imagine that any of my works fail to advocate such principles. (qtd. in Mehrez 79-80)

He strongly believes that art is nothing but “a criticism of life” and that “if life became perfect, art would be meaningless and cease to exist” (qtd. in El-Shiekh 85). To Atiyya, it is this seriousness and strong conviction that the purpose of art is to serve life, that distinguishes Mahfouz as a committed writer whose “courage and clarity of vision are dedicated to the expression of his people's concerns” (22). Mahmoud Amin el-Alim rightly observes that Mahfouz has always been aware of his own identity, of the import of his works and what they impart to his readers:

He is as keen on the clarity and wholeness of the impact of his message on the people as he is persistent and thorough in delivering it. His works show him not only as a talented writer but also as a scrutinizing critic and an exegete with a special analytical ability in describing events and situations and in portraying the psychological set up of the characters. (178)

Mahfouz in *The Day the Leader Was Killed*, however, is no longer interested in presenting a complete picture of the social and political life in Egypt and focuses rather on shedding light on the passive effects of the wrong policies of the post-independence leaderships on the life of the Egyptian individuals and families. Like in *Miramar*, the novelist adopts the multiple points of view technique to give us different perspectives on many aspects of the Egyptian life. *The Day the Leader Was Killed* corresponds to Elizabeth Drew's definition of a good novel as “a selection of material by one individual who has excluded everything irrelevant or superfluous to his purpose” (*Modern Guide* 19). The novel shows Mahfouz's ability to select from the vast amount of material and present it vividly and significantly. He, to borrow the words of Boulton, “present[s] at least some fragments of truth by applying imagination, insight and organization to observation” (16).

Mahfouz keeps constantly changing the forms of his novels with the social and political factors. This novel shows the speed and flexibility with which he is capable of adapting to the historical moment. It not only helps us in understanding the changes in his approach to reality but also the changes that have taken place in that reality. In the last part of *The Trilogy*, Riyad Qaldas says, “Independence isn't everything. There is also the people's sacred prerogative to enjoy their rights and their sovereignty – to live as free men, not slaves” (SS 135). One of the main aims of the writer in *The Day the Leader Was Killed* is to show what the Egyptians have

made of themselves after three decades of independence. The questions that come to our mind as we read the novel are similar to the questions that we ask ourselves as we follow the news of the popular revolutions in different Arab countries: do the people enjoy their rights and sovereignty? Do they live as free men or slaves? Although Muhtashimi family belongs to the middle class, it does not have the financial security enjoyed by al-Sayyid family in the trilogy. The young generation in *The Trilogy* is concerned with freedom from the British rule and the outdated values but, unlike Elwan and Randa, they are not besieged by financial problems. People in *The Day the Leader Was Killed* are so concerned with their daily problems that they find little time to engage in political discussions in the same way characters in *The Trilogy* do. Although young people are no longer dominated by their elders, they cannot choose their future because their freedom is crippled by the difficult economic conditions they face. Moreover, although set in the pre-independence era, *The Cairo Trilogy* is a more optimistic work than *The Day the Leader Was Killed*. It seems that the optimism we hear from some characters in *The Trilogy* has been diminished by the wrong policies of the post-revolution leaderships. People become very exhausted and almost hopeless. "Only trees and buildings remain the same. Some speech on the radio is being broadcast from some place. Lies fill the air and mingle with the dust. Fatigue, fatigue..." (*Day* 54).

After this brief comparison between the two works, one can argue that *The Day the Leader Was Killed* is different in form from *The Trilogy*. It is not only the result of Mahfouz's long years of experimentation with the novelistic techniques but also his understanding of the changes that have taken place in the social and political life in his country. He knows that people in their struggle for survival in the new and merciless society have no time to read lengthy novels. Mehrez tells us that Mahfouz is very careful not only about what he is writing but also how he could make the written word pass or not pass depending on the kind of danger it presents and the general political climate in Egypt. One can add that Mahfouz knows that the mid eighties is not the time to publish another trilogy but short novels that reflect the problems of the people.

Therefore, like the realistic novels of the forties and fifties, this novel focuses on family structure but without the minute details which in the social realistic novels were compounded into a large picture. Despite its shortness, the novel, is concerned with the life of three generations. It is in a sense a condensed saga in which Mahfouz depicts the failure of the post-revolution leaderships to solve the problems of the people. These problems may appear to be specifically Egyptian but the novel still has an inter-cultural appeal and relevance at least in the third world countries which face similar problems. In this sense the novel cannot be seen only as "Mahfouz's studied evaluation of the Sadat period" (El-Enany, *Pursuit* 45). Mahfouz's aim is to dramatize this period in the history of his country by mixing the public story of his country with the private story of

Muhtashimi family. The novel is not a first-person narrative in which a single protagonist or narrator writes his private history. *The Day the Leader Was Killed* has multiple points of view. It is told from the points of view of three narrators, Muhtashimi, the grandfather, his grandson Elwan and his fiancée Randa. Through the use of this technique, Mahfouz is able to give us the reactions of the different generations to the political life in their country. At one point in the novel, Elwan says, "How many millionaires are there? Relatives and parasites, smugglers and pimps, shiites and sunnis. Stories far better than the *A Thousand and One Nights*" (*The Day* 54). The novel itself is one of these stories. It details the hardships faced by the people of Egypt from the economic liberation or Sadat's open-door economy which increased disparities between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have nots. In *The Day the Leader Was Killed*, Mahfouz does not disguise his criticism of life in Sadat's Egypt. Although the use of the multiple points of view technique has lessened the bluntness of the attack, the criticism this novel contains is more explicit than in any of his other novels. This can be attributed to the fact that the novel was written a few years after the death of Sadat. This gave Mahfouz more freedom to address the political and economic evils of Sadat's Egypt directly without risking coming into open confrontation with the authorities. The novel's convincingly intimate portrait of what it meant to live in Cairo in 1970s constitutes a scathing critique of the Infitah policy.

One of the important beliefs expressed by Mahfouz again and again in his novels is the belief that a corrupt political system leads people to be less concerned about morality. Mahfouz viewed the Sadat regime as a corrupt regime and the Infitah as a failed policy. Under this corrupt political system people who are immoral, like Anwar Allam in the novel, are the only people who benefit from the existing conditions. The majority of the people suffer in the same way the Muhtashimi family suffers. As the novel shows, the Infitah has created a society of contradictions or different nations living in one country. There are people who are "piled up in buses, their faces looking out behind cracked glass panes like those of prisoners on visiting days" (*The Day* 10). On the other hand there are those who find a magic formula for amassing colossal wealth in record time. Many of the young generation like Elwan and Randa, find themselves "Lost amid a circus of crooks" (*The Day* 24) in what Muhtashimi calls "the kingdom of the corrupt" (*The Day* 38).

It is an undisputable fact that the economic structure of a nation influences the life styles of its people. In the novel the Muhtashimi family lives a poor life because the economic structure of the country is battered under a corrupt government. When economic conditions are harsh, people usually evolve all kinds of unlawful means of overcoming them. Anwar Allam tells his wife Randa, "God won't forgive you if you don't amass an incredible fortune under these circumstances" (72). Mahfouz sees that the open-door economic policy allowed the business class to

gather considerable wealth at the expense of the larger population. Its effects on Cairo particularly were disastrous as the city became more over-crowded. One of the major problems created by this reality is the housing problem. Housing became unaffordable for the younger generation who found themselves in a merciless society of thieves and their victims. The novel evokes the sense of frustration and suffering as a result of the wrong policies of post-independence leaderships. This fact is presented to us through the relationship and engagement of the hero and the heroine. Their engagement is shattered under the pressure of their financial difficulties. Mahfouz makes it clear that the couple have no solution for the housing problem they face. They cannot overcome their difficulties without giving up their values. They have only love which is not sufficient to face the hard facts of life created by the Infitah.

The question that arises here is: why does Mahfouz focus on the plight of Elwan and Randa? They represent the young generation in the novel. Since their birth coincides with the country's independence and their destiny depends on the success or failure of the post-revolution political leaderships, their private history is inextricably connected with Egypt's history. If it is so then why does Mahfouz choose Muhtashimi, the grandfather to narrate most of the novel? It needs to be stated here that the grandfather's role as a narrator is very important. He seems to be ageless and his age and knowledge make him a reliable voice of the people. He stands for "the atemporal, all-encompassing character of Egypt, having survived many leaders and conflicting policies without ever being engulfed by any one current" (*Pursuit* 93). Muhtashimi plays the important role of connecting the past with the present. He has been an eyewitness to most of the political and social upheavals that occurred in Egypt before and after the revolution. As a novelist, Mahfouz has his own ways of speaking out and one of these ways is the creation of characters through whose speeches and utterances, an evaluation of the political reality is given to us. Muhtashimi opens and ends the novel like Amer Wagdi in *Miramar*, and this is an indication of the importance Mahfouz gives to his point of view. He also narrates the greater part of the novel and one feels that many of the comments uttered by the grandfather are those of Mahfouz himself.

When we first meet him at the beginning of the novel, Muhtashimi says, "I am the alarm clock of this exhausted household. It is good to be of some use at this advanced age of mine" (*The Day* 4). Taking into account Mahfouz's age when he wrote this novel, it would be no exaggeration to say that there is a similarity between the role of the grandfather in the house and that of Mahfouz in Egypt. In other words Mahfouz is playing the role of the alarm clock of his exhausted country. Both the writer and his character belong to the same generation, the generation of the 1919 revolution and the national struggle against the British and the monarchy. The sympathy and understanding with which Mahfouz presents the members of this generation in his novels is remarkable. This

can be attributed to the influence of the 1919 revolution and its principles on him, an influence that cannot be ignored or underestimated. It is notable that both Muhtashimi and Amer Wagdi were, like Mahfouz, supporters of the Wafd Party and its leaders. They share their creator's belief that the 1919 revolution is the most important political event in the history of modern Egypt. Muhtashimi, for example, considers any attempt to devalue the 1919 revolution a treason.

The role of the grandfather is not only to connect the past with the present but also to objectively comment on events and policies. He is moved by the suffering of his grandson and his generation and the novel is full of his angry outbursts:

You scum of the earth. Why my grandson? You have bequeathed your children money and security, and the rest of us ruin, poverty and debts. It is as though the revolution has taken place only to bring you joy and us sorrow. O God! When will Thou give me the courage to spurn the world and what is in it? For how long will I go on yearning for inaccessible miracles? When will I be able to point to the oppressor and slap him down, relieving the world of his evil ways? In fact, the experience has proved to be a failure. We were unable to deal with it for what it actually is: a great blessing. Rather, we spoiled it through treachery, egoism, and betrayal. (*The Day* 64)

In this passage, Mahfouz gives us his evaluation of the 1952 revolution which was "a great blessing" but through the wrong policies of the leaderships, turns into a failure. True that it is a hazardous undertaking to decide which views expressed by a character are those of his creator, but as pointed out earlier, Mahfouz often attributes to one or other of his characters views and statements about the social and political life in Egypt with which he is in agreement. In fact Mahfouz never expresses directly his doctrinaire opinions because he believes that literature is not the literal transcript of the social and political facts of life and the writer's views on them. In almost all his works, he succeeded in achieving a balance between the vision of reality he presents and the artistic value of his work and *The Day the Leader Was Killed* is no exception.

One of the important points one finds in the novel is the opposition between the grandfather and his grandson's points of view. This opposition is intentional and plays an important function in the thematic structure of the novel. According to El-Enany, the "parallelism between the consciousness of the old and the young creates the sense of a continuum of national frustration across generations" (*Pursuit* 93). It seems that the novelist was not satisfied with the way the past is represented by historians who often write accounts of the past that favoured political groups or establishments. Mahfouz wants us to trust the views expressed by Muhtashimi because young people like Elwan grew up during the Nasser era and were exposed to the propaganda of that regime. The difference in the points of view between the two is clearly shown in their attitude towards Nasser. Elwan sees the dead leader as "a symbol for lost hope, hope for the poor and the alienated

“(The Day 53). This attachment to the late president worries the grandfather for whom Nasser is but “a buffoon who used to let out ten sterile slogans every time he as much as opened his mouth” (The Day 24). It is natural that in this gloomy atmosphere people start looking to the past as a source of hope. According to El-Enany “a sense of nostalgia for Nasser's days seems the only comfort in an age without heroes or ideals, a nostalgia so strong it almost serves as a substitute for looking forward for the future” (Pursuit 94). Elwan tells us that Cafe Richi to which he often goes, has become “a temple where offerings are made to the late hero Here, too, torrents of indignation are poured upon the hero of victory and peace, victory that has turned out to be but a dirty game, and peace, surrender” (The Day 53). For the grandfather, however, the source of hope is not the Nasser era, but the 'good old days', the days of the 1919 revolution and the national struggle.

Unlike Elwan, Randa does not have any illusions about the present or the past. To her the whole post-independence era has been a “nauseating age of slogans. Even the late hero never tires of reiterating slogans. Between slogans and the truth is an abyss in which we have all fallen and lost ourselves” (The Day 18). She sees that her generation is not the victim of the Infitah only but the wrong policies of the Nasser regime as well. Her refusal to be exploited is a call to the Egyptian people to refuse the exploitation by their leaders. It is clear that the character of Anwar Allam is another addition to Mahfouz's gallery of the figure of the opportunist which is found in most of his novels. Anwar Allam is adopting the same philosophy as is followed by Ridwan Yasin in *Sugar Street*, Rauf Elwan in *The Thief and the Dogs* and Sarhan El-Beheiry in *Miramar*.

So far light has been shed on the first and third generations. What about the second generation represented in the novel by Elwan's parents? They are always in the background and seem to play an insignificant role in the events of the novel. But by presenting them in this way Mahfouz is emphasizing the fact that the political and social reality in post-independence Egypt has been responsible for the loss of identity suffered by this generation. It is left to their son Elwan to sum up the fate of his father and in a way his entire generation when he says, “He hailed the revolution, mourned its defeat, and was quite ruined by the Infitah” (The Day 55). The economic conditions forced them to work from crack of dawn to night. They rarely find time to spend with their son or hear his problems. Elwan considers himself “an orphan, I lost my parents when they lost themselves in continuous work from morning to night, shuttling between the government and the private sectors to eke out a meager living. We meet only fleetingly” (The Day 10). Like the grandfather, they feel sorry for their son but they are unable to help him. In fact they do not have time to even think of his problem. The father sums up their routine:

The days go by and I find time neither for a haircut nor for paring my fingernails. I shove myself into the bus and draw Hana close to me to shield her from the eyes of the hungry. Friday—our day off—obligations

piled up: one must find time for a bath, for condolences, and apologies, and then there is just one hour left for relaxation, during which I'm swamped by your worries and those of the country. (*Day* 55-6)

The parents' absence from the life of their son and the actions of the novel is Mahfouz's way of dramatizing the fate of the second generation, the generation that was supposed to harvest the fruits of the revolution. It has been indicated earlier that Mahfouz's purpose is not to explore the psyche of his characters or offer an analysis of human relationships. His aim is to dramatize the failure of the economic and social policies of Sadat. This is why the focus is on the negative results of those policies on both the individual and society. The story of Elwan is just a means of documenting an entire era. The novelist often moves from the private problem of Elwan to give a picture of the public life at the time:

Men, women, children and even pregnant women no longer stay at home; the tragic or the comic sums them all up. Furniture stores and boutiques are all crammed with goods. How many nations live side by side in this one nation? The lights in the square are bright and nerve-racking, and equally exasperating are the bottles of mineral water on the tables of tourists. And what about us. What do we drink? (*The Day* 53-4)

The writer employs many images to give us an idea about the overall situation in the country. Elwan, for example, tells us that, "It's just a Mafia which controls us, no more no less" (*The Day* 26). This is one of the recurrent images in the novel which plays similar function to the image of dogs in *The Thief and the Dogs*. The assassination of Sadat is described by some of the people in the Cafe as the collapse of the empire of the robbers. Even Allam who is one of those who benefited from the Infitah, tells Randa that, "we're in a merciless rat race" (*The Day* 73). All these images help us to understand better the kind of age the novel is documenting.

The criticism of the political and social structures of society in the novel is accompanied by a direct attack on the president himself. When the president is seen on TV on Victory Day celebrations, many in the cafe express their opinion that "the late president [Nasser] was greater in his defeat than this one in his glory". This kind of direct criticism is something that one does not find in the novels dealing with Nasser era. One can even say that through this criticism Mahfouz wants us to see the assassination as a logical end to a man who, as Muhtashimi tells us, "was to keep for himself the fruits of victory, leaving us his Infitah, which only spelled out poverty and corruption" (*The Day* 94). Earlier Randa expresses her hope that "someday the microbe will be killed and recovery will be in sight" (*The Day* 58). She also tells her fiancé, Elwan, that killing one person will be enough to solve their problem. There is no doubt that the person she refers to is Sadat himself. The question that arises here is : Does Mahfouz believe that killing the president will be enough to solve the problems of Egypt?

To answer this question one has to study the relationship between the

assassination of Anwar Sadat and the death of Anwar Allam, Randa's husband, after being beaten by Elwan. The murder of the boss, who stands for the crooks and parasites flourishing under the Infitah, must not be seen merely as "an artistically naive parallel action of rebellion" (El-Enany, *Pursuit* 94). El-Enany adds that "the simplistic parallelism of the plot serves to show the fall of the supreme head of corrupt regime and of one of his distant satellites at the same time" (*Pursuit* 94). Foud Dawwarah rightly observes that Elwan's killing of Anwar Allam cannot be fully understood or justified unless we realize the symbolic significance of each of them and their role in the novel as a whole. Dawwarah sees the murder of Allam as a justification of the assassination of the president who shares with Anwar Allam the first name (*Naguib Mahfouz*). It has been pointed out earlier that Randa stands for Egypt and Elwan's murder of Allam is because he is angry at the way the latter tries to exploit Randa.

The murder serves another thematic function in the novel. It shows that killing the head of a corrupt regime does not necessarily mean the end of the empire of the corrupt. The satellites of the head of the state must also fall if the country is to open a new page in its history. In this sense the murder is an artistically significant parallel action. It shows how skillfully Mahfouz is able to interweave the private and the public in his novel. The private and the public strands come to similar conclusions, the death of Allam and the assassination of Sadat. Mahfouz is more of an artist than a historian. Reading the title of the novel, one will expect to read details of the events that occurred on October 6th 1981, the day on which Sadat was killed. Instead, we read about the story of Elwan and Randa and only near the end of the novel is the day presented to us. The assassination is not presented to us directly but through the speeches of the characters. Even Elwan who narrates to us the event was not present in the victory day celebrations. He just watches the event on the T.V. while sitting in the Cafe. In this way Mahfouz gives us an idea of the reactions of as many Egyptians as possible. A cafe is a place where people from the various strata of society can gather. The reaction of the people to this political event is given to us in short sentences which reflect the sense of shock and disbelief which is mingled with a sense of glee.

At first, we turned pale. It's true then. Amazing! actually true ! The man's finished? Who could've believed?... Death is the true dictator. The official announcement comes to us like a final statement. I wonder what people are saying? I'd like to hear what is being said around us in the Cafe? I picked up my ears. There is no power or might save in God. To him alone is permanence. The country is in obvious danger. He doesn't deserve this end, whatever his misdeeds. On his day of glory ? A plot. Surely there's a conspiracy. No doubt. The hell with him! Death saved him from madness. Anyhow he had to go. This is what happens to those who imagine that the country is nothing but a dead corpse. No, it's a foreign conspiracy. He doesn't deserve this end. It was the inevitable end, he was a curse on us. He who kills will

ultimately be killed. In a spilt of a second an empire has collapsed, the empire of robbers, What is the Mafia thinking about right now? (*The Day* 96)

After this long paragraph in which Elwan tries to give us the various reactions of the people in the Cafe to the killing of their president, he gives us his own reaction. Elwan is presented from the beginning of the novel as a victim of the Infitah. He tells us that he is "torn by conflicting feelings of despair, fear and joy" (*The Day* 97). These are the feelings experienced by the majority of the Egyptian people. In addition to these feelings, "Vague hopes hovered, hopes of unknown possibilities, hopes that the prevailing lethargy and routine would, at last, be shattered, and that one could start soaring toward limitless horizons" (*The Day* 97).

The novel may appear to be grim. Despair, lost hopes, images of exploitation at different levels in society dominate the narrative. Mahfouz's impulse for writing the novel is to dramatize his anger at the repulsive aspects of that reality. His aim is not only to document an age by recording social and political facts but also to criticize the negative aspects of the reality he is dealing with. Through the private story of Elwan and Randa, the novel exposes the exploitative political, social and economic structure of Egypt under Sadat. By documenting this era, Mahfouz gives us a chance to see how things were going on at the time. His readers in Egypt can see whether things have improved since the death of Sadat or remained unchanged. Therefore, his pessimism does not proceed from a denial of values but from a melancholy recognition of the degree corruption has plagued his country. His assessment was proved right by the 25th of January popular revolution against Sadat's successor.

On the final account, one can say that despite the documentary nature of the novel, Mahfouz has succeeded in creating a piece of art which will be remembered among his good novels. Summing up and judging an entire age in such a short novel is quite an achievement. In writing this novel, Mahfouz was motivated by a desire to give posterity an impartial assessment of an important period in the history of their country. The intertwining of the private and the public allows the novel to rise above the level of pure documentary. It is not merely a documentation of historical facts but a work of art. His aim is not to throw emphasis on individuals and their particular private problems, their suffering and frustration, but also on the society conceived as an organism. The authenticity of the picture presented by the novel can be attributed to the closeness of the writer to his material. Mahfouz's source is the living experience and not the historical accounts. It is also the result of Mahfouz's total commitment to his art and his understanding of his role as a writer and the relationship between history and art.

By analyzing the recent past of his country, Mahfouz is trying to understand the reasons of Egypt's degradation, both political and economic. It becomes necessary for him to review that past because he sees the political life of his country as a continuing experience, the present growing from the past and containing the seeds of the future. The

novel shows that Mahfouz is absolutely clear in his mind about his aims as a novelist. He is highly concerned for his people who have suffered at the hands of the wrong policies of their leaders. His compassion is for the young generation, a generation that was promised much by the revolution and got very little. Mahfouz has said all that is in his heart and made his commentary on the political, social and economic circumstances in Sadat's Egypt, and still the result is a good piece of fiction which was not destined to die as soon as the occasion for which it was written had elapsed.

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