CHAPTER – III

ANALYSIS OF HIS HISTORICAL NOVELS

BACKGROUND:

The first Arab writer of historical novels was Salim al-Bustani (d. 1884), whose novels *Zenobia* and *Budur* took their themes from Arab history[1]. But the writer who more than anyone else in the Arab world popularized Islamic history through fiction was Jurji Zaydan (d. 1914), a Lebanese Christian who lived most of his life in Egypt. A prolific writer, he produced more than twenty novels whose themes came from Islamic history, from the time of prophet of Islam to the Ottoman coup d'etat of 1908, including several dealing with Egyptian history[2]. His purpose was not only to popularize Islamic history, but to teach it. Subordinating history to fiction, he made his characters vehicles for what he considered his most important task, portraying the historical events of their time.[3] Nevertheless, he cleared the field for those who succeeded him, affording them the opportunity to concentrate more on their characters' behaviour in the context of different historical situations.[4]

This trend towards human analysis in the historical novel reached a high point in the works of Muhammed Farid Abu Hadid, Ibrahim Ramzi, Ali al-Jarim, Muhammad Said al-Uryan, and Ahmad Bakathir. More than Zaydan, these writers concentrated on the development of characters and the extensive analysis of their social, political, and cultural milieu. For example, al-Uryan's *Ala Bab Zuwayla* (At the Zuwayla Gate, 1945), which deals with the Mamluks' struggle for political power, analyzes the behaviour of the common people in the context of historical events and compares favourably with Zaydan's *al-Mamluk al-Sharid* (The Escaping

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[1]. Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, Three Continents Press, Washington, D.C., 1988, p.122-46.
[2]. ibid. p. 157-69.
[3]. ibid. p.158-159.
[4]. Shawkat Mahmud Hamdi, *al-Fann al-Qisasi fi al-Adab al-Misri al-Hadith* 1800-1956, Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, Cairo, 1956, p. 143.

Mamluk), which relates the escape of a Mamluk from a plot devised by Muhammad Ali Pasha (d. 1849), viceroy of Egypt, to eliminate the Mamluks.[5] Writers like al-Uryan used the historical novel not for teaching history, but for a dynamic examination of complex social and political issues underlined by a human massage.

This trend in the Egyptian historical novel took on another dimension in the writing of a new generation of novelists like Muhammad Awad Muhammad, Adil Kamil, Jamal al-Shayyal, Ibrahim Jalal, and Naguib Mahfouz. Most of they were university graduates who had been greatly influenced by the trends of the Western historical novels and by the Egyptian novelists already mentioned. They were deeply concerned with portraying social and political movements and the various problems of their time. More important, they sought similarities between events in the ancient and contemporary history of Egypt offering the historical novels a new nationalistic connotation. They tried to analyze the different aspects of individual personality and human nature. To them, relating the historical story was a way to inculcate a moral lesson. They strove to unravel the mysteries of the human sole in a historically objective and faithful manner. Prominent among them was Mahfouz, who more then any of the others used the historical novel to study human nature. He gave it a new dimension by tackling vibrant themes from Egypt's ancient history, some of which were reflected in the surge of nationalism, whose aim was to liberate its people politically, socially and culturally from foreign domination. For this reason, some Egyptian critiques maintain that Mahfouz's *Abath al-Aqdar* (Ironies of Fate)

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[5] . ibid, p.180-86.

condemns and ridicules kings for their despotism while it praises the common people for their fortitude.[6]

[6] Alim, Muhammad Amin al-, *Ta'ammulat fi Alam Naguib Mahfouz* (Contemplations in the World of Naguib Mahfouz), Al-Haya al-Misriyya al-Amma li al-Talif wa al-Nashr, Cairo, 1970, p 27. Taha Wadi, *Madkhal ila Tarikh al-Riwaya*, 1905-1952 (Introduction to the History of the Novel, 1905-1952), Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, Cairo, 1972, p 87

Abath al-Aqdar:

Abath al-Aqdar, Mahfouz's first historical novel, draws its theme from an ancient Egyptian legend. As the title indicates, fate plays a central role in the novel, manipulating the characters like puppets. The novel revolves around the struggle between the powerful will of the Pharaoh and omnipotent fate and ends with the victory of indomitable fate over the recalcitrant pharaoh.

Khufu (Cheops, 2680 B.C.), king of Egypt during the 4th dynasty of the old kingdom, builder of the great pyramid at Giza, had been told by the renowned soothsayer Dedef that after his reign the thrown would pass not to one of his sons but to Dedef, the new born son of the high priest of the temple of the god Re. Disturbed by this prophecy, Khufu lead a contingent of his palace god to urge the high priest to vow loyalty to himself and, placing the state above his love for the new born child to kill him. But the high priest, having received the same prophecy, attempted to save the child by arranging for him to escape with his mother and Zaya, a faithful made servant, and killed himself just as Khufu arrived. Meanwhile Khufu had killed another new born child and his mother, erroneously believing that they were the once intended by the prophecy, and returned to his capital, Memphis, filling pleased that he had saved the thrown for his sons.

Unluckily, Dedef, his mother, and Zaya lost their way in the desert. Zaya, who could not have children of her own, abducted Dedef, leaving his mother alone in the desert, but was soon captured, first by rebel tribes man who carried her and the child to Sinai, then by the pharaoh and his man, who took them back to Memphis. Claiming that Dedef was her son, she began looking for her husband and was told she would find him

among the workers who were building the great pyramid. On reaching the site, she learned that he had died but was assured that the compassionate Khufu had ordered that she and her son should receive state support. Eventually she married the construction superintendent and moved to his palace with Dedef, who grew up among Khufu's household.

Dedef entered the military academy, where he won the confidence of the pharaoh and the crown prince, who later made him an officer in his private bodyguard. Meanwhile, he had fallen in love with a beautiful girl, supposedly a peasant, who he discovered was the pharaoh's daughter, Princess Mer Si Ankh, already (to his dismay) engaged to the governor of the Sinai. After saving the crown prince from an attacking lion, Dedef was promoted and commissioned to lead an expedition to Sinai to subdue some rebellious tribe's men. Dedef invaded Sinai and brought back many captives, including an old woman who claimed to be an Egyptian, not an enemy. Filling sorry for her he successfully and treated King Khufu to give her freedom and took her into his own household. When the captive woman reached the palace, she recognized her old servant Zaya, who had kidnapped her son; she recognized Dedef, for in fact she was his mother. She related to her son the old prophecy that he would succeed the pharaoh on the thrown.

Meanwhile, the crown prince was plotting to get rid of his father, who he thought had occupied the thrown for too long. Dedef got wind of the plot, set himself to guard the old pharaoh and killed some of the would-be assassins, among them the crown prince. The pharaoh showed his gratitude by designating Dedef as his successor, to the exclusion of his own sons, and giving his daughter, Mer Si Ankh, in marriage. When the pharaoh learned that Dedef was the child designated by the old prophecy to succeed him, he did not feel angry but rather submitted to the

irresistible power of fate. The prophecy had been fulfilled, in spite of his power and authority. The novel ends with the pharaoh on his death bad observing that more then twenty years ago he had declared ferocious war on fate and defied the gods. At last, he confesses, he has been humbled by the gods.[7]

From the summery, it seems clear that *Abathal-Aqdar* is based on an ancient legend, most likely derived from James Baikie's book *Ancient Egypt*, which aimed to inform the reader about daily life in Ancient Egypt by describing the journey of a ship that sailed over the Nile to Thebes. Mahfouz used some of the same Egyptian names appearing in it, and infect, some of the descriptions of the pharaoh's family and his personal characters are almost identical in both works.[8] But he altered the old prophecy about the pharaoh's successor to make the action more dramatic. In back his book, Khufu was succeeded by his son the crown prince, then by the latter's son; after that power was transferred to the three sons of the priest of Re, who successively fell heir to the thrown. Further more the legend as related by Baikie does not show whether pharaoh Khufu attempted to get rid of the priest's three sons. Baikie's account of this folk tail is similar to that given by the Egyptologist James Henry Breasted. According to Breasted's account, base on the Papyrus original, Khufu felt bored one day and asked to be entertain by his sons, who related to him tails of past times. One of the sons, Prince Harzazef, told his father that there was in his kingdom a magician who could do even the men of the past whose wondrous works the sons were relating. Summoned by Khufu to appear before him, the magician performed miraculous deeds. In response to a question by the pharaoh, the magician

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[7]. Somekh, *The Changing Rhythm: A Study of Najib Mahfuz's Novels*, E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1973, p. 200-201.

[8]. Abd Allah, Muhammad Hasan, *Al-Islamiyyah wa al-Ruhiyya fi Adab Naguib Mahfouz* (Islamic and Spiritual Elements in the Literature of Naguib Mahfouz), Maktabat Misr, Cairo, 1978, p. 31-34.

said that the three children soon to be born by the wide of a certain priest of Re had been begotten by Re himself, and that they would become kings of Egypt. Upon hearing this prophecy, Khufu became sad. The magician, who thought that there was no reason for the king's melancholy, assured him that his son would reign, then his grand son, and after that one of these three children.[9]

In essence, *Abath al-Aqdar* is a conflict between man and fate. No matter what man does, he is subject to an inexorable and mysterious external power controlling his actions. It defies his will and manipulates him like a puppet. In this context Khufu represents man, trying unsuccessfully to defy fate and subjugate it to his own will. He was the omnipotent roller of Egypt who tried to achieve a great miracle by building a massive pyramid that symbolized not only the will of divine Khufu but also the collective spirit of Egypt, an extension of his own omnipotent will. He was sure of his majestic power, which no man could defy. But he was not aware of that mysterious external power, fate, until he discovered that whatever he intended could be foiled by events for which there was no logical explanation. He learnt belatedly that it is futile to defy fate.

Thus, when Khufu first heard from the soothsayer Dedi the prophecy that a stranger, not one of his sons, would succeed him, he began to investigate the relation of man with fate. He asked the sage Khomini whether fate could be avoided if man acted beforehand to protect himself. Khumaini's answer was that according to the Egyptian wisdom transmitted from timed of old, man's precaution cannot dispose of fate. This sounded pessimistic, and Khufu, not convinced, turned next

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[9]. James Henry Breasted, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 2nd ed., Charles Scribe Sons, New York, 1912, p. 122-123.

to his crown prince, who responded with a serious look that indicated that he, too, believed man cannot defy fate, no matter what precautions he takes. Khufu smiled and told the men, in effect, if fate is what they say it is, then there can be no meaning to the creation, life and the dignity of man. In fact there is no distinction between work and idleness, strength and weakness, rebellion and subservience. But, the pharaoh said, fate is no more than a false belief, not to be held y mighty men.[10]

Events proved Khufu wrong, however, despite his might, he could

the book of Exodus, the pharaoh tried to get rid of the newborn Hebrew males by ordering them to be thrown into the Nile. Moses would have met the same fate had this mother not placed him in a basket and floated it in the river, from which it was lifted up by the pharaoh's daughter; even more ironically, he became her adopted son. He might well have become pharaoh if God had not called him to save his own people. In Mahfouz's novel, Dedef not only escaped the pharaoh's effort to destroy the male child prophesied to occupy his throne but was raised by the pharaoh, married his daughter, and succeeded him. In Greek mythology, of course, the legend of Laius and Oedipus has some similarity, however remote, to the theme of this novel. But the manner in which Mahfouz tackles the theme and portrays his characters, indeed his whole outlook, is essentially Islamic. He even uses Islamic terms in a pre-Islamic setting, for example, *sahaba* (companions) for Khufu's retinue, and the Quranic term *hawariyya* (apostle) to describe his army commander.[12]

In fact, the novel abounds with detailed descriptions of situations and dialogues that reflect the author's ideas and imagination, particularly when he discusses the pharaoh's family gathering, his library, his hunting party, and the educational system in Egypt. Much of this description may seem redundant and puerile, but Mahfouz intends to endow the events of the novel with a sense of authenticity. We should remember, however, that he is writing a historical romance, not a reconstruction of the ancient history of Egypt.[13] Even if he should intend to represent the historical facts in fictional form, he faces great difficulty in placing them in their proper prospective. The theme of his novel derives from a myth handed down from the time of Khufu in the old kingdom but there is little

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[12]. Abd Allah, Muhammad Hasan, *Al-Islamiyyah wa al-Ruhiyya fi Adab Naguib Mahfouz* (Islamic and Spiritual Elements in the Literature of Naguib Mahfouz), Maktabat Misr, Cairo, 1978, p.

[13]. Farouk Shusha, *"Ma al-Udaba: Naguib Mahfoz* (With men of Letters: Naguib Mahfouz), Al-Adab, June 1960, p. 157-58.

specific information about how this pharaoh lived, thought, or communicated. Thus, it was inevitable that Mahfouz should inject his own ideas into the narrative through the different characters and the events they experience, cloaked with a veneer of historical facts.

Khufu is not only the divine roller of Egypt whose authority no man may contradict, but a warm and considerate person who loves his family and cares for his friends. At the outside of the novel, Mahfouz presents him as a fully developed character, relating his different traits and characteristics. We first see him reclining on his golden sofa in a room overlooking the spacious orchard at Memphis. He wears a silk gown whose golden hem shimmers in the rays of the setting sun. He seems relaxed, supporting his back with a cushion embroidered with gold. A halo of pharaonic glory graces his forty-year-old features. Khufu enjoys family gatherings, in which he feels relaxed after the toil of the day. His eyes roam among his sons and companions as he contemplates the progress of the building of the pyramid, which he intends to be a miracle for his people.[14]

One writer suggests that Mahfouz is describing the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid of *The Arabian Nights* rather than the divine pharaoh.[15] If this is true, he has utilized one ancient fantasy to represent another. In fact, his vision of the pharaoh's life is similar to those provided by other twentieth century writers about the ancient civilization of Egypt, although some what embellished. According to Egyptologist, the pharaoh lived in a royal palace surrounded by pools and lakes, which provided coolness and recreation, and graced with pleasure gardens where he could enjoy some relaxation. Although he was considered a god, he often became tired and

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[14] Mahfouz. *Abath al-Aqdar* (Ironies of Fate), Maktabat Misr, Cairo, 1966, p 5-24

[15] Badr, Abd al Muhsin, *Naguib Mahfouz al-Ru'ya wa al-Adat* (Naguib Mahfouz The Vision and Technique), Dar al-Thaqafa li –al-Tbaa wa l-Nashr, Cairo, 1978, p 184

bored and had to be entertained; in Mahfouz's novel Khufu is diverted by his sons and the all soothsayer Dedi. Apart from the daily business of the strict official etiquette, the pharaoh did have some private life. He enjoyed the company of his favorite wives while slaves anointed their feet. Despite his luxurious life, Breasted writes the pharaoh was not a despot like the Mamlukes of Muslim Egypt.[16]

Mahfouz describes a conversation between Khufu and his chief architect Mirabo, in which the pharaoh asserts that divinity is nothing but power. The chief architect responds the divinity is also mercy and love.[17] It seems doubtful that Khufu conversed with any one about divinity of even tried to define it. According to historical accounts, the pharaoh believed himself to be the sublime god of both state and people. One of his titles in the old kingdom was the good *God,* and he was so reverenced that no man dared refer to him by name.[18]

Mahfouz seems also to inject his own ideas about art and woman's nature into this dialogue between and his step brother Napha;

Napha: do not make an effort to explain or apologize, I know what you mean. This is the third time to day that I was likened to a woman. This morning my father told me that I am unpredictable like a young woman. Likewise, an hour ago the priest Shelva told me that I am like a woman, easily overcome by emotion. And here you tell me that I am just like your mother. What am I, then, a man or woman?

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[16]. Breasted, James Henry, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 2nd ed., Charles Scribe Sons, New York, 1912, chap. 5.

[17]. Mahfouz, *Abath al-Aqdar* (Ironies of Fate), Maktabat Misr, Cairo, 1966, p. 10.

[18]. Breasted, James Henry, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 2nd ed., Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 74.

Dedef (laughing): You are a man, Napha, but with tender soul and feeling. Do not you remember that Kheni said once that the artists are a cross between males and females?

Napha: Kheni believes that art requires a borrowing from faminity. But I don't doubt that woman's sentiment greatly contradicts that of the artist. For by nature woman is selfish and seeks only what will fulfill vital ambitions. But the artist has no objective except to fathom the essence of things, which is beauty. For beauty is the unrevealing of the essence of things, which brings it into conformity with the rest of created beings.

Dedef (laughing): Do you think that by this philosophizing you can convince me that you are a man?

Napha (with a defiant look): You still need proof? If you do, then know that I am going to be married.

Dedef (surprised): Is it true? What you say?

Napha (laughing): Would you deny me marriage?

Dedef: No, Napha, but I remember that you once made our father angry because you showed no interest in marriage.[19]

This cannot be the conversation of two people in the old kingdom. There is little doubt that Mahfouz, who was greatly concerned with subjects like art and beauty, is speaking here.

Mahfouz's description of the construction superintendent's quarters at the pyramid site makes it sound like a government office in Cairo or any other model city. After the made servant Zaya, who had kidnapped

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[19]. Mahfouz, *Abath al-Aqdar* (Ironies of Fate), Maktabat Misr, Cairo, 1966, p. 112-13.

the infant Dedef, returned to Memphis, she shought out her husband and was told that he could be found among the workers who were building the great pyramid. She reached the site and found the office of the superintendent in an attractive building of moderate size. After the sentry at the door admitted her, she entered a large hall where various officials set behind the desks. The walls were covered with bookshelves filled with papyrus scrolls. When the soldiers motioned, she passed through another door to a smaller room more beautiful and richly furnished; in the corner the superintendent set behind a magnificent desk. He was plump and of medium stature. He had a noticeably large head and a short fat nose, a large mouth, and fat cheeks like two small water skins. His bulging eyes were covered by heavy lids. He looked arrogant as he was doing his business. He sensed that someone has entered his office, but did not raise his eyes to see who it was. When he had finished what he was doing, he finally raised his eyes and looked haughtily, asking:

"What do you want woman?"

Frightened and perplexed, Zaya answered in a disturbed and feeble voice, "I have come looking for my husband, my lord."

He asked her, in the same tone, "Who is your husband?"

"A worker, my lord."

The superintendent struck the desk with his fist and said sharply, while his words echoed as if in a volt, "what is the reason that he is not working and causing us trouble?"

Zaya became more frightened and did not answer. He kept looking at her round, bronze colored face, her honey colored eyes and her tender

youth. He found it painful to see fear come over that lovely face. He may have acted arrogantly to demonstrate his authority, but he had a kind heart and tender feeling.[20]

We leave the reader to decide whether this can be accepted as an imaginative description of an ancient Egyptian office and the behaviour of a superintendent under the pharaoh Khufu. To me, it seems more appropriate to a modern Hollywood movie. In fact, the novel abounds with similar examples of inappropriate and outlandish descriptions that contradict the nation that Mahfouz has taken his account from the ancient history of Egypt. Even the writing of a historical romance like this one requires a certain degree of perspective.

Mahfouz presents the educational system under Khufu, for example, as almost identical to that of his own youth. At the age of five, the male child enters elementary school, where for seven years he is taught reading, writing, arithmetic, geometry, religion, ethics, and patriotism. Then he is transferred to an institution equivalent to the secondary school in modern Egypt. According to the novel, when Kheni and Napha finished their secondary schooling Kheni entered the university of Ptah to further his studies of religion, ethics, and political science, hoping to find a religious or judicial position, while Napha joined the Khufu Institutes of Fine Arts because he liked to draw; other students, like Dedef, joined the Military Academy to specialize in the art of war.[21] Fantastic as it may seem, the most obvious historical inaccuracy in this novel is the mention of horses and chariots, unknown in Egypt during the time of the old kingdom. The horse was introduce into Egypt by the Hyksos (shepherd kings), who invaded Egypt in 1588 B.C. and

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[20]. Ibid., p. 61-62.
[21]. Ibid., p. 74, 75.

were expelled in 1780 B.C. it was during this period that the Egyptian armies began to use chariots on a large scale. The reference to people using gold and silver coins provides another example of Mahfouz's carelessness about historical facts.[22] In the old kingdom, barter was the primary means of exchange although golden copper rings of fixed weight were used in some transactions and circulated as money. We shall not mention here other historical inaccuracies in the novel, for Mahfouz are not being judged as a historian; but, the writing of historical fiction requires careful attention to the known facts.

Mahfouz's central theme is that man's actions are subject to an omnipotent fate. It is in this context that we must understand both the prediction about the stranger who would succeed to the throne and Khufu's ultimate failure to overcome fate ironically he found himself protecting and supporting the very man he tried to kill after hearing the prophecy. The novel has many shortcomings in both form and content; indeed, Mahfouz himself called it "kid stuff."[23]

Nevertheless, it marks the end of his obscurity as a novelist and the beginning of a long, busy career during which he refined the writing of the Egyptian novel and gradually won recognition as a leader in his craft.

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[22] Ibid.. 151; Breasted, James Henry, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 2nd ed., Charles Scribe Sons, New York, 1912, p. 97-98.

[23]. Dawwara, Fuad, "*Rihlat al-Khamsinma al-Qira's wa al-Kitaba*," (The Journey of Naguib Mahfouz in his Fiftieth Years of Age with Reading and Writing), Al-Katib, January, 1963, p. 5-23.

Radobis (Rhodopis)*:*

Mahfouz's second historical novel *Radobis*, focuses of a love that is totally subject to fate. Where as in *Abath al-Aqdar* fate is depicted is a strong external power opposed to the will of man, in Radobis it is an uncontrollable force emanating from the very depth of man's sole.

In essence, the novel is a romance whose theme, the love between pharaoh Mernere II and Radobis, is not coincidental but determined by fate. The setting is the southern city of Abo; the occasion is the festival of the Nile, which attracts crowds from every corner of Egypt. Mahfouz describes in detail the people awaiting the Pharaoh's arrival; their conversation previews the events and characters of the novel. Looking over the crowd, a man whose appearance shows his upper class status dolefully remarks that many such festivals have been celebrated and many pharaohs have attended then, but all have gone as if they never existed. They have gone to role another world better then the present one, he adds, and all people will one day follow them to that world. He wonders aloud whether future generations will remember him and the crowds celebrating the festival of the Nile, as those present remember others who have come before. He wishes that death did not exist. Another says philosophically that death is as natural as life and questions the value of immortality when people cannot satisfy their reflect skepticism of Mahfouz, who apparently could not find an answer to the whole question of existence. The pessimistic view taken by this character reflects the innermost sentiments of a perplexed sole.

The people then talk about the pharaoh, observing that he is tall and handsome like his grand father Mehtemsauf. He is a valiant warrior, expected to invade the north and south to bring them under his dominion.

He is young and rash and indulges in carnal pleasure. He is a spendthrift who loves luxurious living; he has always been in need of good, silver and other valuables to satisfy his taste for luxury. Inevitably, he has come into conflict with the priests, as he coveted the temples wealth in order to build more palaces, plant more grows, and gratify his sensualities. The priests oppose his confiscation of this property on the grounds that the temples land had already been appropriated by his forefathers. In the pharaoh's opinion, the priest wrongly regard the temples' large estates' as their personal property and he is entitled to use them to build palaces mausoleums as his forefathers did. The conflict has polarized relations between the pharaoh and the priest, especially the priest of the city of Memphis and the high priest and Prime Minister Khnum Hotep, and rebellion appears eminent.

The events of the novel begin to build after the celebration of the festival of the Nile and culminate in the pharaoh's meeting with Radobis-by sheer coincidence, according to an Egyptian legend. After returning to his palace, the Pharaoh decides with his prime minister to solve the question of the temple's estates by ending them to the positions of the crown. With this vexatious matter settled, he begins to relax, walking through the royal garden. Radobis likewise return home after festivities totally enthralled by the young and handsome pharaoh, and takes off her cloths to cool herself in her private pool. Suddenly, an eagle flying over her palace snatches her gold rimmed sandal and drops it in the lap of the pharaoh, who wonders about its owner. He chamberlain, Sofkhatip, knowing Radobis and her captivating beauty encourages the pharaoh to seek her out, while his army commander, Taho, tries to dissuade him because he himself is desperately in love with her. Eventually, the pharaoh meets Radobis, and they fall madly in love.

The eagle's snatching the sandal is based on Egyptian folklore, according to which eagles, liking beautiful young woman, snatched them up and flew them to the top of the mountains. In Radobis's case, the eagle snatched her sandal instead. That this event leads to the pharaoh's meeting and falling in love with her is not accidental. Fate in this case is not, as most people in Egypt think, a coincident or sheer luck, but action predetermined by the gods. In essence, it is an expression of an Islamic concept, much like what we have seen in *Abath al-Aqdar*. Mahfouz's concept of fate is clearly expressed by the royal chamberlain, who tells the pharaoh that the term *coincidence* has been misused by people who, like a blind man, probe their way in the dark. Every happening in this world, whether trivial or significant is undoubtedly associated with the will of the gods. They do not create events for their own amusement but have a definite purpose in mind.

Thus, the political destiny of the young pharaoh becomes connected with his love adventures, as designed by the gods. On the surface, this love story appears to be no different from any others occurring throughout history, even down to the present day. But the political fate of Pharaoh Mernere II, and indeed the fate and the wellbeing of the Egyptian state, hang in the balance. Not only does the pharaoh love Radobis to the point of losing his sanity, he is willing to sacrifice himself and Egypt to make her happy. His love overwhelms his will. There is an unfathomable force within him that drives him mad and, inspite of himself, towards this woman. He is so infatuated that he cannot eve accept the fact that Radobis is a high-society prostitute; he cannot believe that when she was young she fell in love with a sailor who later deserted her, or that she habitually sold her body until their fateful meeting. Consumed by passion, the pharaoh lavishes everything on Radobis.

At the same time he abjectly neglects his wife Nitocris (also his sister), who has swallowed her pride and suffered silently from the pharaoh's love affairs. The priests are not less angered by his behaviour, feeling he has deprived them of their possessions in neglected the affairs of the state to cater to his mistress. The priests and the prime Minister unhappy at seeing the divine pharaoh in the clutches of a cheap woman, begin to spread detrimental rumors about him. The Prime Minister having lost favour, approaches Nitocris, pretending to hope that she may be able to alert the pharaoh to the growing resentment against him. The pharaoh meets with her, but on discovering that her purpose is to discuss his relations with Radobis, he become furious, accusing his wife of jealousy, and refuses to change his ways.

He dismisses his Prime Minister and appoints the chamberlain Sofkhatep in his place, preparing for a show down with the priest. But the only forces he can rely on to crash them are the royal guard and a insignificant garrison at Beja. Egypt has no regular army, and the pharaoh cannot form any army accept in case of war. He and Radobis concoct a plan to solve this problem; they concoct the governor of Nubia, asking him to send a massage indicating that the Me'sayu Tribes have rebelled. Thus, he can prepare for war against the alleged rebels, though in reality he has found a pretext to overcome his opponents.

Pharaoh tries to implement his plan during the festival of the Nile the following year. Reading the massage from the governor of Nubia he orders all governors to return to their provinces to marshal military forces. But the priests discover his plot and invite the chiefs of the supposedly rebellious tribes to offer their allegiance to the pharaoh believing he has been betrayed by his own massagers, he continues with his plan, but the priests instigate the people, now in full rebellion, to

attack his palace. Not wishing to shed the blood of his guards, he goes out alone to meet the crowd with great courage and dignity. One of the leaders, fearing the people may lose their mettle and retreat, wounds him fatally with an arrow. The pharaoh asks to be moved to Radobis's palace; Nitocris assents, and he breathes his last in the arm of his beloved Radobis, who then ends her life by taking poison.[24]

As in *Abath al-Aqdar*, Mahfouz does not strictly follow history; he is writing a romance not a historical novels. At first, he sets the time of the action as "four thousand years ago." Later he says that the events of the novel took place toward the end of the sixth dynasty, which marked the end of the old kingdom. But in fact, the sixth dynasty ended in 2475 B.C., while the old kingdom lasted until 2300 B.C.[25] Moreover the history of ancient Egypt reveals nothing about Mernere II beyond the fact that he reigned for only one year near the end of the sixth dynasty. There was a Queen Nitocris toward the end of the sixth dynasty, but she had no connection with Mernere II. Her name appears in the Turin Papyrus in Greek sources, but the stories about her beauty and the assertion that she was the builder of the third pyramid are most likely apocryphal.[26] Further, there is no evidence of priests' rebellion throughout more than a hundred year of the sixth dynasty; a period of relative peace Mahfouz appears to have used historical figures and events out of contacts in order to create a framework for his novel.

The love between the pharaoh and Radobis is heartfelt, characterized by complete commitment and devotion. It is a purified love,

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[24]. Peled, Matityahu, *Religion, My Own: The Literary Works of Najib Mahfuz*,Transaction Books, New Brunswick, 1983, p. 41-50.

[25]. Badr, Abd al Muhsin, *Naguib Mahfouz: al-Ru'ya wa al-Adat* (Naguib Mahfouz: The Vision and Technique), *Dar al-Thaqafa li–al-Tbaa wa l-Nashr*, Cairo, 12978, p. 190.

[26]. Breasted, James Henry, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, 2nd ed., Charles Scribe Sons, New York, 1912, p.143,598.

made impeccable by the gods, even though Radobis lived in luxury and offered her body to me of high position, among them the army commandant Taho. When she could no longer submit to him, he called her worthless and ugly adding that she was merely a frigid woman with a beautiful body. Likewise, the crowd who had been spellbound by her physical beauty, knowing she had had many lovers, doubted she knew true love. They were wrong. Radobis had kept her true and pure love for the only man worthy of it. Thus, when she met the handsome pharaoh, she refused to come to his palace, lest she become simply another of his concubines. She preferred to remain in her palace to offer him her sole, having given only her body to other men. To demonstrate her complete spiritual metamorphosis, Radobis visited the temple of the god Sotis to be purified from her former carnal life and to devote her love to the pharaoh and surrender her heart, which no other man had possessed. Fate finally tides her true love.[27]

The pharaoh, no less a paragon of sublime love, looks like Shakespeare's Romeo rather then a divine Egyptian monarch. Although at first he is portrayed as a reckless young man who relishes sensual love and luxury, there is no indication that he is an out-and-out philanderer; he seems to lead a quite family life, and to be developed to his wife/sister Nitocris. In fact, only after he meets Radobis does he began to act as a supreme lover, forgetting (or perhaps Mahfouz himself forgot) that he is divine. He does not even find it demeaning to return her gold-rimmed sandal and confess that he had thought her portrait, drawn inside it, was only a fantasy until his eyes fell upon her face. Only then he says, did he did he learn the awesome truth that beauty, like fate, takes man by complete surprise.

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[27]. Mahfouz, Naguib, *Redobis*, Maktabat Misr, 1977, Cairo, p. 84-85.

Shocked by the pharaoh's sudden appearance at her palace, Radobis cannot believe her eyes. She raises, bows to him with utmost respect, and motions to him to sit on her couch. From that moment on, he submits his entire will and being to her, saying that henceforth madness shall be his emblem.[28] This is the manifestation of absolute love, transcending his divine status and his throne. Yet it is tainted by selfishness on her part of the pharaoh, who is so blinded by love that he abdicates his responsibility to his people and his state in order to lavish the resources of his kingdom on the woman who has captivated his heart.

To some people, this kind of love may seem highly sentimental and exaggerated. But only a few decades ago Edward VIII of England gave up the throne for a twice-divorced commoner who was not even an English citizen, and he lavished on her whatever he could get from his friends, his royal estate, or the British government. Whether of not he claimed to be divine, Pharaoh Mernere II was after all a mortal who like other men in Egypt craved love and companionship. He may have been rebelling against the Egyptian tradition that had forced him to marry his sister Nitocris, or perhaps, unhappy in his marriage of convenience, he had found in the ravishingly beautiful Radobis an answer to his unrequited love.

Whatever the reason may be, love is the theme to which Mahfouz devotes the largest portion of this novel. He portrays Radobis as the happiest woman in Egypt, the one who captures the heart of the pharaoh. Although she has no title, she rules him. On finally meeting Queen Nitocris, she asserts confidently that the real queen is not the woman who marries a monarch and sits o the throne, but the one who occupies the

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[28]. Ibid. p. 74, 77; *Badr, Naguib Mahfouz*, 215-16.

throne of his heart. Nitocris must have felt great pain to have such a woman as he rival; she must also have felt weak and embarrassed.[29]

The readers who expect to learn something about the history of Egypt in the sixth dynasty will be disappointed. The setting and characters in the novel are subordinated to Mahfouz's real purpose, the analytical study of man's nature and his reaction to reach circumstances. This is why at the beginning the Egyptians appear occupied with the questions of life, death, and especially life after death. This interest is also manifested in the prayers of the priests, the sermon the pharaoh gives at the alter, and the songs of the people in the street. Mahfouz expresses in great detail how the Egyptian people lived and behaved. He seems concerned more with pharaoh the man than with pharaoh the monarch, more with Radobis the true female than with Radobis the high society prostitute.

Here they (and we) face an extremely tense situation, marked by psychological conflict. Most conspicuous is the pharaoh's conflict with himself as he succumbs to an irresistible love. He is also at odds with his national duty, which must be sacrificed if he is to pursue adventurous love with a woman of questionable worth. It is the conflict between the pharaoh's private lives that lead him to a tragic end. And through it the characters become vibrant, look upon more as complex beings whose behavoiur reflects the good and evil sides of man's nature. They seem to express their inner most sentiment with dissimulation or duplicity.

Thus, when the pharaoh faces Nitocris, he acknowledges his behavour and his love for Radobis, while the queen advices him to act more prudently. He responds that prudence in the present instance would

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[29]. Mahfouz, *Radobis*, p. 122.

be a sham, worthy only of a weak person. But no matter what justification of his actions he offers, still he realizes that he had led down the very faithful wife who stood by his side during hard times. When the crowds surround and attack the royal palace, the pharaoh refuses the protection of his private guards and withdraws to offer his last prayers before the statues of his parents. In his hour of agony, the human pharaoh turns to his wife and apologizes for having wronged and humiliated her. He feels sorry that he has foolishly made her life miserable. Then in great astonishment, he asks, how all these could have happened. Could he have followed a different course in life and avoided falling in love with another woman? He realizes that he has been overwhelmed by an extraordinary madness, and that he no longer has the will even to repent what he has done. He goes on to philosophize that reason can remind men of their insignificance and stupidity but it cannot remedy their defects. Finally, he asks Nitocris whether she has seen a more tragic state than his. In his agony, he cannot find words to express his misfortune. He concludes that madness is and will ever be as long as there is life.[30]

Here stands pharaoh the man, frail, weak, and sorrowful. This is the way Mahfouz wanted him to be, in order to depict vividly the shortcomings of human nature, the deficiency of human reason, and the futility of man's actions. Here stands man face to face with fate, over which he has no control. Here also is the pharaoh whose false claim of divinity is destroyed by circumstances that transcend his will and expose him as an ordinary man who, although a king, has become a captive of his own nature.

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[30]. Shawkat, Muhammad Hamdi, *al-Fann, fi al-Adab al-Misri al-Hadith 1800-1956* (The Art of Story Writing in Modern Egyptian Literature: 1800-1956), Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, 1956, Cairo, p. 201.

Like Mahfouz's earlier novel Radobis has some historical inaccuracies, such as references to the use of horses and chariots. Mahfoz provides an interesting but lame excuse for these lapses. He states that he submitted Radobis to a literary contest for an award established by the lady *Qut al-Qulub al-Damardashiyya.* The award committee liked the novel, but had found historical inaccuracies in it. A member of the committee, the prominent Egyptian writer Ahmed Amin summoned Mahfouz and, questioning him, found that he knew a great deal about the pharaonic history of Egypt. Nothing that the novel described chariots pulled by horses, which had been introduced into Egypt by the Hyksos long after the sixth dynasty, he asked, "why did you make this historical error?" Mahfouz says he offered only a generalized rationale: he had thought the chariots and horses would offer the royal procession he portrayed a touch of grandeur and glory, which he felt the dramatic situation required. He closes by saying that he ignored this simple historical fact in order to create some artistic persuasion.[31]

Finally, let us note that some analysis believe that in this work Mahfouz meant to criticize the condition of Egypt under the monarchy through the medium of a historical novel. Some have even suggested that the profligate and irresponsible King Farouk is the model for Pharaoh Mernere II. As the ancient people of Egypt under Mernere II revolted against him for his dissolution and extravagance, they argue, the Egyptians in our time revolted against Farouk.[32] Although Mahfouz wrote his novel during Farouk's reign, he denies that he had in mind any such analogy to the contemporary situation.[33] Evidently these analysts

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[31]. Sabri, Hafiz, "*Naguib Mahfouz,*" *in Naguib Mahfouz: Atahaddath Ilaykum*, 90-91.
[32]. Sakkut, Hamdi, *The Egyptian Novel and its Main trends*, 1913 to 1952, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1971, p. 72-73.
[33]. Badr, *Naguib Mahfouz*, p.189-90.

have read too much into the novel, which on its face contains nothing to suggest a comparison between Mernere II and Farouk.

Kifah Tiba:

Kifah Tiba (The Struggle of Thebes, 1944) the third and last of Mahfouz's historical novels, is essentially an epic portraying the struggle of southern city of Thebes against the Hyksos, whose eventual expulsion gave Egypt independence from foreign domination and set it on the way to becoming an empire. Unlike his earlier novels, in which history is subordinated to the philosophical treatment of fate, *Kifah Tiba* is focused more directly on events set in a specific time and place, while the love story between Pharaoh Ahmose and the daughter of the Hyksos king seems to be of secondary important. Nevertheless, Mahfouz does not strictly adhere to the historical facts and even find himself forced to manipulate them in order to support his own convictions about certain matters, such as Ahmose's distribution of land which has no basis in fact. He may be forgiven for not following history precisely, however, because the original source materials on the Hyksos and the Theban dynasts who fought against them are deficient and confusing. For example, the novel has Apophis as the Hyksos king and Seqenenra as the ruler of Thebes; but the Hyksos had more than one King Apophis, and the Thebans had more than one Seqenenra.

It is interesting to note that Mahfouz once said he was inspired to write *Kifah Tiba* when he saw the mummy of Seqenenra full of wounds at the Egyptian Museum.[34] Thus, he tries to portray an Egyptian king who heroically fell in battle while defending his country against foreign occupation forces. The king lost the battle, but not the war. Although Mahfouz does not identify this Seqenenra, he must be Seqenenra Ta' II (the Brave) who suffered a violent death. While fighting the Hyksos, he

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[34]. Musa, Fatima, *Fi al-Riwaya al-Arabiyya* (On the Arabic Novel), Matabaat al-Anglo-Misriyya, Cairo 1971, p. 39.

was hit with an ax and club and fell to the ground. His enemy struck him on the head, fracturing his scull and jaw. Looking at his distorted face, one wonders what tremendous pain this valiant monarch endured. No doubt Mahfouz was moved by the ghastly sight of his mummy, which may well have inspired him to write this novel.

In 1788 B.C., toward the end of the middle kingdom, Egypt was suffering internal political and social chaos as the nobles gained more power, he pharaoh lost a great deal of authority and prestige. Whatever progress the Egyptian had made in the past was by now lost. With no central government to exert power, Egypt became vulnerable to foreign invasion. About 1750 B.C. certain hordes of Asiatic origin, commonly called the Hyksos, invaded the Nile delta. By about 1675 B.C., they had brought the whole country under their domination, except for Thebes in the south. After almost two hundred years of struggle the Thebans under Pharaoh Ahmose I finally managed in 1580 B.C. to expel the Hyksos. Thus, Egypt regained its sovereignty and started on its way to becoming an empire.

Mahfouz's novel is divided into three parts. The first deals with the occupation of Egypt by the Hyksos, who under King Apophis reduced the native rollers, the Seqenenra, into mere vassals and took over their capital, Thebes in south (Upper Egypt). By way of asserting his authority, the Hyksos king Apophis sends a messenger to Seqenenra II, ordering him to get rid of the Hippopotami in his pool because they are disturbing his sleep. He further wants Seqenenra to replace the worship of the god Amon with that of the Hyksos god Set, and to recognize his authority over Thebes. Seqenenra refuses and leads his army northward to fight Apophis. The Theban army is defeated, Seqenenra is killed in battle, and

the enemy mutilated his body. Seqenenra's family escapes to Nubia, and the Hyksos between the lords of all Egypt.

The second part begins ten years after the defeat Seqenenra. Seqenenra's son Kamose is busy marshaling a huge army to fight the Hyksos and regain sovereignty over Thebes. The crown prince Ahmose is sent on a reconnaissance mission to explore the situation in Egypt. Distinguishing himself as the merchant Asphenis, and using every possible means, even bribery and deception, he manages to reach the governor of Thebes and finally the court of the Hyksos king. He succeeds in recruiting men who support his family and carries them in the lower deck of his ship to Nubia to join the army in exile. While carrying out his mission, however, Ahmose falls in love with Amenerdis, the beautiful daughter of King Apophis. In token of his love, he gives her a heart shape emerald with a white chain, which the princes greatly cherish.

In the third part of the novel, the Theban army under Kamose invades Upper Egypt and liberates its cities, but his family refuses to enter Thebes until all Egypt has been freed. The Hyksos retreat to the north, and men from the liberated cities join his army. Kamose loses his life in battle, and Ahmose succeeds him as commander. Among the captives taken by the Egyptians is the Hyksos princes Amenerdis. Brought before Ahmose, she treats him with contempt and threatens to kill herself. Meantime, Ahmose attacks Avaris, the Hyksos capital in the delta, and cuts off its water supply. The Hyksos negotiate an agreement with Ahmose by which they are to evacuate Avaris, leave Egypt, and hand over thousands of Egyptian captives in exchange for Amenerdis. Ahmose agrees, but he visits the princes before releasing her. When she learns that she must decide whether to stay of leave, she confesses her true love to Ahmose, but they both realize it is a hopeless love. Finally,

she chooses to depart, placing her national duty over her love. She takes with her the heart-shaped emerald from her lover, leaving only the white chain in his hands. With her departure the saga of an unrequited love comes to an end.[35]

In Kifah Tiba Mahfouz does not treat the abstract concept of fate as either an external force controlling man's will or an internal force emanating from man's inner being. Rather, he concentrates on the Egyptians' struggle against their oppressors, the Hyksos. In his previous novels, historical events only in outline and are of secondary importance; in this novel, the historical material constitutes the central theme, while the love story between Ahmose and the Hyksos princes occupies a secondary place. Indeed, this love episode is superimposed on the central theme, and it could be dropped without affecting the structure of the novel.

Mahfouz admits that while he was writing *Kifah Tiba* (1937 - 38), his major concern was the Egyptian national question, that is, the Egyptians' struggle to overthrow the British, who had occupied the country in 1882.[36] The British had proclaimed Egypt a protectorate during World War I but rescinded the protectorate in 1922 and recognized Egypt as an independent sovereign state, though they kept it tied to their own interest. Thus, when Mahfouz wrote this novel, Egypt was no longer under direct British control, but it was weak, governed by a dissolute, irresponsible king and a band of self-seeking politicians. There was, however, a minority of national leader who wanted to free their country from the grip of the British. The Egyptians' national struggle culminated in the revolution of 1952, when young army officers

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[35]. Peled,, Matityahu, *Religion, My Own: The Literary Works of Najib Mahfuz*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, 1983, p. 57-66.

[36]. Hafiz, "*Naguib Mahfouz,*" *in Naguib Mahfouz: Atahaddath Ilaykum*, p. 86-87.

overthrew the monarchy and took control of their country. It is in this context that *Kifah Tiba* should be read and understood.

Mahfouz explains that when he was writing the novel Egyptian nationalism was ablaze, and there were many people who saw a real continuity from the pharaonic period to the modern history of Egypt. The pharaonic age, he says, was the brightest spot in the history of Egypt, in contrast to the present age of decadence, humiliation, and indignity caused by British imperialism and the control of the Turko-Egyptian aristocracy. Some members of this aristocracy could trace their heritage back to the Mamluke period; others were members of the royal family of descendants of Muhammad Ali, viceroy of Egypt at the beginning of the nineteenth century, until the revolution in 1952, the Turko-Egyptian aristocrats occupied high positions in Cairo government and looked upon the native Egyptians as inferior. Although they became to some extant Egyptianized, they were not completely integrated into the society; in race and language the remained alien to Egypt and never heisted to collaborate with British to promote their self-interest. A separate social caste, they looked upon the Egyptians as subhuman peasants who deserved to e prayed upon.

Mahfouz was aware of the implied comparison between the Hyksos and the British in this novel but says he was unaware of another analogy between the Hyksos and the Turko-Egyptian aristocracy until a non-Arab writer brought it into focus. Apparently, this writer stated that Mahfouz was writing of a utopia in which Egypt would be liberated from the control of the Turko-Egyptian aristocracy and not just from British authority. Mahfouz says that he liked this analogy because "in reality, I was seething with anger against the British and the Turko-Egyptian

aristocracy, while I was writing a genuine pharaonic novel in which the British and the Turko-Egyptians had no part.[37]

Be that as it may, the reader who has some knowledge of the contemporary history of Egypt will surely discern the connection between the Egyptians' national struggle and the events of the novel.

What gives more credence to this opinion is that Mahfouz himself was one of those nationalists born before World War I who witnessed the transformation of the national movement into a political cause, represented in the struggle involving the royal palace, the Wafd party, and British imperialism. His generation was able to define and analyze the problem of Egypt's relations with the British but could not resolve it. Apparently, through the medium of fiction, Mahfouz finally found a solution to his political frustration and that of Egypt. As the ancient Egyptians had been able to expel the Hyksos after almost two hundred years of occupation, the modern Egyptians may likewise expel the British and topple the Turkish aristocracy, though heretofore such events had been only a novelist's dream.

This thought, however, does not seem to have been uppermost in Mahfouz's mind. It is not clearly stated in the novel. We can comprehend it when we see how the Hyksos looked upon the Egyptians, who they thought should be treated as a subject people. We can also comprehend it from the manner in which the Egyptian characters thought of themselves, their national destiny, and their attitude toward the Hyksos. Thus, we come to realize the extent to which the Hyksos symbolized the ideas and attitudes of the Turko-Egyptian aristocracy toward the indigenous

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[37] . Sakkut, Hamdi, *The Egyptian Novel and its Main trends*. 1913 to 1952, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1971, p. 73-74.

Egyptians. A Hyksos general tells his king, "Truthfully, lord, the *fellahin* (peasants) have no stamina. Truthful is he who said that if you wanted to make use of the *fallah*, starve and whip him."[38] In another instance Ahmose of Avana on meeting his namesake Prince Ahmose (disguised as the merchant Asphenis), tells him that the Egyptians are slaves who should be whipped and fed with the crusts cast to them. The king, ministers, judges, officials, and land owners are all Hyksos. Power is in the hands of the white people (the Hyksos) who wear dirty beards; the Egyptians, who formerly owned the land, are slaves in their own land. Prince Ahmose asks whether there are many like him who feel outraged because of the inequalities inflicted upon the Egyptians. Ahmose of Avana answers that there are such men, but they suppress their outrage and suffer humiliation, like any weak person who has no means to defend himself.[39]

We learn more about the Hyksos as whit lords and the Egyptians as brown-skinned slaves from the confrontation between Pharaoh Ahmose and the beautiful Hyksos princess Amenerdis. Enraged when she refers to her people as master and the Egyptians as slave, he tells her that she is arrogant and does not know what she is saying. If she had lived a century earlier (presumably before the Hyksos occupied Egypt), he says, her father would not have become king, and she would not be a princess. Ahmose reminds Amenerdis that her people came from the cold northern deserts to seize his country's sovereignty. They fancied themselves masters of Egypt and regarded the Egyptians as peasants, feeling superior because they were white and the Egyptians were brown-skinned. But, says Ahmose, justice will take its course and the true masters (the Egyptians) will regain their lordship and shake off the yoke of servitude.

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[38]. Mahfouz, *Kifah Thiba* (The Struggle of Thebes), Laznat al-Nashr li al-Jami'iyyin, Cairo, 1947, p. 82

[39]. ibid., p. 76

Whiteness will be the mark of those to live in the cold northern regions, and brown-skin will become the emblem of the true masters of Egypt, who have been purified by her sun.[40] Thus, the novel is permeated by the racial conflict between the Hyksos and the Egyptians, whom they hated and despised as inferiors.

This contemptuous attitude of the Hyksos towards the Egyptians resembles that of the aristocratic Turko-Egyptians in modern times. The Egyptian writer Yaqub Sanu points out that the Turkish official exacted taxes from the poor, helpless Egyptians *fallah* by the use of the whip.[41] In Muhammad Timur's short story "*Fi al-Qitar*" (On the Train), published in *al-Sufur*, June 7, 1917, as the passengers are discussing how best to educate the *fallah*, one comments that the best means is the whip, which costs the government nothing, while education is costly. Mahfouz, fully aware of the humiliation of his own people by their foreign masters, seeks through Hyksos characters to show that the Turko-Egyptian aristocrats of his time harbor similar contempt toward the Egyptians. This theme is further accentuated in his novel *al-Qahira al-Jadida* (New Cairo).[42]

Beneath the portrayal of the characters and the battle the Egyptians fought to liberate their country from the Hyksos lies Mahfouz national sentiment. He realized when he wrote this novel that his people were not the master of their own country, let alone their destiny. They lacked the military power to read themselves of British authority and were even so weak they could not eliminate the Turko-Egyptain aristocracy who preyed on them. Thus, he used the medium of fiction to vent his gripping

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[40]. ibid., p. 157, 171.

[41]. Musa, Matti, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, Washington, D. C., Three continents Press, 1983, p. 54-56.

[42]. Badr, Abd al Muhsin, *Naguib Mahfouz: al-Ru'ya wa al-Adat* (Naguib Mahfouz: The Vision and Technique), *Dar al-Thaqafa li –al-Tbaa wa l-Nashr*, Cairo, 1978, p. 257, 276.

frustration and release his nationalistic sentiments, for he could about the Hyksos what he could not about the British or the Turko-Egyptian aristocracy without exposing himself to retribution.

In fact, both the Hyksos and the Egyptians are stereotyped, and so is the conflict between them. In Mahfouz's mind, they represent an absolute dichotomy between good and evil. The Egyptians stand for light and truth, the Hyksos for darkness and falsehood. The Egyptian army is the army of truth fighting a holly war against the forces of falsehood. Although in numbers and equipment it is no match for the Hyksos, it prevails because truth is on its side. Indeed, if the god Amon is with the Egyptians, who then can defeat them? Realizing that his enemies are stronger, Seqenenra appeals to the god Amon for help, in words that parallel those of the Prophet of Islam before he fought against his enemies the Quraysh at Badar: "Worshipped Lord, help us overcome this adversity and grant your children victory. If you fail them today your name will never be mentioned in your resting place, and the doors of your holly temple will forever be closed."[43]

Mahfouz portrays Egyptian kings as god-fearing, noble, brave, civil, just and peace-loving. They are the moving spirit of their people. Their subjects are likewise brave; seldom is a coward found among them. They are also tall, handsome, brown-skinned like their predecessors, and very proud of their heritage. In brief, they are paragons of every human virtue.[44] Not so the Hyksos. They are white skinned short, pudgy, cowardly, ignoble, unjust, barbarous, and bloodthirsty. Mahfouz cannot see anything aesthetic about the statue of the Hyksos king which has replaced the statue of Seqenenra; it looks lifeless, representing a short,

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[43] . Mahfouz, *Kıfah Tıba*, p. 32.
[44] . ibid. p.8,11,26.

pudgy person with a massive head, hooked nose, and long beard (92). The Hyksos are avaricious men who love gold enough to betray their national cause for it. When Ahmose goes into occupied territory disguised as the merchant Asphenis, he finds the borders tightly guarded and the gates closed before him. The chief guard responsible for the safety of the borders refuses to let him pass. But when Ahmose offers him gold, the lets him pass safely, and the whole northern country is opened to him. Even the Hyksos princess takes a precious necklace form Asphenis, ostensively to buy it, but does not pay for it.[45]

In war the Hyksos are depicted as more savage than courageous, killing innocent women and children mercilessly and indiscriminately. When Ahmose tightens the siege against Thebes, they inhumanely use Egyptian women and children as shields. The violent Egyptian soldiers, shocked beyond belief at seeing the bare bodies of women and children tied to the city walls while enemy soldiers stand behind them, sarcastic and defiant, determine to storm the city knowing that some of the women and children will be killed but thinking it better for them to die than to become slaves to Apophis. As they begin their attack, they can hear the loud and desperate cries of the woman begging them to strike and avenge their humiliation by the Hyksos and praying that the lord will give them victory.[46] In contrast to the savage Hyksos, they treat their avowed enemies with magnanimity and tolerance. When they have usurped their land-especially the chief of police who whipped the Egyptians, and the unjust judge of the city-Ahmose advises his men not to do so, because killing is against their sacred traditions. He reminds them that they are well known for their respect of women and for not punishing captives of

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[45] . Mahfouz, *Kifah Thiba* (The Struggle of Thebes), Laznat al-Nashr li al-Jami'iyyin, Cairo, 1947, p 92-95.

[46] . Ibid. p. 143-45.

war. "The truly virtuous man," he says, "is he who adheres to virtue while he is in a state of outrage and anger".[47] Further evidence and savagery of the Hyksos is their killing of the Pharaoh Seqenenra. In the heat of battle, he is hit by a spear and falls to the ground, seriously wounded. Instead of taking him captive, the Hyksos soldier strikes him on the head with an ax, then others gang up against him and mangle his body with their spears.[48] At the Egyptian Museum in Cairo the contorted face and jaws and the deep holes in the mummy's skull betray the brutal manner in which this valiant pharaoh was killed. This Hyksos savagery is contrasted with Egyptian magnanimity, represented in the duel between Ahmose and Khinzir, the bravest of the Hyksos, who had killed Ahmose's grand father. Before their combat, each boasts of his own prowess and the bravery of his people, mocks his enemy, and threatens him with death. The actual conflict demonstrates their skill and dexterity. When Khinzir hits Ahmose's head with the tip of his sword, the Hyksos joyfully shout victory slogans. But when Ahmose strikes Khinzir's shield and knocks him to the ground, no cries of victory are heard in the Egyptian camp. Declining to take advantage of his foe, he magnanimously casts aside his own shield to fight Khinzir on even terms. Surprised, Khinzir shouts that such an act is worthy only of noble kings. The fight continues and Khinzir falls to the ground, having suffered two mortal blows. Ahmose and his men are now in a position to mutilate the body of their fallen enemy, as the Hyksos did to Seqenenra. Instead, he draws near and praises the strength and bravery of Khinzir, who, breathing his last, says that king Ahmose has spoken the truth, and that no Hyksos man will ever be able to challenge him again. In a final act of compassion, Ahmose

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[47] . ibid. p. 151-53.
[48] . ibid. p. 35-36.

picks up Khinzir's sword, places it beside his body, mounts his horse, and returns to camp.[49]

In portraying the Egyptians and the Hyksos as symbolizing the strife between good and evil, civility and savagery, reverence and tolerance, Mahfouz perhaps inadvertently injected his own sense of values into the novel. Human history, both ancient and modern, full of savagery an inhumanity. One has only to skim the pages of the Old Testament to realize how ancient people treated each other in time of war. Neither the history of the Arabs, before or after Islam, nor the history of Western countries is free from atrocities. The absolute dichotomy between good and evil permeates most of Mahfouz's novels. Perhaps it is a manifestation of his frustration and that of his generation because of the power of their British and Turko-Egyptian masters, who like the ancient Hyksos regarded the native Egyptians with utter contempt. He finds no redeeming virtue in those who preyed on his own people, whether in ancient or modern times.

Mahfouz also injects his own understanding of socialism into the Egyptian society under Ahmose, describing his distribution of land to the peasant farmers in something like a sharecropping transaction. Although there is no historical evidence to support it, he superimposes this socialistic idea on the narrative as part of his vision of the utopian city of his dreams. Quite possible he was not sufficiently courageous to openly embrace the idea of land distribution at a time when the British grip on Egypt was strongest, and when most of the land was owned by wealthy

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[49]. ibid. p. 131-34.

aristocrats. After he wrote *Kifah Tiba*, however, his proclivity for social reform became stronger.[50]

In the light of Mahfouz's dogmatic moral dichotomy, setting forth the Egyptians and the Hyksos as symbols of good and evil, the love episode between Ahmose and Amenerdis appears pale and tenuous, and it cannot be expected to mitigate the long hatred between the Egyptians and Hyksos. It is from the very beginning illogical and indeed impossible, given the circumstances that surrounded it. That Ahmose, disguised as an obscure Egyptian merchant, and the Hyksos princes should fall in love at first sight is absurd. And how are we supposed to believe that Ahmose, of the divine blood, could ever think of loving an enemy princes, unless he has forgotten about his own royal status and the Egyptian tradition that deified him?

Mahfouz makes this love relationship even more implausible when Amenerdis stands before the newly crowned Pharaoh Ahmose as a prisoner of war. Instead of appealing to him in the name of love to show mercy, she turns arrogant and hostile, even threatening to kill herself if he should touch her. During this unemotional dialogue, they both recite the glorious deeds and traits of their people. Their talk, more a diplomatic negotiation between the representatives of two sovereign peoples than a passionate, tender declaration of love, ends with an agreement by which the Hyksos are to release the Egyptian prisoners of war in exchange for the princes. Thus, this contrived and implausible love relationship ends with the lovers' separation. The only consolation for Ahmose is the recognition that he has put responsibility to his country above love.[51]

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[50]. Hafiz, *"Naguib Mahfouz," in Naguib Mahfouz: Atahaddath Ilaykum*, p. 86-87.

[51] . Badr, Abd al Muhsin, *Naguib Mahfouz: al-Ru'ya wa al-Adat* (Naguib Mahfouz: The Vision and Technique), *Dar al-Thaqafa li -al-Tbaa wa l-Nashr*, Cairo, 1978, p. 252,258,268-269.

The novel teems with historical characters, most important of whom are the three pharaohs, Seqenenra, Kamose, and Ahmose, and the old queen Tetisheri, mother of Seqenenra. The three pharaohs personify Egypt and its people. They are the very soul of Egypt; without them the Egyptians can accomplish nothing. They possess sublime traits and are preeminently suited to lead their people. The Hyksos characters, in contrast, poses no redeeming virtues; in fact, Mahfouz does not even give names to the Hyksos minor characters and refers to them only in the third person.

Of all the women in the novel, Tetisheri is most important. She appears as a lovely and charming lady, the proud matriarch of the line of kings and queens who inherited her dainty features. To the royal household and the Egyptian people, Tetishery was called the Holly Mother, a symbol of the pharaonic traits of solemnity, courage and fortitude. In Mahfouz's portrayal, she is the collective consciousness of the Egyptian nation, a second goddess Isis. After her husband's death, she left the throne to her son and his wife but retained some influence, acting as a councilor to her son Seqenenra the Brave, whose mutilated body she may have seen being carried from the battlefield to the palace. She was the moving power and spirit behind the war of liberation, and it was on her advice that Ahmose launched his final assault against the Hyksos. She was, as Mahfouz portrays her, in her sixties, yet still beautiful and active. She possessed all the dainty features of the pharaonic royal family, especially the slight protrusion of her front teeth, which fascinated the people of southern Egypt. She was a highly educated woman who read much about history, especially the accounts of Khufu and the *Book of the Dead.* In brief, she was the symbol of the indomitable spirit of Egypt. It was no wonder that the inhabitants of southern Egypt deified her, calling

her the Holly Mother. She appears throughout the novel as the symbol of fortitude and determination, showing no sign of human weakness until Thebes is finally liberated from the enemy. Upon hearing the news of victory of, she becomes excited, and her heart begins to beat rapidly. Carried in her litter to the palace, she rests in great serenity, surrounded by the female members of the royal family. After she regains some strength, she manages to sit upright and looks compassionately on the ladies, apologizing to them in a feeble voice for her show of weakness. She asks to kiss each one of them, as if she has a premonition that her end is near.[52]

As in the two earlier novels, Mahfouz describes the events in *Kifah Tiba* with so much detail that it diverts the readers' attention from the central theme. Some of these details are superfluous and boring. The army's march to the front, for example, is portrayed as if it were a hunting expedition.[53] When Seqenenra meets with Testisheri to seek her advice about the demands of the Hyksos king, Mahfouz even notes that he sits at her right hand, while his wife sits at her left, and that Testisheri kisses him on the left cheek and his wife Ahotpe on the right.[54] There are also lengthy, often repetitious dialogues between Ahmose and the Hyksos princess, most of which turn into disputes between the pair, who brag about the noble traits of their own people. Finally, there are meticulous descriptions of battles, soldiers, armaments, and the manner in which these battles were fought, down to how many chariots and horses and captives were involved.[55]

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[52]. Abd Allah, *Al-Waqi 'iyya fi al-Riwaya al-arabiyya* (Realism in the Arabic Novel), Dar al-Maarif, Cairo, 1971, p. 57-59.
[53]. Naguib Mahfouz, *Kifah Tiba*, p. 28.
[54]. Ibid. p.18.
[55]. Ibid. p. 118-121.

From a historian's point of view, Mahfouz appears to have adhered more closely to the facts than he did in the previous novels. He uses pharaonic and Hyksos names the same way as Egyptologysts. Given that the available historical evidence, especially about Ahmose, is meager and confusing, Mahfouz has succeeded in giving the common reader a fictionalized picture of the struggle between the Egyptians and the Hyksos. Yet the main question here is not historical integrity so much as plausibility. Does present-day Egypt resemble that of the pharaonic period? Are the Egyptians of today similar to the people in the time of Seqenenra and Ahmose? Naguib Mahfouz seems to believe that they are, and that the passage of time and the many foreign invasions have not affected them greatly. Not even the Arab conquest could affect the pharaonic features of Egypt; the conquerors imposed their religion (Islam) and their language on the Egyptians but could not convert them to Arabism. They were and are still pharaonic Egyptians, with the traits of the ancient culture. Indeed, Mahfouz so firmly believes that the two cultures have mingled that in his address to the Nobel Prize Committee, he called himself the product of two civilizations: pharaonic and Islamic. He explicitly avoided saying that the latter is the exclusive civilization of Egypt.[56]

In brief, Mahfouz, like a number of Egyptian writers, is a leader of the movement that has claimed that by history and culture Egypt is more pharaonic than Arab. This movement was very lively and strong until the rise to power in 1954 of President Jamal Abd al-Nasir, who propagated Arab nationalism in Egypt and gave it a great impetus in the Arab countries. It is in this pharaonic context that Mahfouz's historical novels should be read and appreciated.

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[56]. See Mahfouz's address to the Nobel Prize Committee in no. 59, January 1989, p. 10-14.