



Controversial View on the Nobel of Naguib Mahfouz

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ABSTRACT

The allegorical story by the renowned Arab author Naguib Mahfouz was first serialized in a Cairo newspaper about 40 years ago. It caused a theological discussion over whether it constituted blasphemy, resulted in the book being banned, and was the subject of an attempted Nobel Prize. Passeggiata Press has released a new version of Philip Stewart's novel "Children of Gebelawi" in the English language. A low-key academic book with an English translation was first released by Passeggiata in 1981. The 1997 Extended Edition was revised in light of fresh information on lost original manuscripts. It also features a fresh introduction that describes the horrific string of occurrences that happened after the book's tumultuous debut in 1959. With help from Mahfouz himself, Stewart explores the book's literary puzzles and follows its turbulent publishing history.

The 1959 story "Children of Gebelawi" (*Auladu Haratina*) first appears to be the story of several generations of Cairo residents who struggle to put up with the vicious strongmen and criminals who run the repressive neighborhood protection rackets. The book is an allegory on a higher level; it has fictitious characters who represent Adam and Eve, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad in addition to Adam and Eve, Jesus, and Muhammad. They are all engaged in a battle to restore the people's rightful ownership of a trust fund started by their legendary ancestor Gebelawi but stolen by tyrants and embezzlers. A secluded, cramped alleyway outside of Cairo is the setting for the five elaborately intertwined images, which blur the borders between reality and fantasy.

Key words: Allegorical, Naguib Mahfouz, Theological, Blasphemy, "Auladu Haratina", "Children Of Gebelawi", Manuscripts, Horrific, Tumultuous, Turbulent, Muhammad, Legendary Ancestor, Alleyway, Reality And Fantasy

INTRODUCTION

Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz received the Nobel Literature Prize in 1988. Along with Taha Hussein, Mahfouz is recognized as being one of the first prominent Arabic authors to investigate existentialism-related topics. He is the one Egyptian to have received the Literature Nobel Prize. Over the course of a 70-year career, from the 1930s to 2004, he authored 35 novels, more than 350 fantasy novels, 26 screenplays, hundreds of op-ed essays for Egyptian periodicals, and seven plays. His books all take place in Egypt and frequently make reference to the lane, which is equivalent to the globe. Children of Gebelawi and The Cairo Trilogy are two of his most well-known works. No other Arab author has more works which have been converted for film and television than Mahfouz, who has had many of his writings transformed into Egyptian and international films. Despite being categorized as realism literature, Mahfouz's works contain existential elements.

HIS EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Mahfouz was born in 1911 in ancient Cairo to a lower middle-class Muslim Egyptian family. In honor of the renowned obstetrician who supervised his challenging birth, Naguib Pasha Mahfouz, the first component of his complex given name was selected. With four brothers and two sisters who were all considerably older than him, Mahfouz was the youngest and seventh child. (Experientially, he was a "only kid" growing up.) The family divided their time between two well-known Cairo neighborhoods: first, the Bayt al-Qadi neighborhood in the Gamaleya quarter of the old city, from which they moved in 1924 to Abbaseya, a new Cairo suburb to the north of the old city.

These neighborhoods served as the setting for many of Mahfouz's later writings. Mahfouz regarded his father, Abdel-Aziz Ibrahim, as being "old-fashioned." Mahfouz finally followed in his father's footsteps in the civil service in 1934. Fatimah, Mahfouz's mother, was an illiterate woman who was also the daughter of Al-Azhar sheikh Mustafa Qasheesha. She frequently escorted Mahfouz to places of interest like the Egyptian Museum and the Pyramids despite being illiterate herself.

Mahfouz was raised in a strict Islamic environment by a devoted Muslim family. He went into further detail about the strict religious environment he experienced growing up in an interview. You would never have imagined that an artist would come from that household, he said. Mahfouz saw a significant impact from the Egyptian Revolution of 1919 despite only being seven years old at the time. He observed British military fire at the protesters out of the window in an effort to disperse them. The 1919 revolution, according to Mahfouz, "might be regarded to be the one incident which most rocked the security of my boyhood," he later said.

Mahfouz studied much in his formative years and was influenced by Salama Moussa, the Fabian philosopher, Taha Hussein, and Hafiz Najib. Mahfouz entered the Egyptian University (now Cairo University) in 1930 after finishing his secondary school, where he studied philosophy and earned his degree in 1934. After working on an M.A. in philosophy for a year starting in 1936, he made the decision to give up on his studies and pursue a career as a writer. In 1929, Salama Musa founded the journal *Al Majalla Al Jadida*, where he first published his writing. Later, Mahfouz worked at *Arrissalah* as a journalist and wrote flash fiction to *Al-Hilal and Al-Ahram*.

CONTROVERSIAL VIEW ON HIS NOBEL

As soon as the first episode of "Awlad Haritna," which is known as "أولاد حارتنا" in Arabic, started to run in the semi-official Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* starting in September 1959, students at Al-Azhar University in Cairo organized protests and open demonstrations. The other parts of the work were only distributed over the course of the next three months with President Gamal Abdul Nasser's personal support. Later, both its publishing as a book and any public references to it were forbidden in Egypt by censors. Egypt continued to forbid the publishing of the book, but it was eventually published as a book in Beirut in 1967. According to Stewart, it was publicly repudiated in 1968 by a committee of theologians from Al-Azhar.

The debate reappeared when the Nobel Committee announced in a press release that Mahfouz had won the 1988 Literature Prize. The committee mentioned five novels, "أولاد حارتنا" being one of them. Stewart's introduction states that at the time, the author himself advocated against publishing for the sake of peace and President Hosni Mubarak stated that he wanted the book published in Egypt. Things became much more concerning once the Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini issued his fatwa against Salman Rushdie in February 1989. Rushdie would not have had the courage to publish the novel "The Satanic Verses" if Mahfouz had received a life sentence for his Nobel Prize-winning book, according to the Egyptian Sheikh Omar Abdur Rahman, who is currently serving a life sentence in the United States. This statement was made in the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al Qabas*.

Prior to being attacked on a Cairo street one Friday night in 1994, Mahfouz was unharmed. He declined police protection and carried on unaffected as normal. Thirteen persons were convicted guilty of the assault after confessing to following Sheikh Omar's fatwa during questioning. But in an essay that was published in "The New Yorker" in January 1995, he asserted that everything had been a mistake. He underlined that it was just "a response to a journalist's question," not a fatwa. If Mahfouz had been taken before a committee to be found guilty in accordance with sharia law, Sheikh Omar was quoted as stating, "He would have had an opportunity to provide his own defense, and if convicted guilty, he would have had a chance to make apologies." Despite the occasions when he discussed ideas with Stewart, Mahfouz was never accused of anything, and he was never afraid to criticize Stewart's work. Gebelaawi is at the core of the issue; the Nobel Prize committee opted to refer to his made-up death as "the primordial father Gebelaawi's (God's) death."

Mahfouz consistently refuted this notion, saying that the Gebelaawi character represents individuals who don't believe in God's ultimate sovereignty as it is revealed in Islam rather than "God, but a specific version of God that mankind has invented." The fictional Adam mourned, "Loneliness talks, and sadness smolders like embers buried in the ashes," after being expelled from the Garden. Gebelaawi is undoubtedly a father figure, although one who is arrogantly distant. The mansion's intimidating wall deters the longing heart. How do I get this awful parent to pay attention to me? My attention is drawn to the streams that flow through the rose bushes. Where is the jasmine and henna scent? Where is the peace of mind? You evil guy, you also got my flute! Will the sensation of a frozen heart ever go away?

Arafa the Magician, the personification of science, is eventually responsible for Gebelaawi's demise. Theological opponents who interpreted this as a depiction of the "death of God" condemned it as blasphemous. Mahfouz didn't write biographies of prophets or of murder. Stewart claims that "His main purpose was to shine light on certain aspects of their lives and careers." Even if some of the legendary characters commit crimes like smoking hashish, Stewart supports the novelist's goals: "Even if he demonstrated unforeseen errors of taste or conviction, it is impossible to conceive that he intended injury to his heroes." Stewart adds in his conclusion, "Readers should determine for themselves if what he said was - or was intended to be-anti-religious or anti-Islamic." Of course, the reader will still face additional challenges. Those unfamiliar with Mahfouz's work may find it difficult to understand its seeming naivete. The characters are one-dimensional, the language is consistently basic, and the plot is thin, flitting quickly from one theatrical dead end to another.

The literary style is reminiscent of Cairo's café storytelling bards. One's own sacred knowledge is awakened while reading "The Children of Gebelaawi," creating a slightly parallel realm where the appreciation of allegory is increased by the knowledge of scriptural and chronological correspondence—and divergence. Mahfouz has consistently introduced a plot twist, a new "what if," and a new perspective to guarantee that this aspect would be unexpected. So disregard the idea that Gebelaawi was created to stand in for God. The Old Man of the Mountain, like the Wizard of Oz, was ultimately just another constrained, distressed prism of mankind. Mahfouz said to Stewart, "Nothing can mirror God. God is huge and unmatched by anything."

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it is to be mentioned that Mahfouz asserted the Gebelaawi's character represents individuals who reject the ultimate authority of God as it is revealed in Islam—"not God, but a specific notion of God that mankind has invented." The fictional Adam mourned, "*Loneliness talks, and sadness smolders like embers buried in the ashes,*" after being expelled from the Garden. Thus, it can be said that Mahfouz's perspective of view helped readers and book lovers to strengthen their critical thinking skills.

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