

**East-West Encounter in Lawrence Durrell's  
*The Alexandria Quartet* and Naguib  
Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy***

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**To my mother**

**To the memory of my father**

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## Introduction

The writers selected for this study are Lawrence Durrell and Naguib Mahfouz. *The Cairo Trilogy* and *The Alexandria Quartet* are both works about the same country during the same period: Egypt between the two Wars. However, the similar context does not mean that both writers use a similar approach. The roles of author, reader and text are different in each work. In other words, the way the reader engages with the *Quartet* differs from that of the *Trilogy*. There is also a difference in the narrative techniques of the two authors. For instance, whereas Kamal's degree of involvement in the story is constant throughout the *Trilogy*, Darley's distance changes from one volume to another. In fact, these differences are significant in a comparative study because they stem from the different characteristics underlying Arabic and English literature on the one hand, and because they reflect the backgrounds of the two novelists on the other.

Firstly, therefore, a brief survey of Arabic literature will be useful, from the coming of Islam to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This will help shed light on the major Arabic literary genres and will situate the novel in a genre borrowed from the West. This exercise will also help highlight Mahfouz's contribution to the establishment of the novel in Arabic literature. Secondly, a similar examination of English literature and the English novel will help assess Durrell's achievements in relation to the development of the novel, rather than his place in establishing it.

### I. Mahfouz and the Arabic novel

In his book *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, Roger Allen names chapter 3 *The Qur'an: a sacred text and cultural yardstick*<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter, Allen considers the Qur'an not only a source of theological argument but also a source for science. He illustrates a direct relationship between the word *Iqra'* (recite), which is the first word of the first of God's revelations to His messenger, the Prophet Muhammad, and the oral tradition as primary modes of transmitting messages.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Allen, *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 52.

In the words of Allen, the Qur'an 'becomes the paradigmatic text, and its language, structures, and images pervade the whole of Arabic discourse.'<sup>2</sup> Simply put, Arabic literary texts draw considerable inspiration from the Qur'an. Literary techniques in the Qur'an which have inspired Arab litterateurs include allusion, citation, imagery, vocabulary, nuance and metaphor. Even the art of storytelling can be learned from the Qur'an. The surah of Joseph is a good illustration. In Allen's words, it 'has attracted much attention in both Arabic and other languages for its unusual structural unity and narrative qualities'<sup>3</sup>. These narratives usually serve as sub-texts in modern works. A good example can be found in *The Cairo Trilogy*, which uses Shaykh Mutwalli's stories of disbelievers and their fate to predict the aftermath of colonisation in Egypt.

Because poetry, using the words of Salma Khadra Jayyusi, 'has been the greatest verbal art of the Arabs'<sup>4</sup>, and because prose has had great difficulty competing with verse, it will be useful to consider poetry before discussing the novel as a new genre in Arabic literature. The themes of Arabic poetry in earlier centuries can be classified into three areas: praise, lampoon and elegy. The poet could express his admiration or offer great homage to a leader. Hassan ibn Thabit's poems about the Prophet Muhammad are a good example of this poetic mode. The poet also had the task of satirising a person, tribe or country with whom there was conflict. Al-Mutanabbi and his *hija* (lampoon) poems provide a good example of this type of Arabic poetry. It was also the task of the poet to produce a mournful and melancholy poem as a lament for the dead. Poems by the woman poet al-Khansa about her dead brother serve as a good example.

However, al-Nahda (a cultural renaissance which started in Egypt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) was a turning point for Arabic poetry when Arab poets began to turn to European Romanticism.<sup>5</sup> A new poetic sensibility emerged as a result of contact with the West. Poets who contributed to the foundation of Arabic romantic poetry include Khalil Mutran (1872-1949), Jubran Khalil Jubran (1883-1931), Mikhail Nuayma (1889-1988) and Iliyya Abu Madi (1889-1957).

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Roger Allen, *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 123.

Examples of prose exist, but they remain specific to Arabic culture because writers failed to detach themselves completely from poetry. In other words, poetic verse intervened from time to time in writing which was intended to be prosaic. Allen's survey of Arabic literature starts with the Qur'an as the earliest text in prose. As a first step in the development of *adab* (literature), Allen mentions the name of Abd al-hamid al-Katib (d.750)<sup>6</sup> as the author of a number of epistles. However, the writer who marked the beginnings of Arabic prose was al-Jahiz (776-869). *Kitab al-bukhala* (*The Book of Misers*) shows him to be a prose writer of outstanding humour. The book, as R.B. Serjeant puts it, is 'the best way to enter into an understanding of how Arabs think and feel. The very theme, avarice or miserliness brings out their sentiments of generosity and honour and also reveals the straits to which the poor must resort and the penny-pinching necessary to accumulate a modest capital.'<sup>7</sup>

Other varieties of prose writing consisted of compilations and anthologies, such as those of Ibn Qutaybah (828-889). A 10<sup>th</sup> century development in prose involved Ibn Hazm's *Tawq al-hamamah* (*The Ring of the Dove*), 'a treatise which deals with love in prose and poetry'<sup>8</sup>. Ibn Hazm (994-1064) based the composition of this book on personal experiences. Another form of prose involves historical writings. Here Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839-923) provides a good illustration with his *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (*History of the Prophets and Kings*). Specific to Arabic literature, however, and one of the famous Arabic genres of fictional narrative, is the *maqama*, usually translated as 'assembly'. The *maqama*, known for its rhymed prose, is a specifically Arab literary genre for which there is no exact equivalent in other literatures. The *maqama* (plural, *maqamat*) is "from a root which means 'he stood,' and in this case it means to stand in a literary discussion in order to orate."<sup>9</sup> Al-Hamadani (967-1007) and al-Hariri (1054-1122) were the pioneers of this genre. In addition to these types of prose are popular narratives. *The Thousand and One Nights* is a major reference for this type of text. The work consists of a collection of tales which inspired many Arab writers such as Naguib Mahfouz, who in 1982 published *Arabian Nights and Days* in its original form.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Jahiz, R. B. Serjeant, and Ezzeddin Ibrahim, *The Book of Misers*, Great Books of Islamic Civilization, Reading: Garnet, 2000, p. xviii.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Ibn Hazm and A. R Nykl, *A Book Containing the Risala Known as The Dove's Neck-Ring, about Love and Lovers*, Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2014, p. LXI.

<sup>9</sup> Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadani and W.J. Pendergast, *The Maqamat of Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadani*, London: Forgotten Books, 2008, p.vii.

However, prose narratives with Western characteristics were only introduced into Arabic literature in modern times. This was not a simple task because, on the one hand, Arab readers were accustomed to the genres cited above, and on the other, writers lacked experience in the new genres. From another point of view, the themes involved in a long prose narrative presented another challenge. Arab writers could not simply imitate Western themes because of considerable barriers of culture and religion, and because of tight censorship. There was also a problem of finding equivalent terms to those in the genres of the Western literary tradition. Because this thesis is about a series of novels, the focus of the following pages will be the novel genre and its introduction into Arabic literature.

If experts from the West have differing views about what a novel is, aspiring novelists in the East have had to face a far more complex situation. Firstly, Roger Allen remarks in *The Arabic Novel* that Arabic ‘possesses no general word equivalent to the English term “fiction”’.<sup>10</sup> Allen adds that ‘in the various regions of the Arab world there is a certain amount of ambiguity inherent in the assignment of titles to critical works on fictional genres.’<sup>11</sup> This is because the words *Qissa* and *riwaya* are used interchangeably to talk about the novel as a literary genre. However, the use of the word *Qissa* creates confusion. Because Arabic literary criticism uses the term *Qissa Qasira* for the short story, to use the word *Qissa* for novels may suggest that the difference between a novel and a short story lies only in length. How, in fact, was the novel incorporated into the list of Arabic literary genres?

The invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798 was a milestone in the relationship between East and West. Although the mission of Napoleon failed in a military sense, the invasion nevertheless brought cultural changes. Egyptians were introduced not only to different modern technologies but also to a new way of seeing the world. On a literary level, the focus shifted more towards society and its problems. After Napoleon’s defeat and the withdrawal of France from Egyptian lands, Mohamed Aly decided to import European military know-how. Rifa’a al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) was sent to Paris as *imam*<sup>12</sup> to accompany a group of students sent to study arts and sciences at French universities. France and the French culture

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. Contemporary Issues in the Middle East, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

inspired al-Tahtawi, who decided to write a book on it. Roger Allen states that al-Tahtawi's *Takhlis al-ibriz fi talkhis Bariz* 'aroused the interest of the Egyptian readership concerning European society and its bases'.<sup>13</sup>

Like al-Tahtawi, Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) studied in France, where he composed *Zaynab* in 1913. *Zaynab* is considered by most Arab critics to be the first Egyptian novel. The story depicts the Egyptian countryside and criticises Egyptian society and marriage practices. Haykal had been deeply influenced by France and French literature. In his introduction to the third edition of the novel, he describes this influence in the following words:

I was a student in Paris [...] I was fond of French literature in those days. I didn't know much French literature when I left Egypt, and my knowledge of French was very poor, but when I began to study the language and its literature, I discovered writing which was completely different from what I knew of English and Arabic literature. I found fluidity and easiness. I found in it all a purposeful and precise way of narrating and describing. I also found simplicity of expression which can only interest those who love what they are describing more than the words they use for their descriptions. My passion for this new literature and my nostalgia for my homeland intertwined in my soul, and I immediately set about describing my memories of Egyptian places, events and scenes. After a few attempts, I started writing *Zaynab*.<sup>14</sup> (*My translation*)

An obvious analogy could be drawn between the story of Julie d'Etange and St. Preux in *Julie, or the New Heloise* by Rousseau, and the story of Hamid and Zaynab. Moreover, although *Zaynab* depicts the rural life of the Egyptian countryside, the influence of French romantic stories is obvious. Zaynab's slender figure does not sit easily with the Egyptian women working on cotton plantations. Even her tragic deterioration in health which results from an unbearable arranged marriage is an imitation of European plots. *Zaynab* can be seen as a building block in the development of the modern Egyptian novel, but the author's lack of experience and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Mohamad Hussein Haykal, 'Preface' to *Zaynab: Manazir wa Akhlaq Rif'iya*, Cairo: al-Dar al-Misriah al-Loubnaniah, 2012, pp. 26-27.

skill in terms of novel writing means that it cannot be compared with English novels written during the same period. In 1913, D.H. Lawrence published *Sons and Lovers*, and followed this in 1915 with *The Rainbow*. In 1915, Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*, and Dorothy Richardson's *Pointed Roofs* were published. 1916 saw the publication of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In terms of the craft of novel writing, there is a large gap between *Zaynab* and these major works of literature. This is because the tradition of writing novels in Arabic was a new experience, and Husayn Haykal had no predecessors from whom to learn. In her article *The Arab Laureate and the Road to Nobel*, Salma Khadra Jayyusi writes about the difficult beginnings of the Arabic novel:

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, the Arabic novel was highly experimental, imitative, and unsure of itself. In its growth toward modern maturation, it depended on Western examples and on the intermittent efforts of a handful of experimentalists, mainly in Egypt. Because of its hesitant beginnings, it took more than half a century for the novel to become a serious genre employed by many writers and sought by a good-sized reading public.<sup>15</sup>

It is only with Naguib Mahfouz that the novel became 'a serious genre'. Naguib Mahfouz was born in 1911 in Cairo, in the district of al-Gamaliya. In 1930, he began his university education, during which he translated from English a book on ancient Egypt in 1932.<sup>16</sup> In 1934 he obtained his university degree in philosophy, and began postgraduate studies, which he then abandoned to devote himself to writing fiction. In 1938, Mahfouz published his first collection of short stories, *Hams al-Junun* (*Whispers of Madness*), and in 1988, became the first Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize:

Mr. Mahfouz, your rich and complex work invites us to reconsider the fundamental things in life. Themes like the nature of time and love, society and norms, knowledge and faith recur in a variety of situations and are presented in thought-provoking, evocative and clearly daring

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Naguib Mahfouz and William M. Hutchins, *The Cairo Trilogy*, Everyman's Library, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001, p. xxviii.

ways. And the poetic quality of your prose can be felt across the language barrier. In the prize citation you are credited with the forming of an Arabian narrative art that applies to all mankind. On behalf of the Swedish Academy I congratulate you on your eminent literary accomplishments.<sup>17</sup>

These were the words addressed to the Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz by Professor Sture Allén, the permanent secretary of the Swedish Academy and member of the Nobel Committee<sup>18</sup>. Thematically speaking, Mahfouz had introduced new themes into Arabic prose. The situation of women in a male society had not been a focus for his predecessors. Mahfouz's works reconsidered realities, raised questions and provoked debates in a society controlled by strong religious feeling and a deep attachment to customs and traditions. Mahfouz dared to challenge society and religious institutions to investigate what had previously been indisputable.

Technically speaking, it is true that the development of the novel owes much to writers before Mahfouz, such as al-Aqqad and Taha Husayn, but it is with Mahfouz that the novel reached maturity. In the words of Fedwe Malti-Douglas, Mahfouz 'was (and is) the redefinition of modern Arabic prose and its relationship with its centuries-long textual ancestry.'<sup>19</sup> Salma Khadra Jayyusi goes so far to state that the novel 'was established by the disciplined dedication of Naguib Mahfouz'<sup>20</sup>. From another viewpoint, Mahfouz's prose constitutes a stylistic break with traditional Arabic prose. Instead of using sophisticated diction, an important characteristic of Arabic poetry, Mahfouz's characters think and talk as they do in real-life situations.

The title of El-Enany's book on Mahfouz's literary career, *The Pursuit of Meaning*, summarises the Nobel Prize winner's achievements well. The long literary career of Mahfouz is characterised by a constant struggle to establish the novel as a genre within Arabic literature. It was not his objective simply to imitate the Western novel. Mahfouz sought an Arabic novel with Arabic themes and Arabic stylistic features. Such a challenge naturally had to be met by experimenting with different

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

schools. On the other hand, the political and social instability of Egypt before and after the Second World War conditioned the literary production of the period. The stringent controls and censorship the government imposed on writers and journalists restricted what they could say and how they could say it. Reliance on a single method in a period characterised by such turmoil would undoubtedly have failed. Therefore, working in a context where freedom of speech limited his desire to introduce change, Mahfouz's writing developed in a number of stages. Gaber Asfour, an eminent Egyptian critic, characterises Mahfouz's literary experience as follows:

The fictional world of Naguib Mahfouz is so complex, encompassing historical and realistic narrative, containing the partially symbolic that may infiltrate the dominant tone of a realistic work and the general symbol whose manifold meanings lead to more than one interpretation or become unified and revert to allegory. His fiction contains within itself different schools and trends, ranging from critical realism to existential realism to socialist realism, and including naturalism, surrealism, and the absurd.<sup>21</sup>

Mahfouz began his literary career by writing historical novels: *Abath al-Aqdar* (*Ironies of Fate*, 1939), followed by *Radobis* (Rhodopis, 1943) and *Kifah Tiba* (*The Struggle of Thebes*, 1944). After completing his third historical novel, Mahfouz moved on to portray contemporary life in Cairo. In 1945, he published *Khan al-Khalili*, which marked a shift from ancient history to realism and naturalism. The conflict between old and new in the *Trilogy* had already begun to develop in *Khan al-Khalili*. A year later, in 1946, Mahfouz published *New Cairo*, a novel in which he showed his growing interest in social realism. In 1947, his next novel, *Midaq Alley*, appeared, which takes its name from one of the alleys in Cairo. In this novel, Mahfouz once again exposes the conflict between traditional and imposed values in an Egypt caught up in World War II. In *Mirage* (1948), Mahfouz appears to be concerned with 'the representation of a psychological rather than physical or naturalistic reality.'<sup>22</sup> In 1949, he published *The Beginning and The End*, a novel set in Cairo and covering the period from 1935 to 1939. In this novel, Mahfouz is still preoccupied with society and the individual, but this time with the introduction of fate as a force which disturbs this relationship. *The*

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>22</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 61.

*Beginning and The End* is a novel where, in El-Enany's words, 'Mahfouz is obviously still agonizing over the theme of past and present.'<sup>23</sup> Lastly, an important event in the literary life of Mahfouz and a milestone in the history of Arabic literature involved the publication of *The Cairo Trilogy: Bayn al-Quasrayn* (1956) translated as *Palace Walk* in 1990, *Qasr al-Shawq* (1957), translated as *Palace of Desire* in 1991, and *al-Sukkariyya* (1957), translated as *Sugar Street* in 1992. Commenting on the *Trilogy*, Jayyusi writes:

*The Trilogy* radically changed the whole balance of Arabic literature. The former intractability of the novel was broken, and the old timidity and sense of alienation that Arab creative talent had left toward that medium were gone. Mahfouz proved its accessibility, and after the *Trilogy* many writers began writing novels, quickly learning the craft and realizing the possibility of a novelistic achievement. From this time on, the novel became an ever more desirable form.<sup>24</sup>

## II. Durrell and the English novel

The other writer in this study is Lawrence Durrell. Born in Jalandhar (in the Punjab region) in 1912 to an English father and a Protestant Irish mother (both also born in the Indian Empire), Lawrence Durrell was an English writer and poet. His work is marked by his many travels, especially in the Mediterranean region where he spent most of his life. As a young man, he was sent to the United Kingdom to be educated, and his encounter with the country of his ancestors came as something of a shock. In 1935, determined to become a writer, he convinced his wife, mother, brother and sister to settle in Corfu. In the same year, he published his first novel *Pied Piper of Lovers*, which had to be published in France because of its sexual content. In 1937, he wrote his second novel *Panic Spring*, and the following year, in 1938, produced what he considered to be his first true novel, *The Black Book*. These novels were followed in 1943 by his first poetry collection, *A Private Country*. Two years later, he produced *Prospero's Cell*, a diary of his life on Corfu, and by 1950, had written his first play *Sappho*. However, the work for which Durrell became best known is *The Alexandria Quartet*. *Justine* was published in 1957, and *Balthazar* and *Mountolive* in 1958. *Clea* was published in 1960, and in 1962 the four volumes were published as *The*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 13.

*Alexandria Quartet*. Durrell was nominated for the Nobel Prize for literature in 1988 but did not win it<sup>25</sup>. As noted above, the Prize was awarded to Mahfouz.

When it comes to Durrell's place as a novelist in English literature, his contribution can best be examined in relation to a number of modernists, such as Joyce and Lawrence. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth writes:

The novel began, we are told, with Cervantes, with Defoe, with Fielding, with Richardson, with Jane Austen--or was it with Homer? It was killed by Joyce, by Proust, by the rise of symbolism, by the loss of respect for--or was it the excessive absorption with? - hard facts. No, no, it still lives, but only in the work of. . . . Thus, on and on.

In this quotation, Booth pinpoints one of the main issues in defining the novel: what is a novel and when did the genre emerge? At the same time, he mentions James Joyce as a milestone in the history of the English novel. The words 'began' and 'killed' highlight two major stages in the novel's development: the novel before Joyce and the novel with Joyce. In this study, we are concerned with the second stage, which marked the beginning of modernism. Modernists such as Pound, T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and Joyce rejected the literature of the nineteenth century in favour of a distant past, with mythology and antiquity as their sources, to bring order to the chaotic experience of modern times.

Pound looked to the Provence of the troubadours or the China of Confucius; T.S. Eliot found an ideal order in Dante and in the seventeenth-century England of Donne and Herbert and Lancelot Andrewes; James Joyce used Homer as a way of ordering the chaos of modern existence; and Lawrence aspired to the pure primitive consciousness of American Indians or ancient Etruscans.

In the same way as these writers, Durrell admired the remoter past, especially Shakespeare and Elizabethan literature. However, unlike them, Durrell introduced science into his work.

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<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Mark Robinson, *Lawrence Durrell: Between Love and Death, East and West*, Maidstone, Kent: Crescent Moon Pub., 2008, p. 24.

In an interview in New York City in 1970, he was asked whether he considered himself one of the last Romantics. His answer was:

Oh, I think that I'm the first of the new Romantics. I think that the backswing is coming. By adding to my subject matter, which is romantic, contemporary preoccupations, particularly scientific material, I have brought it up to date.<sup>26</sup>

By 'contemporary preoccupations', he is alluding to Freud and Einstein. Freud's theories about the unconscious changed our vision of the self. For Durrell, form in the novel needed to parallel this vision by responding to the structure of the psyche. On the other hand, in terms of natural science, Einstein's theory of relativity changed our conception of the world. And again, this should be reflected in literature. In other words, the world as it existed in the novels of Durrell's predecessors had changed, and literary form had to adapt to these changes. In another interview recorded in 1975 in London, Durrell states:

I felt that the *roman fleuve*, the sequential novel, the family novel if you like, the six-decker family novel, had really been mopped up for our age by Proust and that one really couldn't go on in the same way. The serial form moving from A-Z had been mopped up, so to speak, and I wondered what a contemporary form might be. Then I asked myself, in which departments of our thinking and of our feeling and of our belief had our age distinguished itself from all other ages? And I came to the conclusion that the world inside had been completely disintegrated by the Freudian split of the psyche, the discovery and analysis of an unconscious; and the world outside had been split by the atom, by Einstein. And I wondered if it wouldn't be possible to make a kind of mockup form which naturally couldn't imitate mathematical diagram but could use some of the philosophic by-products from relativity and psychoanalysis and make a new kind of mix.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 111.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Nevertheless, Durrell did not reject all Victorian literature. For example, he admired Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), one of the late Victorian writers who enjoyed great popularity in the 1890s. The Anglo-Indian writer was the voice of British imperialism. He was born in India and, like Durrell, was sent to England for his education. In other words, Kipling and Durrell shared a number of similarities in their background, so Kipling is important for the present study. Both writers were born in India and both of them were sent to England at an early age. Durrell was aware of these similarities:

By the time I was twelve, in ordinary terms of self-reliance and grown-upness, I was a little older than my contemporaries of twelve in England who were living this tremendously narrow life. Now my view of England was largely conditioned by circumstances. I think Kipling had roughly the same background. We were sent to small suburban households in England with very strict people in charge – the educational patterns of that time are simply not recognizable now. I mean, we were still living in the shadow of the world Dickens described.<sup>28</sup>

Kipling was ‘much in demand as a short story writer and he became a master of the genre.’<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, his achievements in terms of the novel genre were relatively minor, though *Kim* (1901) remains a great work. In *Kim*, Kipling vividly portrays India under the British Empire with its culture, its religions, and its populations. Durrell clearly admired this novel:

I have always been a child of *Kim*. It’s an extraordinary book, impregnated with Buddhism, even though the word itself is never mentioned. The scenes in *Kim*, you might say, were taking place right in our garden.<sup>30</sup>

From a thematic point of view, there is an echo of *Kim* in the *Quartet*. Mysticism and imperialism are characteristics of Durrell’s tetralogy. However, Kipling’s novelistic

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> Pat Rogers, ed., *An Outline of English Literature*, 2nd ed. Oxford [England] ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 365.

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 192.

techniques remained conventional and did not influence Durrell's approach to writing.

In an interview in 1960, when Durrell was asked about the writers who had influenced him, Durrell spoke of 'Proust, Joyce, [and] Lawrence'.<sup>31</sup> D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) was a writer who worked in a variety of genres: novels, plays, short stories, and poems. As a novelist, he 'added nothing to the form of the novel'<sup>32</sup>. Thematically speaking, the world of Lawrence is impregnated with sexuality, just like Durrell's. In this respect Lawrence's influence on Durrell is clear. However, there is also a divergence which Durrell highlights in the following extract:

I have been very much influenced by Lawrence as a writer, but not as a person of ideas. Lawrence, in spite of his heroic and magnificent tilt at the conventions of the day and his attempt to deepen and widen consciousness (which certainly did), remained at heart a Puritan. There is still a touch of Calvinism about his insistence on certain sexual *motifs*. His passion about marriage, for example. He does not carry it to scientific lengths. He does not say that, biologically, monogamy appears to be the rule. He ascribes his ideas very largely to his own psyche.<sup>33</sup>

It was, in fact, Joyce who most influenced Durrell. With James Joyce (1882-1941) the reader's role in the narrative changed. The previous comfortable relationship with the text disappears, and the reader is plunged into constant flux and doubt. It is important to understand these narrative techniques in order to analyse and appreciate *The Alexandria Quartet*. Like Joyce, Durrell forces us to enter the characters' minds and share their consciousness with them at that moment in time. However, Durrell did not limit himself simply to writing novels in the fashion of Joyce and Proust. An extract of a conversation in 1959 in Paris illustrates this point:

**Juin:** Your readers are anxious to know how you tie up your *Quartet*.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> Ifor Evans, *A Short History of English Literature*, London: Penguin Books, 1962, p. 186.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 46.

**Durrell:** But exactly, just the opposite of Proust and Joyce, I'm not going to tie up anything. I leave it all open. Right there, completely open, for the reader, the viewer, if you will.<sup>34</sup>

Here Durrell was announcing his vision for the novel, a vision which led to his recognition as one of the precursors of postmodernism. In his introduction to *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Ingersoll, writes:

As a literary "son," Durrell demonstrates a variety of departures from literary modernism – as early as *The Alexandria Quartet*. The *Quartet* is in several respects a masterpiece of English postmodernism, a generation before literary theorists would generate the term to characterize either the *Quartet* or Durrell as postmodernist. Like the work of his "fellow Irishmen," the Samuel Beckett of *Murphy* (1938) and the "Flann O'Brien" of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), and even the modernist Joyce of *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), Durrell was following the path of an inevitable transformation of the modernist into the postmodern.<sup>35</sup>

### III. Why Mahfouz and Durrell?

The works of Durrell and Mahfouz inspired the examination of the encounter between East and West in the *Quartet* and the *Trilogy*. In the case of Mahfouz, the East and the West do not appear to be always in opposition. The encounter is often represented instead as an important opportunity for cultural, economic and linguistic exchange. The *Trilogy* indicates that the West does not always signify conquest and conflict as shown in Said's *Orientalism*. Moreover, Egypt's submission to British rule did not leave Mahfouz with any obsession for highlighting the distinctiveness and individuality of Arabic culture. Of course, the British imperial agenda and colonial practices are denounced and firmly criticised, but at the same time there is an invitation to establish science as a bridge between the two cultures. Mahfouz was seriously criticised and sometimes rejected in the Arab world because of his opinion about the West.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

As an Occidental writing about the Orient, Durrell depicts this encounter in a quite paradoxical manner. The Orient is an object of fascination and also an object of repugnance. To a great extent, Said's theories of orientalism provide a key to the understanding of certain attitudes of the Occidentals towards the Orientals of Alexandria. The presence of long passages dedicated to describing the dilapidated condition of the city, the need for the Oriental to feel the presence of the Occidental; the sharp criticisms directed towards the Oriental's beliefs and conduct and the presence of orientalist intertexts like that of Edward William Lane are all characteristics of an orientalist approach. At the same time, and paradoxically, the *Quartet* manifests a great fascination with the theosophies of Alexandria.

To put it simply, a comparative approach to Durrell and Mahfouz with regard to their novels on Egypt during the time between the First and the Second World War can help alter our stereotypes concerning oriental identity and gain a deeper insight into the western influence on the shaping of this identity. The two works complement each other if one is to understand Egypt of the time, as each omits what the other has to offer. However, it should be also noted that Durrell predominantly demonstrates the Orientalist attitude existing at the time, while Mahfouz presents a realistic portrait of life in Egypt, eventually reconciling the strengths of both worlds.

To examine the subtleties of the East-West encounter in the works of Durrell and Mahfouz, the following structure has been adopted. The first chapter is an introduction which provides some historical, political and religious context in terms of Egypt. This context helps to understand the relevance of the city of Alexandria to Durrell's *Quartet*, and the background to the Copts who are given an important role in the story. The plot is built on the aspirations of a Coptic family seeking to strengthen the position of Copts in Egypt. In the *Trilogy*, on the other hand, there is no reference to these political aspirations or to any tensions between Copts and the Muslim government of Egypt. They are still considered patriotic Egyptians seeking to free Egypt from British colonisation. This is confusing, and is the reason for retracing the history of relations between Muslims and Copts. From another point view, even though it is fiction, the *Trilogy* presents considerable historical data in relation to British colonisation. Real names, real dates and real events are involved, and need clarification and contextualisation. This chapter will also show that the

*Quartet* pays little attention to the British presence in Egypt, overlooking the fact that British colonisation was extremely painful for most Egyptians. This attitude may be attributable to Durrell's background as a child of the Empire.

Both the *Quartet* and the *Trilogy* are expressions of the tensions which characterise East-West encounters. Seen in the light of Edward Said's theory of orientalism, Durrell's *Quartet* can be shown to be the work of an orientalist. In contrast, in the *Trilogy*, the West is not presented as a symbol of colonisation. The work takes a broader view which includes the contributions of Western science and modern technologies, education, literature and philosophy. It also involves women's emancipation. However, the Orient of Durrell is not always far from reality. At times it also seems to coincide with the Orient of Mahfouz. It is true that the line between the real Orient and the imagined Orient in the *Quartet* is very thin, but reading the *Trilogy* highlights this line and redraws it where it needs to.

The city, the subject of chapter three, has a major role in both works. In the *Trilogy*, which is considered the best reflection of the realistic phase of Mahfouz's writing, Cairo remains a reliable reference for the period the narrative covers. When the city is the subject of criticism, critics usually focus on alleys and districts. However, there is an aspect of the city which remains marginalised, notably the coffeehouses and shops. These two elements nevertheless provide the *Trilogy* with structure. In the case of Durrell, the city swings between realism and imagination. Many critics consider Durrell's Alexandria to be an invented city, while others argue that it cannot be dissociated from the real Alexandria. In fact, Alexandria is both real and unreal, largely because Durrell loved casting doubt and cultivating contradictions. Durrell once said of these ambiguities that 'paradox is central'<sup>36</sup> in writing.

When Durrell was asked about the main theme of *The Alexandria Quartet*, his answer was: 'modern love'<sup>37</sup>. The story is built on a network of sexual relationships. Infidelity, incest and homosexuality are present in this Alexandria which remains, in this respect, a European city rather than an Egyptian one. Here, once again, is a contradiction in Durrell's novel. From a historical point of view the city is real, but it is the scene of certain events which could not easily have happened in the city of

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

Urabi, the founder of Egyptian nationalism. In the *Trilogy*, however, love is Eastern. Men are not allowed to have sex outside marriage, and love and sex are simply synonymous. There is also a growing obsession with the female body. The body itself is orientalised through the eyes of men like Yasin and his father. Unexpectedly, the *Trilogy* displays more tolerance towards homosexuality than the *Quartet*.

Religion is the subject of chapter five. The intensive portrayal of religion in the *Trilogy* dominates the characters' actions, and each of their actions should be evaluated in terms of religion. They live suspended between the principles of religion and what they would have done if they had not been religious. The only character who recognises that his life is not in harmony with religion is Kamal. The others do not have the courage to accept this, but their behaviour highlights the conflict. In fact, it is not a problem with religion itself but a problem with the way the religious discourse is interpreted. None of the characters, not even the most religious ones, are able to demonstrate a clear understanding of the religious text. For Mahfouz, the over dependence of Egyptians on religion hinders progress. If Egypt is a weak nation, it is because science takes second place to blind faith.

Durrell, however, portrays religion differently in the *Quartet*, where it is used as a mask for secret activities. Characters use religion to meet, to plan and to deliver dangerous messages of conspiracy. In this respect, it is important to highlight that Durrell accuses all religions, not just one. From a narrative point of view, religion offers Durrell a good opportunity to adopt layered narration. Once again in a spirit of paradox, he manifests his love for Eastern mysticism but remains an orientalist. In the *Quartet*, Eastern esoteric traditions are celebrated as spiritual alternatives to religion.

The last chapter will shed light on Durrell's modernist writing techniques, and on Mahfouz's attempts to write a realistic novel adapted to the Arabic context, rather than simply imitating the Western novel. While Durrell saw the palimpsest as the most suitable form for his story in the city of Alexander, Mahfouz found the generation novel more suitable for his audience. Moreover, in *The Alexandria Quartet* the story escapes time. Chronological order is considerably abused, so that the story is developed and the characters mature outside the control of time. Equally, because truth is relative, it becomes an enemy to the plot. The more we read, the more we

become certain that events must be understood in relation to the position of their author in space and time. If time loses its power and its function in the *Quartet*, in the *Trilogy* it is inescapable. In the *Trilogy*, the characters develop with the story. They constantly pursue time but never quite catch it. Time controls traditions in the same way that it structures lives. This is why events are arranged in an obsessively chronological order.

The last part of the thesis will address some translation issues and make some suggestions. Reading the *Quartet* in Arabic and the *Trilogy* in English presents an opportunity for knowledge transfer in terms of translation skills. When the *Quartet* was published in Arabic, it met with criticism from Arab readers, which can be attributed to the history of the novel in Arabic literary tradition. For a readership recently introduced to the novel genre and only familiar with realistic novels, it was a mistake to translate the four volumes of a modernist novel separately with such long intervals between volumes. The conclusion makes some suggestions about how a new translation of some passages could improve the response of Arabic readers. As to translation issues in the *Trilogy*, they are more concerned with idiomatic use and culturally-specific humour.

Finally, Lawrence Durrell and Naguib Mahfouz are writers with different cultural backgrounds. They write in two different languages. Because literature mirrors the society in which it is produced, the themes are also different. Differences are not so marked if one compares the national literatures of France and England for instance. This is because their cultural and religious contexts share powerful similarities. With Arabic literature the approach is different. Mahfouz writes as a member of an occupied nation, while imperialism dominates Durrell's discourse. The religious and political contexts widen the gap between the two novelists and between the two literary traditions. Writing under a known threat of potential censorship and condemnation is different from writing with the freedom to express ideas openly. This freedom can be detected in the style and language used, where the choice of words is not always a simple task. There are also differences in terms of literary tradition, especially in literary genres. Where the novel genre is concerned, British writers were more advanced than their Arab colleagues. As this study has highlighted, the novel had only recently been introduced into Arabic literature. All these differences generate interesting meaning, however. They highlight the fact that

comparison means focusing not only on similarities but also on differences, and their role in unveiling a hidden transfer of ideas and values between cultures and literatures. On the importance of difference to comparative literature, Ute Heidmann notes in her article 'La différence, ce n'est pas ce qui nous sépare':

[...] le souci d'explorer ce qui est 'différentiel' ne mène pas au constat d'irréductibles différences, mais permet de comprendre que les oeuvres littéraires et culturelles évoluent en réponse les unes aux autres, dans un processus continu de relance, d'adaptation et de variation, de proposition de sens et de contre-proposition. La comparaison montre que ce processus dialogique et différentiel est créateur d'effets de sens toujours nouveaux et qu'il constitue le potentiel sémantique inépuisable non seulement de l'écriture littéraire, mais de toute création culturelle. [...] Elle [l'analyse différentielle] nous amène à découvrir des relations interculturelles et intertextuelles qui sont restées inaperçues dans ces optiques cloisonnées et nous permettent d'accéder à de nouvelles dimensions et effets de sens créés dans et par ces dialogues interculturels et interlinguistiques.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ute Heidmann, "La Différence, ce n'est pas ce qui nous sépare: pour une analyse différentielle des relations littéraires et culturelles," in *Zwischen Transfer und Vergleich: Theorien und Methoden der Literatur- und Kulturbeziehungen aus deutsch-französischer Perspektive*, ed. Christiane Solte-Gresser, Stuttgart: Steiner, 2013, pp. 341-342.

## Chapter 1

### Historical, religious, and political contexts for *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy*

Although *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy* are both set in Egypt and cover the same period between the two wars, they involve two different historical contexts. Where the *Quartet* is concerned, Lawrence Durrell insisted on many occasions that he was interested in Alexandria as a city which played a major role in shaping Western civilisation:

If one lets himself in for such an extensive work, the setting cannot be too restricted or else it is exhausted too quickly. I considered Athens but it lacked Alexandria's juxtaposition of races and cultures. And Alexandria finally is the starting point of our civilization.<sup>1</sup>

Because the city is one of the main characters in the *Quartet*, it is of crucial importance to examine its history in this context. The aim of this investigation is not to present the city's history as a historical work, for this is the task of historians, but to focus only on the historical elements which made Alexandria a city belonging simultaneously to East and West. This investigation is important to the understanding of the next chapters because, as we shall see, the notion of the West is present in all aspects of thinking in the *Quartet*.

Moreover, it is not possible to ignore the absence in the *Quartet* of what Egyptians consider to be their history. By this, I mean the effects of British colonisation and the sacrifices Egyptians were compelled to make to restore independence. The tetralogy deals with British colonisation in Egypt's history to an extent, but this remains very superficial. Again, Durrell focuses on the origins of Western ideas found in the city of Alexandria, and how Western thought has passed

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 38.

through. However, this cannot easily be understood simply by reading the four books. This raises the important question: is *The Alexandria Quartet* about the real Alexandria or is it about a fictitious city which has nothing to do with the real one?

In terms of the chapter dedicated to the city, some critics consider that the *Quartet* is not a work about Alexandria at all, and that Durrell did not know the city well. This is not actually true, but is understandable in the sense that, if we read the novels expecting to learn about the history of Alexandria from an Eastern point of view, we will almost certainly be disappointed. However, if we read them from a Western point of view, we are much more likely to understand them.

In addition, the story of the *Quartet* is based on the Coptic plot. In the chapter about religion, the political intrigue of the Hosnani family revolves around their ambition to offer Copts more power in Egypt. Coptic aspirations throughout the tetralogy nevertheless remain meaningless without a historical understanding of the Coptic cause in Egypt. In other words, the Coptic plot involving Nessim and Justine can only be fully understood by considering the background of Copts in the country. Examining this aspect will nevertheless reveal interesting points about religion as a major theme in *The Alexandria Quartet*.

In the *Trilogy*, the Orient is faithfully represented and matches the expectations of most readers, especially Arabs. The three volumes are full of historical events which represent Cairo and Egypt in general. There are many references to Egyptian personalities who have played a role in the history of their country. For instance, if we wish to understand the role of Fahmy in the story, we have to know about the participation of young Egyptians in demonstrations against the British. Moreover, the personality of al-Sayyid Ahmad and his friends can be fully appreciated only in relation to resistance to the British presence in Egypt and to the role played by the Wafd party in securing the country's independence. Many other real historical elements are used in the *Trilogy* to recall Cairo between the two wars as the city which spawned the Egyptian revolutions. In other words, *The Cairo Trilogy* provides its readers with an important account of Egyptian history, and simultaneously leads them through a Cairo where the atmosphere is closer to an Orient struggling to find itself.

Therefore, if the notion of the West prevails in the *Quartet*, the notion of the East dominates the *Trilogy*. This is why it is also important to consider Cairo from a historical point of view which is relevant to the story. In summary, to understand the works of Durrell and Mahfouz properly, we should examine the context of Alexandria in relation to the West, and that of Cairo in relation to the East.

### 1.1. Alexandria as the starting point of Western civilisation

Quoting Douglas Sladen, Haag says in his book about Alexandria:

Alexandria is an Italian city: its vegetation is almost Italian; it has wild flowers. Its climate is almost Italian; it has wind and rain as well as fierce blue skies. Its streets are almost entirely Italian; and Italian is its staple language. Even its ruins are Roman. If it were not for the mosque of Kait Bey, where the Pharos ought to be, and a few minarets in the strip of old Alexandria between the two forts, you would not believe that you were in a city of Islam.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that European civilisation left its traces in Alexandria. The city, with its monuments, buildings and libraries, is an open-air museum which reflects the foundations of Europe and European thought. To illustrate this point and to shed light on the significance of Alexandria to the West, this section will recall the main historical events which link the city so closely to Europe and which are relevant to studying *The Alexandria Quartet*.

Firstly, a knowledge of Greek civilisation is central to understanding the history of Alexandria. Macedon, a kingdom in northern Greece, developed into a large empire with Philip II as its ruler. With a well-trained army, he dedicated himself to acquiring Greek territories, and the war between Athens and Macedon lasted from 355 to 346 BC, ending in victory for Philip. He established himself in central Greece, and was killed in 336 BC.<sup>3</sup> The Greeks attempted to regain their independence after the death of Philip, but Philip's son, Alexander, subjugated the Greek rebels. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great conquered Alexandria and introduced the Hellenistic civilisation to the city. 'Hellenistic' is derived from 'Hellas' meaning Greece. The

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<sup>2</sup> Michael von Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> J.M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, pp. 212-213.

Hellenistic period covers the time between the death of Alexander the Great and the rise of the Roman Empire. During this period, Greek culture dominated the Mediterranean:

Greek was now the official language of the whole Near East; even more important, it was the language of the cities, the foci of the new world. Under the Seleucids the union of Hellenistic and oriental civilization to which Alexander may have aspired began to be a reality. They urgently sought Greek immigrants and founded new cities wherever they could as a means of providing some solid framework for their empire and of Hellenizing the local population.<sup>4</sup>

Egypt underwent a number of conquests. For centuries, it was subdued and was forced to adapt to new rulers and imposed civilisations. Before Alexander, Egyptians had had to adapt to Persian rule. They rebelled a number of times, suffering considerably under the Persians, and it would be a long time before they regained their independence. Alexander, who hated the Persians, found the Egyptians prepared to collaborate with him. He was supported by the Egyptian religious authorities because he respected the Egyptian people and recognised their religion. Directing his attention to Persia, Alexander crossed into Asia in 334 with a strong army, an important element of which was Greek.<sup>5</sup> This invasion can be considered an attempt to introduce Hellenism from Greece to the East, and in the *Quartet*, Darley recalls Alexandria's Hellenistic period with nostalgia:

The symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world are replaced here by something different, something subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself. The Orient cannot rejoice in the sweet anarchy of the body – for it has outstripped the body. (*Quartet* 18)

Alexander made Egypt a strategic point from which to begin his conquests of Asia. He established Alexandria on the shores of the Mediterranean as the capital of his proposed new empire. In his *Alexandria: A History and Guide*, E.M. Forster says:

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

He needed a capital for his new Egyptian kingdom, and to link it with Macedonia that capital had to be on the coast. Here was the very place – a splendid harbour, a perfect climate, fresh water, limestone quarries, and easy access to the Nile. Here he would perpetuate all that was best in Hellenism, and would create a metropolis for the greater Greece [...].<sup>6</sup>

Alexandria thus became the ruling city of the new empire. Its geographical position makes it a strategic point where East embraces West. Durrell refers to this hybrid characteristic when Darley says:

And hearing her speak his lines, touching every syllable of the thoughtful ironic Greek with tenderness, I felt once more the strange equivocal power of the city – its flat alluvial landscape and exhausted airs – and knew her for a true child of Alexandria; which is neither Greek, Syrian nor Egyptian, but a hybrid: a joint. (*Quartet* 28)

Alexander returned to Babylon where he died in 323 BC, leaving no heir to take his place. There is a reference to his death in the *Quartet* when Darley compares Nessim's office to 'a sarcophagus of tubular steel and lighted glass' (*Quartet* 30) recalling 'the glass sarcophagus of Alexander the Great, patron-genius of the city, which supposedly still lies buried somewhere in the city.'<sup>7</sup> Alexander's generals saw in this void an opportunity to take over the empire, and Alexander's work began to disintegrate. After 40 years of chaos, the independent states emerged as monarchies.<sup>8</sup> This was the era of the Ptolemies. Ptolemy Soter was the first to rule Egypt after the death of Alexander in 323 BC. The Ptolemies made Alexandria a capital of knowledge and wisdom. Philosophers were attracted to the city, either for research and learning or for teaching. Euclid, Archimedes, Eratosthenes and Hero all left their traces in Alexandria, making it one of the greatest of the Hellenistic cities. Following in the footsteps of Greece, it became the cradle of science.<sup>9</sup>

Science had been studied in Ancient Greece, but sporadically: there had been no coordination, no laboratories, and though important truths

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Morgan Forster and Miriam Allott, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide and Pharos and Pharillon*, The Abinger Edition of E. M. Forster, Vol. 16, London: Deutsch, 2004, pp. 8-9.

<sup>7</sup> Michael V. Diboll, *Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" in Its Egyptian Contexts*, Studies in British Literature, v.84, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, p. 128.

<sup>8</sup> J.M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, pp. 217-218.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

might be discovered or surmised, they were in danger of oblivion because they could not be popularised. The foundation of the Mouseion changed all this. Working under royal patronage and with every facility, science leapt to new heights, and gave valuable gifts to mankind. The third century B.C. is (from this point of view) the greatest period that civilization has ever known – greater even than the nineteenth century A.D. It did not bring happiness or wisdom: science never does. But it explored the physical universe and harnessed many powers for our use. Mathematics, Geography, Astronomy, Medicine, all grew to maturity [...].<sup>10</sup>

There is a reference to the Ptolemies in the *Quartet* when Darley speaks of Justine:

The bedroom for example with its bronze phosphorous light, the pastels burning in the green Tibetan urn diffusing a smell of roses to the whole room. By the bed the rich poignant scent of her powder hanging heavy in the bed-curtains. A dressing-table with its stoppered cream and salves. Over the bed the Universe of Ptolemy! She has had it drawn upon parchment and handsomely framed. It will hang forever over her bed, over the ikons in their leather cases, over the martial array of philosophers. (*Quartet* 112)

In parallel with this, however, political decline was approaching. During this period, Egypt was subject to agitation in the form of wars, revolts, intrigues and murders, which helped weaken and ultimately dissolve Alexander's empire. Only faith resisted the destructive winds of greed and rivalry. The temples were untouched as everyone had remained uniquely unanimous about preserving them.

At that time, Rome was a growing power, while the dynasty of the Ptolemies was sinking into disorder. Its kings were weak and lacked skill in ruling the country. The people became more dissatisfied, especially when Cleopatra allied herself to Julius Caesar. Egyptians considered Cleopatra to have betrayed them and their country, but she remained oblivious to criticism of the new relationship. Cleopatra's alliance with Marc Antony, however, accelerated the collapse of her reign. When

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<sup>10</sup> Edward Morgan Forster and Miriam Allott, *Alexandria: A History and a Guide and Pharos and Pharillon*, The Abinger Edition of E. M. Forster, Vol. 16, London: Deutsch, 2004, pp. 40-41.

Marc Antony was killed, Cleopatra committed suicide, leaving Egypt in the hands of Augustus Caesar in 30 BC. The death of Cleopatra marked the end of the Ptolemaic period and the beginning of a Roman one. In the tetralogy there is a reference to the story of Antony and Cleopatra through Cavafy's poem, "The God abandons Antony".

Moreover, there are parallels between the stories of Darley and Marc Antony. Both are Europeans who fall in love with an Egyptian woman. Both Justine and Cleopatra love and seduce men. Both of them are courtesans and both are unfaithful. Kaczvinsky says of these similarities:

Like Antony, [Darley] is seduced by the intensity and love of an Alexandrian woman. He is then tracked down by a rival and a ruler, "Prince" Nessim, who seeks his destruction. While he is on the water (during the duckshoot), he is left defenseless, betrayed by his lover. He returns to Alexandria with seemingly no hope for the future. Darley identifies with the Antony of Cavafy's poem, "The God Abandons Antony," creatively translated by Durrell in the "Consequential Data" at the back of *Justine* – "Your fortunes having failed you now, / Hopes gone aground, a lifetime of desires / Turned into smoke" (lines 4-6). Darley's identification with Antony raises his relationship with Justine to mythic stature. More importantly, it suggests to him (and to us) that in his personal relationship with Justine, history may be repeating itself. Yet there is one crucial difference between Darley and Antony: Antony, unable to escape Alexandria, commits suicide, while Darley, able to flee to a Greek island, remains only wounded and tries to "heal" himself through art. But Antony's suicide is exactly what Darley fears; it is one very real alternative.<sup>11</sup>

Another important element of the tetralogy's context involves the Jewish presence in Alexandria. The Jews constituted an important community in the city:

One of the greatest Jewish colonies was Alexandria, where they had gathered from about 300 BC. The Alexandrian Jews were Greek-

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<sup>11</sup> Donald P. Kaczvinsky, *Lawrence Durrell's Major Novels, Or, The Kingdom of the Imagination*, Selinsgrove: London: Susquehanna University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1997, p. 45.

speakers; there the old Testament was first translated into Greek and when Jesus was born there were probably more Jews there than in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup>

The Jewish quarters were built around synagogues and courts of law-forming clusters. The Jewish religion was so strong that it attracted Romans who had abandoned Christianity. This naturally fuelled hatred of the Jews, and rioting began in Alexandria which spread to other cities.<sup>13</sup> In AD 66, the great Jewish uprising became a sign of growing Jewish nationalism, and the Jews conquered Jerusalem. The riots continued, however, and Jerusalem was once again taken from them. Hadrian, the Roman emperor, restricted Jews to entering the city only once a year, but they continued to live in the empire with exemption from any Roman laws which did not comply with their religious precepts.<sup>14</sup> The Jews nevertheless resented Rome and saw the Romans merely as conquerors who, like previous occupying forces, contributed to the dispersal of their communities.<sup>15</sup> The Romans also introduced Christianity to Egypt along with Roman culture. The Egyptians, especially the poor, were seduced by the new religion and were readily converted.

In 641, Egypt submitted to Arabs and fell to Islam. In spite of its significant Greek and Jewish communities, Egypt allied with the Arabs against the West. However, Hellenistic and Roman civilisation remained prominent, and when Amr reached Egypt, he was fair to its inhabitants. Darley mentions this as part of the history of the city when he says:

I felt like answering him in the words of the dying Amr:\* 'I feel as if heaven lay close upon the earth and I between them both, breathing through the eye of a needle.' (*Quartet 77*)

In addition, Amr respected the freedom of Copts to practise their religion, and promised security for them and their property. This linked them to the rest of the Egyptian population. Many Copts were converted to Islam and many of them married Arab women. The population of Egypt at this time was made up of Egyptians, Syrians, Persians, Greeks and Jews. Converts from all five groups learnt

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<sup>12</sup> J.M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, p. 263.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

Arabic, and the Greek language lost its dominance, making Hellenistic and Roman civilisation a thing of the past. Egypt's long history of conquest and occupation, however, had made the country, and especially Alexandria, a cradle of civilisation, a mixture of the cultures of ancient Egypt, Persia, Greece, and the Roman and Arabic empires.

The relevance of Alexandria's history to the work of Durrell remains minor in terms of the period between the two wars, but this does not mean the *Quartet* ignores this period altogether. The British presence in Egypt, British involvement in the Suez Canal (*Quartet* 459), the High Commission and its rule from 1888 (*Quartet* 474) are examples which reflect this period but which add no important information to the interpretation of the work. However, the cause of the Coptic community in Egypt very much needs to be taken into consideration, not because it forms part of Egypt's history but because it is closely related to the theme of religion and to the spirit of Alexandria.

## 1.2. The Coptic cause and *The Alexandria Quartet*

The Coptic religion is involved in *The Alexandria Quartet* through the Hosnani family. Faltaus, the father, is an invalid and is confined to a wheelchair. He is 'dying of some obscure disease of the musculature' (*Quartet* 404). Leila, his wife, is 20 years his junior. Because he is much older than her, their marriage is compared to a 'merger between two great companies' (*Quartet* 407). Leila completed her studies in Cairo and hoped to continue them in Europe, but her parents' conservatism has obliged her to marry and stay in Egypt. However, she 'had been among the first Coptic women to abandon the veil and to start to take up the study of medicine against her parents' will' (*Quartet* 259). As well as being especially beautiful, Leila reads books and periodicals in different languages. Nessim is the Hosnani's eldest son. He is a wealthy and successful banker, and highly respected by Alexandrians. He has been educated abroad and his English and French are perfect. Nessim is extremely generous and does not care about money. The second of the Hosnani's sons is Narouz. It is Narouz who manages the family estate, but unlike the elegant Nessim, Narouz is unpredictable. His hare lip has forced him to live in seclusion like 'a Coptic squire, never stirring from Karm Abu Girg' (*Quartet* 251). Justine, a Jewish

woman, has joined the family by marrying Nessim. She has renounced Judaism to embrace Coptic Christianity ‘in obedience to Nessim’s wish’ (*Quartet* 275).

Another important character who illustrates the situation of the Copts in Egypt is Mountolive. Mountolive is the only English character who lends his name to the title of one of the books in the *Quartet*. As a young man with a brilliant future, Mountolive ‘had been sent to Egypt for a year in order to improve his Arabic and found himself attached to the High Commission as a sort of scribe to await his diplomatic posting’ (*Quartet* 397). Mountolive has managed to obtain a letter of introduction which has allowed him to be welcomed into the Hosnani family. After reading the letter, Faltaus tells Mountolive: ‘You will come and stay with us – it is the only way to improve your Arabic. For two months if you wish.’ (*Quartet* 405)

The Coptic cause is mentioned for the first time one evening during dinner in the house of the Hosnanis. When he commits ‘one of those *gaffes*’ (*Quartet* 420) about the religious identity of the Hosnani family, Mountolive is immediately corrected by Leila who tells him: ‘But my dear David, we are not Moslems, but Christians *like yourself*.’ (*Quartet* 420) Leila chides him gently, but Faltaus reacts indignantly and aggressively:

The slip exactly expresses the British point of view – the view with which we Copts have always had to contend. There were never any differences between us and the Moslems in Egypt before they came. The British have taught the Moslems to hate the Copts and to discriminate against them. Yes, Mountolive, the British. Pay heed to my words. (*Quartet* 420)

The conflict between Copts and Muslims in Egypt has its roots in AD 641 when Arabs brought Islam to Egypt. Immediately after the conquest, Egyptian Christians became *dhimmis*. This meant that in order to have the right of residence in an Islamic state, non-Muslim citizens had to sign what was known at that time as the *dhimma* contract.<sup>16</sup> This protected the rights of non-Muslim religious communities. They were free from Muslim religious observances, and their right to property was

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<sup>16</sup> Mariam F. Ayad and Coptic Orthodox Church Centre (Stevenage, England), eds., *Coptic Culture: Past, Present and Future*, Stevenage, U.K.: Oakville, CT: The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre; [distributor] David Brown Book Co, 2012, p. 27.

guaranteed. In return, the *dhimma* contract bound *dhimmis* to remain loyal to rulers<sup>17</sup> even though they had only limited political rights. *Dhimmis* also had to pay a tax called *jizya*. Taxes weighed heavily on the shoulders of non-Muslim citizens, and this created tension, causing some uprisings which were rapidly repressed.<sup>18</sup> It was only in 1855 during the reign of Said Pasha that the *jizya* tax was lifted.<sup>19</sup>

The condition of Copts improved under the dynasty of Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman Albanian commander who, after the defeat and departure of the French in 1801, instituted important military, economic and social reforms. Michael J. Reimer describes the achievements of Muhammad Ali Pasha in his book about Alexandria:

In the 1820s, Muhammad Ali's need for large numbers of soldiers drove him to forcibly impress the fellahin, and his desire to modernize his army to import military advisers, engineers, and medical officers from Europe, who were to train 'Ottoman-Egyptians' in the new scientific and technical fields. The result was an army that gave the pasha regional dominance until the intervention of the European powers in 1840, which curtailed his expansionism but did not destroy the military and para-military institutions he had founded. Closely connected to military modernization was the development of a centralized administrative apparatus that supervised the increasingly diversified activities of the viceregal state. The old concessionary administration of the Ottoman period was gradually replaced by a hierarchically organized and formally regulated bureaucracy under the personal direction of the khedive. New departments of government concerned with commerce, industry, public hygiene, education, and printing were set up.<sup>20</sup>

Muhammad Ali realised that the modernisation of Egypt required the collaboration of all Egyptians, regardless of their religious affiliation. He began by establishing respect for the Copts' religion. Despite being a Muslim himself, he did

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> Jak Tajir and N. Makar Ragai, *Christians in Muslim Egypt: An Historical Study of the Relations between Copts and Muslims from 640 to 1922*, Arbeiten Zum Spätantiken Und Koptischen Ägypten 10, Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1998, p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> Michael J. Reimer, *Colonial Bridgehead: Government and Society in Alexandria, 1807-1882*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1997, p. 4.

not oppose the building of churches.<sup>21</sup> Although the issue was sensitive, especially for Muslims, the viceroy had no problem allowing Copts to occupy key administrative positions. He was the first to grant certain Copts the title of 'Bey', and was the first to take Copts onto his advisory board.<sup>22</sup> Faltaus makes a direct reference to this when he tells Mountolive:

When Mohammed Ali came to Egypt he put all the financial affairs of the country into the hands of the Copts. So did Ismail his successor. Again and again you will find that Egypt was to all intents and purposes ruled by us, the despised Copts, because we had more brains and more integrity than the others. Indeed, when Mohammed Ali first arrived he found a Copt in charge of all state affairs and made him his Grand Vizier.' (*Quartet* 422)

El-Feki notes of Ismail Pasha, the grandson of Muhammad Ali, who was known as Ismail the Magnificent:

Ismail Pasha, who was motivated by his aim of making modern Egypt a part of Europe, gave financial support to the Coptic schools, and appointed Coptic judges in the Courts. In 1866, he granted Copts the right to become members in the first Egyptian parliament Majlis Shura Al-Nuwwab.<sup>23</sup>

If Muhammad Ali and Khedive Ismail succeeded in reawakening the Coptic identity and relieving the Coptic community from persecution, the presence of the British was a major disappointment. In one of his reports on Egypt, Lord Cromer made the following remark: "When England occupied Egypt, all the Egyptian interests were in the hands of the Copts."<sup>24</sup> We can deduce from Cromer's words that British administrators believed their first task was to eliminate the Coptic

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<sup>21</sup> Moustafa El Feki, *Copts in Egyptian Politics (1919-1952)*, Cairo : General Egyptian Book Organization, 1991, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Jak Tajir and N. Makar Ragai, *Christians in Muslim Egypt: An Historical Study of the Relations between Copts and Muslims from 640 to 1922*, Arbeiten Zum Spätantiken Und Koptischen Ägypten 10, Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1998, p. 199.

<sup>23</sup> Moustafa El Feki, *Copts in Egyptian Politics (1919-1952)*, Cairo : General Egyptian Book Organization, 1991, p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Jak Tajir and N. Makar Ragai, *Christians in Muslim Egypt: An Historical Study of the Relations between Copts and Muslims from 640 to 1922*, Arbeiten Zum Spätantiken Und Koptischen Ägypten 10, Altenberge: Oros Verlag, 1998, p. 213.

monopoly of key positions. The Egyptian Coptic journalist and politician Mikhail Kyriakos highlights this in his *Copts and Moslems Under British Control*:

When Egypt was occupied by the British in 1882, the Copts rejoiced in the coming of a Christian nation, and looked forward to a new era of freedom and prosperity. It did not occur to them that a great and civilised nation like the English would be so ignorant as not to know that the true Egyptians, then reduced to little more than seven hundred thousand in a population of seven millions, were Christians and not Moslems. They soon found that their existence was simply ignored by the new rulers.<sup>25</sup>

Tensions between Europeans and Copts, however, went back a long way. During the Crusades, the Copts would not subscribe to the Crusaders' claims that they were trying to protect Christian minorities.<sup>26</sup> They were expected to collaborate with the Crusaders against Muslims but, surprisingly, this did not happen. Despite the tensions between Muslims and the Coptic community, Copts did not welcome the Crusaders and chose instead to demonstrate their loyalty to Egypt. *The Alexandria Quartet* makes reference to the Coptic position when Faltaus, speaking of the first Crusade, explains to Mountolive that the Bishop of Salisbury 'openly said he considered these Oriental Christians as worse than infidels' (*Quartet* 421). Nessim also makes reference to this historical point in his open criticism of Mountolive when he says: 'You have remained Crusaders at heart' (*Quartet* 425).

The British presence in Egypt had a negative effect on the relationship between Muslims and Copts. On January 26th, 1911, Gorst visited provinces where there were important populations of Copts in order to investigate Coptic grievances. An article was published in the wake of this visit, in which the Copts and their claims were ridiculed.<sup>27</sup> The content of the telegram appears in Mikhail Kyriakos' book. Gorst summarises the Coptic demands in five points:

- 1- Right of the Copts to take advantage of the educational facilities provided by the new Provincial Councils.

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<sup>25</sup> Kyriakos Mikhail, *Copts and Moslems Under British Control; a Collection of Facts and a Résumé of Authoritative Opinions on the Coptic Question*, Port Washington, N.Y: Kennikat Press, 1971, pp. 11-12.

<sup>26</sup> Moustafa El Feki, *Copts in Egyptian Politics (1919-1952)*, Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1991, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

- 2- Recognition of capacity as the sole test for admission to government appointments.
- 3- Representation of the Coptic community in the representative institutions of Egypt.
- 4- Permission for non-Moslems in government offices and schools to substitute another day for Friday as their day of rest.
- 5- Conferring of government grants on all deserving institutions without invidious distinction.<sup>28</sup>

According to Gorst, these claims were not legitimate, and he judged that:

No class has profited more by the era of good government introduced into Egypt by the British Occupation, as is amply testified by the fact that many of the wealthiest men and largest landowners in the country are Copts. Regarding their situation as a whole it compares very favourably with that of the Moslem population, and I have no hesitation in stating that at the present moment the Copts have no real grievances of any importance.<sup>29</sup>

Gorst suggested that the Copts aspired to a separate community, and this led to Coptic protest. Gorst's mission in Egypt is described in the tetralogy by Faltaus, who discusses most of the points which appeared in Gorst's report. He even mentions the word 'grievances', just like the High Commissioner.

The British changed it, with their hatred of the Copts. Gorst initiated a diplomatic friendship with Khedive Abbas, and as a result of his schemes not a single Copt was to be found in the entourage of the Court or even in the services of its departments. Indeed, if you spoke to the men who surrounded that corrupt and bestial man, supported by the British, you would have been led to think that the enemy was the Christian part of the nation. At this point, let me read you something.' Here Narouz, swiftly as a well-rehearsed acolyte, slipped into the next room and returned with a book with a marker in it. He laid it open on the lap of his father and returned in a flash to his seat. Clearing his throat the sick man read harshly: "When the British took control

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<sup>28</sup> Kyriakos Mikhail, *Copts and Moslems Under British Control; a Collection of Facts and a Résumé of Authoritative Opinions on the Coptic Question*, Port Washington, N.Y: Kennikat Press, 1971, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

of Egypt the Copts occupied a number of the highest positions in the State. In less than a quarter of a century almost all the Coptic Heads of Departments had disappeared. They were at first fully represented in the bench of judges, but gradually the number was reduced to *nil*; the process of removing them and shutting the door against fresh appointments has gone on until they have been reduced to a state of discouragement bordering on despair!" These are the words of an Englishman. It is to his honour that he has written them.' He snapped the book shut and went on. 'Today, with British rule, the Copt is debarred from holding the position of Governor or even of *Mamur* — the administrative magistrate of a province. Even those who work for the Government are compelled to work on Sunday because, in deference to the Moslems, Friday has been made a day of prayer. No provision has been made for the Copts to worship. They are not even properly represented on Government Councils and Committees. They pay large taxes for education — but no provision is made that such money goes towards Christian education. It is all Islamic. But I will not weary you with the rest of our grievances. Only that you should understand why we feel that Britain hates us and wishes to stamp us out.' (*Quartet* 423-424)

The reduction of important positions open to Copts ignited anti-British feeling among them. As a result, they decided to collaborate with Muslims against British occupation. It was the Wafd party that facilitated this collaboration. In 1919, Sa'd Zaghlul (1859-1927) announced the formation of the secular Wafd party under the slogan 'Egypt for Egyptians'.<sup>30</sup> The leader of the nationalist movement invited Copts and Muslims to work together as Egyptians, and not as different religious communities. The Copts were invited to take part in major decisions and were treated on equal terms with Muslims.

Within the Wafd the Copts enjoyed a privileged position, particularly in the days of its founder Sa'd Zaghlul. His successor, Mustafa al-Nahas, even chose Makram 'Ubaid as secretary general of the party. After nearly

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<sup>30</sup> Mohammad Sohirin Solihin, *Copts and Muslims in Egypt: A study on Harmony and Hostility*, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1991, p. 23.

sixty years since its re-emergence, the Wafd in the 1970s still clung to its national unity principles. When Ibrahim Faraj, a Copt, was the secretary of the party, the Muslim Brotherhood made an alliance with the Wafd. In an interview with the British and American journalists he emphasized: 'They accused our movement of being motivated by religious tendencies, but they have witnessed both the Copts and Muslims are unshakeably unified. The Christians were in the forefront of demonstrations even in 1919 and some of them became martyrs against the British troops'.<sup>31</sup>

Although relations between Copts and Muslims in Egypt were characterised by tensions from time to time, the two religious communities agreed that coexistence had never been a problem. Both of them attributed these tensions to colonial strategies. Nessim says to Mountolive, for example, 'for us there was no real war between Cross and Crescent. That was entirely a Western European creation. So indeed was the idea of the cruel Moslem infidel. The Moslem was never a persecutor of the Copts on religious grounds.' (*Quartet* 425) For Britain, creating disunity between Copts and Muslims increased the chance of eliminating resistance. However, the British never managed to divide the Egyptians. They had to deal with collective uprisings and protests because the Egyptian independence movement was supported by all religious affiliations. Whether they were Copts, Jews or Muslims, the primary concern of Egyptians was to free Egypt from Britain.

Mountolive's slip is the catalyst for the outburst by Faltaus and the introduction of the Coptic cause to the story. 'It is good that we should mention these matters openly because we Copts feel them in here, in our deepest hearts.' (*Quartet* 421) Faltaus' reaction, at the same time, reveals the extent to which the Copts have been wounded by the British during their occupation of Egypt, and also introduces the political intrigue in which most of the characters of the tetralogy are involved, either directly or indirectly.

Therefore, the background of ancient Alexandria is relevant to the *Quartet* on the one hand, and the Coptic cause provides a focus for the influence of Western culture on the other. Can we, however, say the same about Cairo? Can we apply the same approach? Do we need to go back to the pharaonic period to examine the

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

relevance of the city to Mahfouz's ideas throughout the *Trilogy*? Does Mahfouz illustrate the city through its past or through its present? Lastly, is British colonisation relevant to the story, or is it only a minor event which needs no detailed consideration?

### 1.3. *The Cairo Trilogy: a historical document*

#### 1.3.1. Arab and Ottoman Egypt (641-1882)

In order to assess the role of history in *The Cairo Trilogy*, the historical account given in the previous part needs to be reconsidered. After the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, two Arab empires emerged. At the head of each empire was a Caliph (a political and religious successor to the prophet Muhammad). Government policies were based on religion. The Umayyad caliphate was founded in the year 661 as a major division of the Arab empire. Its capital was Damascus because it was based in Syria. In 750 it was displaced by the Abbasid caliphate based in Baghdad. Some of the characters in the *Trilogy*, such as Amina, Yasin and Fahmy are nostalgic about the Muslim caliphate (*Trilogy* 61, 62, 347).

Islam and Islamic institutions were deeply rooted in Egypt at the time of the Fatimid dynasty. Despite this stability, however, an important new empire emerged with the Turks.

Some of them had been granted a home by the Sassanids in their last years in return for help. In those days the Turkish 'empire', if that is the right word for their tribal confederation, ran right across Asia; it was their first great era. Like that of other nomadic peoples, this ascendancy soon proved to be transient. The Turks faced at the same time inter-tribal divisions and a resurgence of Chinese power and it was on a divided and disheartened people that there had fallen the great Arab onslaught.<sup>32</sup>

In 1453, Constantinople fell to the Turks, led by Mehmet II, the Conqueror. Mehmet made the famous church of St Sophia into a mosque, and the fall of Constantinople was the beginning of a Turkish conquest of limitless ambition. The Turks conquered nearly all the territories of the Mediterranean and a number of others in Europe. The

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<sup>32</sup> J.M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, p. 373.

rule of the Ottoman Empire over Egypt began in 1517 with Sultan Selim's conquest of Cairo.<sup>33</sup> In the nineteenth century, the Ottomans began to lose territories in Europe and Africa, and the Turkish decline started when Mehmet Ali established himself as Governor of Egypt in 1805. The empire was so big that the decline accelerated quickly. The main reason behind this decline was the growth of nationalism in Europe and Africa.

France emerged as a major power, competing with Britain for colonies. To prepare France for the threat represented by Britain, Napoleon convinced the French government of the necessity of an expedition to Egypt. Napoleon tried to persuade the Egyptians that his intervention in Egypt meant chasing out the Mamelukes and restoring the rights of the people. It is important to mention here that Egypt had been ruled by the Mamelukes for 300 years. In fact, Napoleon's real motive lay in protecting the interests of France in Egypt because the Mamelukes had become a serious threat. However, the plan failed and Napoleon lost the allegiance of the Egyptians. To meet the growing needs of his army, he imposed heavy taxes and seized lands where it was necessary. His repression led to revolts, and Napoleon was unable to restore calm. His mission lasted no longer than six months, and instead of the friendship he had hoped to cultivate, he left Egypt an enemy.

After Napoleon's departure, Egypt fell victim to anarchy once again. The next man the Egyptians chose to trust was Mohamed Aly, an Albanian soldier who proved his worth by defeating the Mamelukes. He was afforded great respect in Egypt as he was the only leader to relieve the country from the infidels. After assuring the stability of the country, Mohamed Aly turned to improving economic prosperity by encouraging the production of cotton. However, his successors were less brilliant. For example, Abbas Hilmi (1813-1854), his grandson, gave the British the railway concession linking Cairo to Alexandria. Muhammad Said (1822-1863), who succeeded Abbas Pasha, is another example of an imprudent ruler. He offered the British the opportunity to set up the Bank of Egypt, and allowed them to use routes in Egypt to protect their colonial plans in Asia.

Muhammad Said Pasha, murdered in 1854, had been influenced by his education in Europe and admired French culture. Said Pasha took a more

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

Westernised approach to the problems of Egypt than his predecessors. He treated the Egyptians justly, improving the system of taxation and encouraging foreign trade by respecting people's rights and property. His great mistake, however, was to give Ferdinand de Lesseps the concession to build the Suez Canal. The Canal was of crucial importance to the British. It was their bridge to the East, and the British government's first priority was to ensure it could be used without hindrance. Egyptians considered Said Pasha's generosity to his friend de Lesseps a fatal error which would lead the country to disaster. The Suez Canal concession can be regarded as the real trigger for the British occupation.

From 1863 to 1879, Egypt had been ruled by Ismail, the grandson of Mohamed Aly. Like Said Pasha, he was influenced by Europe, where he had been educated. Ismail was the first khedive<sup>34</sup> of Egypt. He had studied in France and brought with him European ideas. He became ruler in 1863, and benefited from economic change brought about by the Civil War in the United States, when the American cotton trade suffered with the abolition of slavery. The value of Egyptian cotton increased, opening the way to economic growth and social prosperity. This prosperity was reflected in the wealth of Shaddad Bey Abd al-Hamid, who was 'the greatest of all the cotton merchants' (*Trilogy* 500). Ismail, however, failed to establish a long-term strategy. His calculations excluded the possibility that things could change at any moment. With the end of the civil war, the American economy recovered, bringing serious losses to the cotton trade in Egypt. Debts became unmanageable.

The cotton business therefore failed instead of bringing prosperity, and European banks could no longer trust the Egyptian financial situation. Because liabilities largely exceeded assets, payments were postponed. In 1876, the Egyptian government was declared bankrupt and the intervention of the French and British was inevitable. Europe sent its representatives to Egypt under the pretext of

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<sup>34</sup> *Cassell's Dictionary of Word Histories* defines the word Khedive as 'the official title of the governor of Egypt under the Turks, 1867-1914'. The title of Khedive, sometimes translated as Viceroy, passed from father to son. It was first conferred on Ismail Pasha by the Ottoman Sultan in 1867. The title was used by Ismail's successors until 1914. Abbas II Hilmi was the last Khedive to bear this title in Egypt. He was succeeded by his uncle Husayn Kamal, who assumed the title of Sultan in 1914.

protecting the interests of creditors, and this is where interference in Egyptian affairs began. The European officials appointed to reduce Egypt's debt were seen by Egyptian nationalists as agents of European imperialism. Foreigners in Egypt were privileged, and this deepened the resentment of Egyptians, who ultimately refused to pay the heavy taxes imposed by the European agents. As a result, revolutions erupted. The Suez Canal, however, was too important to the British, who suppressed the revolution of 1882 and refused to compromise in terms of their interests in Egypt. This new situation nurtured the hatred of the nationalists, who forgot the Ottoman occupation and made the British a target instead. In 1914, the title of khedive was replaced by that of Sultan.<sup>35</sup>

The peasants had been heavily taxed for a long time and no more money could be squeezed from them. The miserable situation in which Ismail had put the Egyptians became unbearable, and calls for change began to emerge. The British government decided that its officials would have to intervene to reconstruct the health of the Egyptian economy. A council of ministers had been formed, from which Ismail had been excluded. Ironically, it was his son, Tewfik, who had been chosen as President of the Council. Despite various attempts to restore his authority, Ismail was instead asked to abdicate by both France and Britain. The Sultan submitted to their pressure and removed Ismail.

In Egypt, nationalism was directed against Europeans rather than the Ottomans. Educated Egyptians adopted political ideas from Europe and started applying them to their own context. Young Egyptians learnt from the Europeans and their voices began to have an important influence. Another turning point in imperial history in Egypt was the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which marked the start of European interference in Egypt. The 10<sup>th</sup> of June saw a turning point in the relationship between the Egyptians and the British. Fifty Christians were killed during a riot in Alexandria, among them a British officer. The situation worsened when the British Consul was injured. Urabi, a fervent nationalist in Cairo, was accused of being behind the event, but unexpectedly, it was Urabi who restored calm. Britain chose to punish those involved as an example. Riots had to be suppressed and rebels had to be punished severely. The British were keen to quash nationalist feeling before it started to disrupt foreign interests in Egypt.

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<sup>35</sup> J.M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, pp. 932, 933, 934.

### 1.3.2. Egypt under the Veiled Protectorate (1882 to 1914)

Urabi (1841-1911), was the leader of the first Egyptian nationalist revolt against the power of the khedives and against European domination. He took part in protests against reforms undertaken by Khedive Ismail Pasha. Urabi enjoyed great popularity among the Egyptians. Incapable of surmounting the obstacles facing him, the khedive resigned in favour of his son Tewfik. Urabi's ambition went further, however. He hoped to end Western influence in Egypt and limit the power of Khedive Tewfik. The interests of the French and British governments were threatened by Urabi's ideas, especially when he limited access to the port of Alexandria for the French and British fleets. The Egyptian Army was defeated at the battle of Tel el-Kebir in 1882, and Urabi was exiled by Lord Dufferin. Some nationalists were imprisoned while others were simply executed. In *Palace Walk*, Amina evokes the subject of Urabi in a discussion of political issues with Yasin and Fahmy during the coffee hour:

The revolutionary leader Urabi Pasha was one of the greatest men and one of the most courageous. Sa'd and the others are nothing compared with him. He was in the cavalry, a fighting man. What did he get from the English, boys? They imprisoned him and then exiled him to a land on the other side of the world. (*Trilogy* 348)

Another influential nationalist who fought with Urabi against the British was Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). He was a famous theologian and reformer of the period. There is a reference to him in *Sugar Street*, when al-Sayyid Ahmad cites him as the most important theologian in Egypt (*Trilogy* 993). After his participation in Urabi's revolt, he was forced into exile, first in Lebanon and then in France. For six years he was not allowed to return to Egypt. In 1884, he moved to France, where he joined al-Afghani, and together they published an Islamic revolutionary newspaper, *Al Urwa al Wuthqa*, which had an anti-British orientation.

Lord Cromer was appointed by Britain as the Consul-General of Egypt. His first main task was to redress the financial situation of the country by reducing its debts. When Tewfik died in 1892, he was succeeded by his son, Abbas Hilmi. He was only 18 years old and had been educated in Vienna. Rulers who had been educated in Europe were preferred by Britain because they were open to change and were easily

influenced, since most of them admired European thinking. Lord Cromer appreciated the collaboration of Abbas Hilmi.

Among the most influential Egyptians of that time was Mustapha Kemal (1874-1908), a nationalist from Cairo. His education in France provided him with ideas and confidence, and he was introduced to the intense rivalry between Britain and France. Living in France deepened Kemal's nationalist feelings, and when he came back to defend the independence of his country, he found an extensive audience ready to listen to his patriotic speeches. Mustapha Kemal founded the National Party, which played a major role in awakening anti-British sentiments, but his own health problems led to his early death.

In 1906 the British committed an atrocity in the village of Denshawai. The causes of this incident did not justify the results. It began simply with a pigeon hunt which turned into a massacre, but highlights the tension between the British and the Egyptians, especially the peasants who had developed a strong sense of nationalism. Some British officers were hunting pigeons, ignoring the fact that the pigeons belonged to villagers. The villagers attempted to defend their property, at which point the British officers considered themselves to be in danger and fired on the peasants. One British officer died and the villagers were accused of an unpardonable crime. The British decided to make an example of them by sentencing some peasants to death. The incident left deep wounds in the collective Egyptian memory, a fact recalled by al-Sayyid Ahmad when he is caught and forced by British soldiers to fill the hole in the road which had been dug to obstruct British trucks:

I'll remember this dreadful hour for the remainder of my life, if there is a remainder.... Bullets, the gallows, not to mention the brutal injustice the English inflicted on the villagers at Dinshawai. (*Trilogy* 478)

Lord Cromer was convinced that Britain must rule Egypt. For him the Egyptian mind was limited and incapable of ruling. He believed that the superior must govern the inferior, and for this reason he made no apparent attempts to cultivate Egyptians during his mission in Egypt. Colonialists like Cromer believed that the colonisers offered opportunities to the colonised, and that the latter must learn from the former instead of fighting for an independence they did not deserve. In short, Lord Cromer believed Egypt should be grateful to Britain for its

interference. Since the Egyptians were not fit to govern, it was inconceivable that Britain should leave Egypt.

During the last days of Lord Cromer's mission, the insecurity of foreigners became a burden. The growing popularity of the nationalists worried the British who, in 1907, chose Sir Eldon Gorst to succeed Lord Cromer in Egypt. Gorst's new mission was to restore security and to protect foreigners and their interests. He came with no concessions and was not prepared to make any compromises regarding the British occupation. This change in leadership did not improve the situation. Instead, the number of crimes increased dramatically, worsening the feeling of insecurity. In addition, disease was rife, and the medical infrastructure remained poor. This led to the famous plague, which caused a significant number of deaths in Egypt. Gorst did not intend to repair what Cromer had destroyed. He accepted his mission in Egypt to continue what Cromer had started. He hated nationalists and worked hard to break the alliance between them and the Copts.

Lord Kitchener, on the other hand, was a man who had understood how things could work. He knew that coercion was not the best solution. Since oppression and threats had led to revolt, he tried winning the sympathy of the Egyptians by offering them what Lord Cromer and Lord Gorst had not. He first established a good reputation for himself by helping Egypt to govern Sudan. He then offered the Egyptians a new constitution in 1913, giving them a role in decision-making. The constitution did not allow total self-government, but was a step which brought some satisfaction to the nationalists.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, Lord Kitchener became chief of the British forces. In the same year, Turkey decided to wage war on the side of Germany. This event is referred to in the *Trilogy* when al-Sayyid Ahmad, during his talkative moments in the night, tells his wife:

All we read about in the papers are British victories. Will they really win or will the Germans and Turks be victorious in the end? (*Trilogy* 17)

Thus, Egypt had to adapt to its new position as part of this conflict. The Egyptian Prime Minister, Hussein Rushdi, gave instructions to cooperate with Britain. This decision was not unanimously supported since the Egyptians had to defend non-

Muslims against Muslims. The dispute is referred to in *Palace Walk* when Fahmy, during the family's coffee hour, declares his support for the Germans to Yasin:

The important thing is to rid ourselves of the nightmare of the English and for the caliphate to return to its previous grandeur. Then we will find the way prepared for us. (*Trilogy* 61-62)

In this same year, the British government declared Egypt a protectorate. This was the only solution which would lend legitimacy to Britain's presence in Egypt. At this time, Abbas Hilmi was in Constantinople. When Britain declared war on the Ottomans, Hilmi was accused of plotting against British rule and was removed. The Egyptians saw him as the man who could rescue the country. Amina expresses the Egyptians' love for Abbas Hilmi when she prays for him: "Our Lord can return our sovereign Abbas to us." (*Trilogy* 17) Abbas had been replaced by Husayn Kamal, not as khedive but as Sultan.

Egyptians hoped that the Germans and Ottomans would win the war against the British, but the reverse happened: "The Germans were defeated." (*Trilogy* 342) The British were victorious and became more powerful and determined than before. With this victory, Egyptians grew desperate. Yasin expresses Egyptian disappointment after the British victory:

How could anyone think of requesting independence for Egypt from the English immediately after their victory over the Germans and the Ottoman Empire? (*Trilogy* 345)

When Husayn Kamal (the Sultan of Egypt during the British Protectorate from 1914 to 1917), died in 1917, his son Kamal al-Din Husayn (1874-1932) refused to become his father's successor to the throne. He was unwilling to work with the colonisers, and instead, the British chose Ahmad Fuad, Husayn Kamal's half-brother. This event is mentioned in *Palace Walk* through al-Sayyid's discussion with his wife:

He said as though addressing himself, "What a fine man Prince Kamal al-Din Husayn is! Do you know what he did? He refused to ascend the throne of his late father so long as the British are in charge." The woman had heard the day before of the death of Sultan Husayn

Kamal, but this was the first time she heard the name of his son. She could not find anything to say, but moved by her feelings of veneration for the speaker and afraid not to comment on something he said, she responded, “May God have mercy on the Sultan and bless his son.” Her husband continued his remarks: “Prince Ahmad Fuad, or Sultan Fuad as he will be known from now on, accepted the throne. The celebration came to a climax today with his investiture. Then he went in a procession from Bustan Castle to Abdin Place. Praise to God, the Everlasting.” (*Trilogy* 16-17)

### 1.3.3. Egypt between the two world wars

The war context and the British Protectorate favoured the emergence of the National party, which was now stronger than it was before, with Sa’d Zaghlul as its charismatic leader. Zaghlul (1859-1927) considered himself to be the only person capable of taking matters in hand if there were to be any real change. He was a man known for his conciliatory spirit but the Protectorate gave him a new role. He turned completely to the nationalists, and headed a rebellion on their behalf. In 1917, Sultan Husayn Kamal died, leaving his place to his brother Ahmed Fuad, who was not interested in the affairs of Egypt or the nationalists.

Sa’d Zaghlul tried to return to a path of diplomacy by asking Sir Reginald Wingate, the British High Commissioner, to intervene with London to give him an opportunity to present the Egyptian case. Sa’d’s negotiations are praised by Fahmy, who tells Yasin in *Palace Walk*:

We also heard that they requested permission to travel to London to lobby for Egyptian independence. For that reason they met with Sir Reginald Wingate, the British High Commissioner for Egypt. (*Trilogy* 346)

Even though Wingate supported the idea, London refused the request. In 1919, Zaghlul announced Egypt’s declaration of independence. At the Peace Conference of Paris, Zaghlul seized the opportunity to defend the cause of Egypt, and this infuriated the British who accused him and his party of agitation. The fact that

international opinion was oblivious to their cause made the Egyptians even more bitter.

Zaghlul responded to this accusation by making a protest which resulted in his exile to Malta with Ismail Sidki, Mohamed Mahmoud and Hamad Bassil Pasha. The exile of Zaghlul is covered in detail in *Palace Walk* through the political discussion of al-Sayyid Ahmad with his friends, Muhammad Iffat and Ibrahim al-Far: ‘They’ve exiled Sa’d and his colleagues to the island of Malta’ (*Trilogy* 377). Even the name of Hamad Bassil Pasha is cited in the *Trilogy* during a conversation between Yasin and Fahmy:

It’s fortunate that Hamad Basil Pasha was one of the exiled. He’s the chieftain of a ferocious tribe. I doubt that his men will keep quiet about his banishment. (*Trilogy* 379)

Zaghlul’s exile was an explosive element in the relationship between Egypt and Britain. University students raised their voices in the streets and rioting erupted in Cairo, then in Alexandria, and spread throughout Egypt. Nothing could stop the revolts because of the solidarity of the Egyptians with their leaders. The British troops did not hesitate to use force to restore order, and many demonstrators were killed. The country came to a standstill. Transport and public services were paralysed. The target of Egyptian attacks was British soldiers, but the British forces were more organised than the rioters. They restored order by using their military superiority, and Britain reasserted its dominance. To avoid the recurrence of these disturbances, gatherings were forbidden and identity checks in the streets became more frequent. The army used gunfire to disperse suspicious meetings, caring little about the lives of the people. The events of 1919, however, promoted the Egyptian cause, though the price was high. The English freed Sa’d Zaghlul, which is noted in the *Trilogy*: ‘Sa’d Pasha has been freed’ (*Trilogy* 512). Fahmy, the fervent nationalist, considers that the date of Sa’d’s liberation marks an important victory:

No matter what else happens, April 7, 1919, will remain the date marking the success of the revolution. (*Trilogy* 514)

In 1919, the British government entrusted Lord Milner with the mission of establishing a new constitution. The Egyptians knew that this constitution would

only give more power to the British, and that clauses would be added to protect Britain's interests in Egypt. One of these interests was to secure the Canal, which facilitated Britain's imperial communications. The Egyptians' experience with the constitution of 1913 had taught them not to trust the British, and the mission was boycotted on the instructions of Zaghlul. Rioters filled the streets, and once again the British response was ruthless. Many people were killed. Tension increased further in December 1921 when Sa'd Zaghlul organised a demonstration in Cairo. The peaceful intentions of the demonstration were disrupted, and two British soldiers were killed. The Wafd party was charged with destabilising the country, and its leaders were expelled from Egypt when they refused to dissolve the party.

Sir Lee Stack (1868-1924), a British army officer and the Governor of Sudan, was assassinated in Cairo. The British government responded harshly, as it tended to do whenever a British officer was harmed. The assassination of Sir Lee Stack is one of the subjects discussed by Kamal and Husayn Shaddad on their journey to the Pyramids with Aida and Budur:

The assassination of Sir Lee Stack Pasha was a blow directed at Sa'd's government. ... (*Trilogy* 727)

Trouble increased in Egypt with the British occupation. Risings against the army and the British administrators became increasingly frequent until the British, under pressure, ended the Protectorate to extinguish nationalist feeling. Lord Allenby had always been in favour of ending the Protectorate, and published the declaration to abolish it on February 28th, 1922. However, Egyptians were not completely satisfied with the move. They had never demanded the end of the Protectorate on its own, but had always called for full independence.

Even after the Protectorate had been abolished, Britain continued to play a supervisory role in Egypt. It retained the right to intervene in the country, both politically and militarily, as the declaration of February 1922 had only ended the Protectorate and not granted full independence. The nationalists persisted in demands for independence and for sovereignty over their country. Eventually, when Britain could no longer cope with these demands, Egypt was declared an independent state.

Alliances between the British, French, Greeks and Italians during the war put the Ottomans under pressure.<sup>36</sup> The Sultan was forced to sign a peace treaty which allowed Greece greater autonomy. Armenia gained its independence and Turkey abandoned the Arab lands. The Ottoman Empire outside Turkey ended after six centuries, and in 1923, a new republic was established.<sup>37</sup> The title of Sultan disappeared and King Fuad became leader of the country. The first Egyptian government was formed by Sarwat Pasha and a commission was established to draw up the constitution.

The Wafd was opposed to the king because he was indifferent to the presence of foreigners in Egypt. Sa'd Zaghlul's death on August 23rd, 1927 is recalled in the *Trilogy* when Muhammad Iffat tells his friends:

This is 1935. Eight years have passed since Sa'd's death and fifteen since the revolution. Yet the English are everywhere, in the barracks, the police, the army, and various ministries. The foreign capitulations that make every son of a bitch a respected gentleman are still operative. This sorry state of affairs must end. (*Trilogy* 1024)

Mustapha Nahas Pasha, Zaghlul's companion during his exile, was appointed head of the Wafd party. *Sugar Street* recalls Mustafa al-Nahas' two hour-long address (*Trilogy* 1017). The new leader was completely opposed to the presence of British soldiers in Egypt. Ultimately, the longed-for treaty of 1936 marked the end of the British military presence in Egypt, but contained a clause giving the British the right to secure the Suez Canal until the Egyptian Army was sufficiently organised to protect the Canal on its own. The government of Egypt agreed to this.

This clause was difficult for some nationalists to digest. The idea of completely expelling the foreign presence from Egypt fermented behind the scenes, until the Muslim Brotherhood movement was formed by Shaykh Hassan el-Banna in Ismailia in 1928. El-Banna came into contact with the British when he was assigned to teach in Ismailia. There he witnessed the privileges the British enjoyed through the Suez Canal Company, and the way Egyptian workers were treated. El-Banna believed that Islam was the solution. If Egypt was suffering, it was because its rulers and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 941.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 941.

leaders had strayed from their religion. He sought to revitalise Islam in the lives of Egyptians. In parallel with the Muslim Brotherhood, communism emerged as a strong movement in Egypt. It was represented by intellectuals who had had contact with European political and philosophical ideas. The Egyptian authorities kept a close eye on the activities of both movements.

Because *The Cairo Trilogy* is about Egypt between the two wars, World War II also plays a role in the story. There is a reference to it when Amina tells her husband in *Sugar Street*:

Oh, master, I almost forgot. They're talking about the war everywhere.

They say that Hitler has attacked. (*Trilogy* 1154)

The fate of Aïda and her husband reflects what happened to foreigners living in Europe. They all sought refuge in countries they did not believe Hitler would attack. Durrell did the same by choosing Alexandria. Aïda narrated for Isma'il and his mother how 'she and her husband - in fact, all the diplomats - retreated from the advancing German forces until they ended up taking refuge in Spain.' (*Trilogy* 1223)

It has become clear from the above discussion that considering *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy* simply as two works about the same period, the time between the two wars, will add nothing to a comparative study. On the contrary, this type of approach could be misleading in the sense that it would leave most of the ideas in the *Quartet* unclear and devoid of meaning. If the *Trilogy* reflects the reality of this period with its political, economic and social dimensions, the *Quartet* uses it to reflect on the past of Alexandria and its place in Western thought. In other words, the memory of the city is revived through the present. For instance, Alexandria was once the home of mysticism. Even though this aspect is part of the distant past of the city, the *Quartet* brings it into the present. The present is also explained through the past. For example, Alexandria's cosmopolitan atmosphere finds its explanation further in the past when the city was the biggest trading centre in the region. Another example lies in the ethnic and religious diversity of the city. If Alexandria is currently the home of people with different religious backgrounds, such as Muslims, Christians and Jews, it is because it has been so for many centuries.

In contrast to Durrell's *Quartet*, the text of *The Cairo Trilogy* teaches us history, and history can be of great help in understanding the *Trilogy's* text. Moreover, the city of Cairo has to be seen in its present context. Its distant past and the memories of it are not the focus. It is the real city with its inhabitants, its alleys and its coffeehouses which interests Mahfouz. Here, Cairo can only be seen as a purely oriental city.

In conclusion, comparing the *Trilogy* and the *Quartet* on the basis of the historical period which forms the setting for the two works will only reveal the *Quartet* as a work written by an occidental, for an occidental readership. It will also present a very different Alexandria from the real city. Most analyses of the *Quartet* present it as a work about Egypt between the two wars. Michael V. Diboll, for example, writes in his introduction that the *Quartet* is 'set in Egypt between the years 1918-1943'<sup>38</sup>. Michael Haag also relates the *Quartet* to the 'interwar heyday of the cosmopolitan city and the dramas of the Second World War'<sup>39</sup>. Even if this is true in a certain sense, it is apt to mislead readers if they base their understanding of the novels on this approach. However, if we bear in mind that Durrell's objective was not to examine the period historically but to use the era to evoke the significance of the city to Western civilisation, then ideas, characters and the story begin to reveal themselves to us.

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<sup>38</sup> Michael V. Diboll, *Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" in Its Egyptian Contexts*, Studies in British Literature, v.84, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Michael von Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 126.

## Chapter 2

### The East in *The Alexandria Quartet* and the West in *The Cairo Trilogy*

Edward Said's *Orientalism* is a comprehensive study which investigates and analyses relationships between East and West as two geographically distinct locations. In his book, Said has tried to expose the system of representation of the East by the West, and to show how the Orient has been reinvented in Western literature. Whether the authors are historians, anthropologists, sociologists, politicians, poets or novelists, in general their works have a tendency to introduce a way of portraying the Orient in which it is recreated and reinvented. These texts become a reference for other cultures, and begin to form a basis for others who wish to study the Orient. However, this knowledge is not based on personal experience. It is acquired through 'specialists' who have had to rely on other 'specialists' for their conclusions, and this process perpetuates itself. The Orient therefore undergoes transformations from one generation to another. These transformations, based on perceptions, create an ever-widening gap between the real Orient and the imagined one.

Moreover, in the preface to his book, Said states that the Orient 'has been made and remade countless times'<sup>1</sup>, and that the West continues to consider the East a place which can be mapped as if 'myriad peoples can be shaken up like so many peanuts in a jar.'<sup>2</sup> Said adds that the relationship between Occident and Orient is one of 'power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony'.<sup>3</sup> However, Said was criticised for omitting the Oriental point of view on the Occident<sup>4</sup>. In his *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction*, Rasheed El-

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction*, London; New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 2.

Enany points out that Said's study ignores 'self-representations of the colonised'<sup>5</sup>. El-Enany's remark is quite accurate because Said's approach focuses primarily on the perception of the West in terms of the East. His main idea is to shed light on the way Orientals are seen by Occidentals and not on the way Orientals see Occidentals or the way they see themselves. In other words, the way the Orient sees and perceives the West seems to have been beyond the scope of Said's book.

In the light of Said's theories and El-Enany's criticism, this chapter will consider the encounter between East and West in *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy*. The East in the *Quartet* will be examined using Said's theories of Orientalism, while in the *Trilogy*, the West will be investigated not only by focusing on the colonial relationship between coloniser and colonised, but also through how Arabs perceive the West.

The first part of this chapter will be devoted to Durrell's tetralogy. The *Quartet* can clearly be considered the work of an Orientalist, but to what extent are elements of Said's theory relevant to its interpretation? From which point of view does the European tell his story in the *Quartet*? Is it a position of equality and closeness, or a position of inequality and remoteness? Is the Occidental interested in studying and depicting Orientals in the way Said suggests? Is his analysis based on the individual or on the group? If it is based on the group, how does he classify his groups? Is it according to the 'reductive categories' of Europe/Africa, White/Black, East/West and Orient/Occident? Does the relationship between Occidentals and Orientals reflect a balanced association, or does it highlight the latter's need for the former? Finally, how are Orientals represented in the *Quartet*, and what kinds of image emerge from these representations?

The second part of the chapter will be dedicated to the *Trilogy*. How does Mahfouz see the West? Do Orientals disapprove of all things Western or only some aspects? Are there any aspects of the Western occupiers that Orientals admire? On the other hand, does a positive attitude towards the West necessarily mean a lack of patriotism? Is there any contradiction in combining the two?

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

## 2.1 The East in *The Alexandria Quartet*

### 2.1.1 The need to retreat

The *Alexandria Quartet* presents us with scenes and images which form a certain picture of the Orient, one framed within a rigid structure. Detailed descriptions which add little to the development of the story are used to shed light on the characteristics of this Orient, especially the negative aspects. Here is an example of these descriptions, in which elements of Said's 'cultural repertoire'<sup>6</sup> can be highlighted:

Here came the Rifiya dervishes, who could in their trances walk upon embers or drink molten glass or eat live scorpions – or dance the turning measure of the universe out, until reality ran down like an over-wound spring and they fell gasping to the earth, dazed like birds. The banners and torches, the great openwork braziers full of burning wood, the great paper lanterns inscribed with texts, they made staggering loops and patterns of light upon the darkness of the Alexandrian night, rising and falling, and now the pitches were swollen with spectators, worrying at the procession like mastiffs, screaming and pulling; and still the flood poured on with its own wild music (perhaps the very music that the dying Antony in Cavafy's poem heard) until it engulfed the darkness of the great *meidan*, spreading around it the fitful contours of robes and faces and objects without context but whose colours sprang up and darkened the edges of the sky with colour. Human beings were setting fire to each other. (*Quartet* 317-318)

Descriptions like this, which pay special attention to a few minor details, help construct a particular image of the Orient. Scenes of men walking on embers, and words like 'snake-charmers' and 'scorpion-eaters', are used to form a picturesque Orient with characteristics we have come to expect. The fact that this is what we see indicates that these characteristics have been resurrected intentionally to depict the Orient in a certain way. How, in fact, are these images constructed? To answer this

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<sup>6</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 63.

question, we need to start with the European's need to distance himself from the Orient itself.

In his *Orientalism*, Said indicates his conviction that 'Orientals were rarely seen or looked at; they were seen through, analysed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved'<sup>7</sup>. In the same context he adds that the Orientalist 'surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him – culture, religion, mind, history, society.'<sup>8</sup> This becomes interesting in terms of the movements of some of the characters in the *Quartet*. Though they are living in Alexandria, they believe they have to distance themselves from it to understand it. This can be seen at the very beginning when the narrator informs us of the reasons for his departure. This departure also specifies the position he is going to take in the story:

I have had to come so far away from it in order to understand it all!  
Living on this bare promontory, snatched every night from darkness by  
Arcturus, far from the lime-laden dust of those summer afternoons, I see  
at last that none of us is properly to be judged for what happened in the  
past. It is the city which should be judged though we, its children, must  
pay the price. (*Quartet* 17)

Darley's choice to live on high ground jutting out into the sea allows him to cultivate distance and detachment. Although he has no optical instrument, the fact that he is high above the city helps him to bring it under the lens of his mental telescope. Darley chooses a 'bare promontory' from which to 'see' and understand what has happened in the past. This position seems to give him the power to understand, and to put things back into their original perspective. It helps him to recapture authority from the Orient and from Orientals, and to give it back to Westerners. The promontory allows him the opportunity to 'see' who is responsible for all the ravages his psyche has undergone, and who deserves to be judged.

Darley escapes from Alexandria to an island to heal himself. If he does not know why he uses the word 'escape', it is because he is overwhelmed and defeated. He has to retire to a remote place to 'rebuild' what has been destroyed by his

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

experience in the city, or rather by his experience in the Orient. He is now certain that being in Alexandria stifles his ability to understand, and that he can only mature by remaining far away from the city. Thus, Darley's relationship with the city has been transformed into a sick man battling with his illness. The use of language, silence, contemplation and interior monologues reflects this battle and accentuates the damage the Orient has caused him. For Darley, Alexandria is a generator of disease, and the remedy lies in withdrawing from it. However, it is not a definitive withdrawal since his intention is to understand the past, to regain his power and to go back when he is stronger.

Towards the end of *Justine*, a kind of relief and release from the city have been established. Darley begins to recover, thanks to the time he has spent on the island. He now distances himself from Alexandria, trying to forget all the damage it has caused him.

The cicadas are throbbing in the great planes, and the summer Mediterranean lies before me in all its magnetic blueness. Somewhere out there, beyond the mauve throbbing line of the horizon lies Africa, lies Alexandria, maintaining its tenuous grasp on one's affections through memories which are already refunding themselves slowly into forgetfulness; memory of friends, of incidents long past. (*Quartet* 194)

Here Darley describes the city and its geographical situation in Africa as if it were responsible for his misfortunes. This implies that he would not have been wounded in the same way had the same events taken place in a European city. The distinctions go beyond the city to include the whole continent. By mentioning Africa, he is implicitly involving Europe. It is Alexandria, and therefore Africa, which have enabled him to become aware of the advantages of Europe.

Even when they are living in Alexandria, we have the impression that European characters are in constant need of distance to help them see and analyse, a distance which is reinforced by their chosen physical location. This is usually high up, like a balcony. On several occasions we meet characters contemplating the city from a balcony instead of participating in daily life, as when Darley says:

Six o'clock. The shuffling of white-robed figures from the station yards. The shops filling and emptying like lungs in the Rue des Soeurs. The pale lengthening rays of the afternoon sun smear the long curves of the Esplanade, and the dazzled pigeons, like rings of scattered paper, climb above the minarets to take the last rays of the waning light on their wings. Ringing of silver on the money-changers' counters. The iron grille outside the bank still too hot to touch. Clip-clop of horse-drawn carriages carrying civil servants in red flowerpots towards the cafés on the sea-front. This is the hour least easy to bear, when from my balcony I catch an unexpected glimpse of her walking idly towards the town in her white sandals, still half asleep. Justine! (*Quartet 22*)

Darley choosing to look down from the balcony is not what he should be doing at this time of day. He should be in a café near the sea, or at the very least taking a walk in the animated streets. Here again, Darley is investigating the city from a higher point. His contemplation is only interrupted by the sudden appearance of Justine. The detailed description of what is happening outside shows that he is thoroughly examining what he sees. In another passage, Darley shows his preference for remaining distant from Alexandria when he finds himself once again looking down from above:

Then, one hot blank afternoon, when I was sitting at my window watching the city un wrinkle from sleep I saw a different Melissa walk down the street and turn into the shadowy doorway of the house. (*Quartet 53*)

Another incident, which takes place during the carnival of Alexandria, highlights how Clea also retreats to a higher position to give herself a sense of control over the city. Instead of participating in the carnival, Clea, the beautiful blonde, prefers to remain at her window with 'a board on her knees, patiently drawing' (*Quartet 343*). This reinforces a need for a strategic point from which to observe the city.

This obsession with analysing everything also takes place through a telescope. As though Alexandria were a micro-organism causing some fatal disease, the city needs to be magnified through a telescope, so that characters can avoid direct contact with it. Scobie has a telescope. We meet him in the story with his telescope

‘turning a wistful eye on the blank wall rotting mud-brick which shuts off his view of the sea.’ (*Quartet* 101) We are told that to ‘repay her husband’s thoughtfulness’ (*Quartet* 133), Justine has offered Nessim an observatory with a telescope. We learn, nevertheless, that this telescope, with which Nessim was supposed to indulge his passion for astronomy, ‘had been canted downwards so that it no longer pointed at the sky but across the dunes towards where the city slumbered in its misty reaches of pearl cloud.’ (*Quartet* 138) The same telescope will be used later by Clea from Mountolive’s house, not only to spy on Mountolive and Liza, but also to magnify the city:

As I had time to kill I started to fool with the telescope, and idly trained it on the far corner of the bay. It was a blowy day, with high seas running, and the black flags out which signalled dangerous bathing. There were only a few cars about in that end of the town, and hardly anyone on foot. Quite soon I saw the Embassy car come round the corner and stop on the seafront. Liza and David got down and began to walk away from it towards the beach end. It was amazing how clearly I could see them; I had the impression that I could touch them by just putting out a hand. They were arguing furiously, and she had an expression of grief and pain on her face. I increased the magnification until I discovered with a shock that I could literally lip-read their remarks! It was startling, indeed a little frightening. I could not “hear” him because his face was half turned aside, but Liza was looking into my telescope like a giant image on a cinema screen. (*Quartet* 742-743)

By increasing the magnification of the telescope, Clea is not only attempting to understand the story of Liza and Mountolive, she is also trying to magnify the enigmatic Orient. The telescope emphasises the need to retreat in order to study a phenomenon and comprehend it fully. In the Orient, truth is not told. It is discovered.

Does the problem really lie in the place itself? Is distance capable of healing wounds, as most characters believe? A comparison of this need to retreat in both the *Quartet* and the *Trilogy* may help provide the answer. Kamal grows up in an atmosphere of fear. We are told that when he was young, ‘his father’s stick did more

to his feet than ten of others would have.’ (*Trilogy* 51) We are also told that ‘[he] was a sitting duck to be struck at any moment by the teacher’s stick raised threateningly over the pupils’ heads’ (*Trilogy* 52). Fear accompanies Kamal throughout the different stages of his development. His father humiliates him because he chooses teaching college. He insults him when he writes an article on Darwin. His big head and nose are often the subject of others’ laughter. The failure of his love affair with Aida still affects him deeply. With people, he is easily deceived. The hypocrisy of his friends disgusts him. His opinion of Egyptian society is quite negative. Worse still, the tyranny of his father and the ignorance of his mother torture him.

As for Darley, though we know nothing about his childhood and his family life, the artist-writer does not suffer the intimidation of an authoritarian father. He is also free, and the weight of tradition does not interfere between him and his art. However, the reaction of the two artists towards the city is quite different. Kamal is a teacher who can easily find a job outside Cairo, but he never considers leaving his city. On the contrary, he asks his nephew Ridwan to mediate in order to prevent his transfer to Asyut. Kamal never sees Cairo as responsible for his failures and his misfortunes. If, for Darley, truth is to be found on an island, Kamal searches for truth in books. So while the escape of the former is physical, the latter’s retreat is purely mental, because distance provides no solution to existential problems.

### **2.1.2 The need to study and depict**

Physical retreat and emotional detachment are therefore necessary for Europeans living in the Orient to study and depict the context in which they find themselves. Clea asks Darley: ‘Why do you never play a part in these things? Why do you prefer to sit apart and study us all?’ (*Quartet* 376) This is the usual position of the narrator in the story. Darley the writer and Clea the painter are Europeans living in Alexandria. Their art is dedicated to the study of the Orient and the Oriental. Darley never shirks in terms of devoting his time and full attention to carrying out a detailed investigation or analysis of a situation. He usually remains a certain distance from the events. Clea accuses him of being a spectator, studying his subject, but she forgets that she often engages in similar examinations. Clea’s role in the Orient can be compared to the role of the Orientalist, whom Said describes as portraying the

Oriental as ‘something one studies and depicts (as in a curriculum)’ and as ‘something one illustrates (as in a zoological manual).’<sup>9</sup>

Because Balthazar is ‘pursuing some private theory which makes him attach importance to the pigmentation of the skin in certain stages of his diseases’ (*Quartet* 109), he commissions photographs for his research. However, he is not satisfied with the careless quality of the photographic recording, and assigns Clea the task of recording the medical anomalies of syphilis in detail by means of ‘large coloured drawings’ (*Quartet* 109). This task needs someone with a passionate interest in depicting the characteristics of the sick body carefully and in detail. The Oriental is a subject which needs to be studied carefully. This is how Darley describes her while she is carrying out the work she has been assigned:

Through the glass doors of the surgery I caught a glimpse of Clea, whom I did not then know, sitting under the withered pear-tree in the shabby garden. She was dressed in a white medical smock, and her colours were laid out methodically beside her on a slab of fallen marble. Before her, seated half-crouching upon a wicker chair, was a big breasted sphinx-faced *fellab* girl, with her skirt drawn up above her waist to expose some choice object of my friend’s study [...] Her face [Clea’s] showed the rapt and concentrated pleasure of a specialist touching in the colours of some rare tulip. (*Quartet* 110)

The image of Clea and the Egyptian girl suggests power versus weakness. The Occidental is the master and the Oriental is the slave. While Clea is sitting, the nameless ‘*fellab* girl’ is ‘half-crouching’. Negative adjectives are used to describe the girl. She has a face like a sphinx and big breasts. She is not a human but a strange creature that needs to be recorded and immortalised in a painting for further study. The Egyptian girl’s naked waist is a sign of humiliation. She arouses the curiosity of normal human beings like Clea and Balthazar. She is a creature which needs ‘studying’ because she could be a potential danger to the ‘White Man’ living in Alexandria. In contrast, Clea is dressed properly. She is well-organised and works ‘methodically’. She is very impressed by this rare discovery and is fully absorbed and fascinated by what could be the sphinx of contemporary Egypt.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

While walking in one of the quarters of the city, Darley feels the need for an unusual experience. After leaving Justine, he goes into a brothel. His visit is not to satisfy a frustrated sexual desire but, using Darley's words, 'to test the validity of the very emotions upon which so much love and anxiety could base themselves' (*Quartet* 150). In the booth, Darley tries to free himself from his background by adopting the same behaviour as everyone else. He describes the place as dirty and disgusting, but does not regret his visit. He has to validate some notions about sex and the Orient, and this seems to justify the experience. While he is awaiting his turn, Darley has no trouble putting himself in the shoes of the Oriental. He wants to resemble him not out of admiration but to facilitate his investigation:

There was a tarbush lying upon the chair beside me and absently I put it on my head. It was faintly warm and sticky inside and the thick leather lining clung to my forehead. 'I want to know what it really means' I told myself in a mirror whose cracks had been pasted over with the trimmings of postage stamps. (*Quartet* 150-151)

When Darley says 'I want to know what it really means', he reminds us of Edward Lane in Egypt. The tarbush, a symbol of the Orient, allows him to cross to the other side and experience some of the Egyptian's feelings. This is another level of studying, since it goes beyond seeing and analysing, and approaches a level of experimentation. Observing is no longer sufficient, as it does not allow him to feel. Darley wants to be in touch with the profound meanings of things in this city. The brothel is the laboratory, and the prostitutes serve as the objects of his experiments.

When Darley says: 'It was impossible to explain to them that I was investigating nothing more particular than the act upon which they were engaged' (*Quartet* 151), the word 'investigating' leaves no doubt about his role in the Orient. 'Impatient to deliver [himself] from the question', Darley moves aside the curtain of the cubicle and surprises the prostitute and her visitor during the act. Darley's description of them highlights his biased perception of how things work in the Orient. For the sake of what he calls 'scientific' investigation, he allows himself to violate the intimacy of Egyptians. This reveals the feeling of superiority he has brought from Europe. Would it have been possible for him to do such a thing in Europe? Of course not. By explaining that he is only interested in the act and not the

partners, he is attempting to legitimise his audacity. He thinks his investigation gives him the right to do anything. The worst aspect of this is that he does not regret his act, and leaves the booth laughing. Darley's visit to the brothel is replicating the actions of the 'native poet of the city', Cavafy. He is validating what he has learnt from his poems. (It is important to mention that Cavafy 'took his subject-matter from the streets and brothels of Alexandria?' (*Quartet 31*))

John Keats, the Global Agency correspondent and author of the 'faded flashlight photograph' (*Quartet 218*), represents another form of Orientalism, which is generally seen in photographs. He is always in search of scenes to immortalise. Photographs serve to give Orientalists who have not yet visited the Orient, or those who plan to visit it, ideas and impressions about their subject. Photographs play the same role as books and guides. They are subjective, and play an important part in the formation of ideas and prejudices about the Orient for the traveller who consults them. There are few comments on Keats' photographs except for the picture in which Darley features with his friends, but we are told by Darley that "[h]is 'files' were enormous, bulging with signed menus, bands of memorial cigars, postage stamps, picture postcards." (*Quartet 220*) This is the way the Orient is portrayed outside its borders.

Darley recognises that he has been influenced by Keats, and that he has inherited from him the 'mania to perpetuate, to record, to photograph everything!' (*Quartet 220*) For him, everything that can validate his perceptions is worth photographing for further analysis. He must not miss or forget anything, since recorded arguments will give credibility to his conclusions. The impact of photographs is dangerous because they allow hasty generalisations. They must be interpreted in relation to the context in which they were taken and the author who took them. For instance, a veiled woman looking from a barred window may give the immediate impression that women in the Orient are imprisoned and badly treated. No one will think she is perhaps only calling her child or enjoying the view.

In discussing the reasons why Western authors live in the Orient, Said speaks of the 'writer who intends to use his residence for the specific task of providing professional Orientalism with scientific material, [and] who considers his residence a

form of scientific observation'.<sup>10</sup> Edward William Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) is a good example of this category of writer. Lane, a British anthropologist and lexicographer, represents the class of Orientalists who, in order to further their understanding of the Orient, choose to live there among the natives. Lane learnt Arabic in Egypt in 1825. During his stay, he was obsessed with observing everyday life and amassing information about the Orient, a pursuit in which he became so immersed that he almost abandoned his Western lifestyle.

In the *Quartet*, Mountolive reminds us of Lane's eagerness to explore every aspect of Egyptian life. We learn that during his first days in Egypt, he 'noted and pondered upon the strange ways of people among whom he had come to live' (*Quartet* 414). Mountolive has been sent to Egypt for a year in order to improve his Arabic and to work as a secretary at the High Commission, to prepare him for a diplomatic career. Nessim's family has agreed to welcome him into their household for two months to practise his Arabic. This is an excellent opportunity for him to check the validity of what he has learnt in books.

Mountolive has read Burton and Lane. We are also told that '[a]ll this matter was entirely new to him for his studies had consisted only in reading the conventional study by Lane as the true Gospel on Egypt.' (*Quartet* 424) This is a reference to Lane's: *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*. The book has imposed on him a certain way of thinking and seeing. Mountolive cannot be objective since he strives 'to find a sort of poetic correspondence between the reality and the dream-picture of the East which he constructed from his reading.' (*Quartet* 414) Said believes that 'rarely were Orientalists interested in anything except proving the validity of these musty "truths" by applying them, without great success, to uncomprehending, hence degenerate, natives.'<sup>11</sup> So by observing and assessing the everyday life of Egypt, Mountolive intends to rewrite the Orient, or 'his Orient' as he sees it, emphasising the differences between what he sees and what he has found in books. This process of rewriting, which inevitably leads to a gradual disappearance of the real Orient, is frequent among Orientalists. As Said puts it:

[...] amongst themselves Orientalists treat each other's work as in the same citationary way. Burton, for example, would deal with the *Arabian*

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

*nights* or with Egypt indirectly, *through* Lane's work, by citing his predecessor, challenging him even though he was granting him very great authority.<sup>12</sup>

Mountolive is someone who pays great attention to manners. His relationship with Narouz illustrates some of the stereotypes he represents. First of all, Narouz has a harelip, which forces him to live in seclusion. He also has a scar on his cheek from an attack by a Kingfisher. He behaves like a savage and is violent towards all creatures, human beings and animals. So when the handsome Mountolive is found on a fishing boat with the savage Narouz, it is bound to mean something. How does Mountolive see Narouz?

Out of the corner of his eye he [Mountolive] could see his companion [Narouz] standing up as he poled, and study the hairy arms and hands, the sturdy braced legs. (*Quartet* 398)

Mountolive is facing a creature different from the men he knew in Europe. It is because he is afraid of him that he studies him discreetly. The hairy arms suggest bestiality. Mountolive is just another scientist approaching a wild animal unknown to science, and trying to understand its behaviour. For him, Egypt is a jungle where a traveller's safety depends on knowing the language of the natives. Mountolive openly acknowledges that he has come to Egypt to 'study and assess them [the Egyptians], their language, religion and habits.' (*Quartet* 409)

Besides, where Darley investigates, Clea paints portraits and Keats takes photographs, Mountolive has another obsession. He is:

An inveterate note-taker by habit, he found his little pocket diary now swollen with the data which emerged from their long rides together [with Leila], but it was always data which concerned the country, for he did not dare to put down a single word about his feelings or so much as record even Leila's name. (*Quartet* 413-414)

If the data involved his private life, the notebook could be considered a diary, but the data only record things about Egypt. What he writes is what he will use later when he

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

has to make decisions. He will also include it in reports to his superiors in England. This is how the Orient is approached and shaped by the Westerners who have taken upon themselves the mission of understanding and representing it, those who have appointed themselves to speak for the Orient and who, instead of forming it, deform it.

This need to study and depict in the *Quartet* is not duplicated in the *Trilogy*. We cannot logically expect to find in the *Trilogy* an obsessive need to analyse others and record everything about them. This is because characters who do so in the *Quartet* are Europeans. In contrast, Mahfouz's characters are Egyptians who know Egypt and who are acquainted with the culture of their fellow citizens. Something which is odd and strange for some is ordinary and normal for others. It is important to highlight here that characters in Mahfouz's work are not obsessed with recording everything. Nowhere in the three volumes are photographs used. Kamal and his friends, for example, never think of taking photographs, even as souvenirs when they visit the pyramids.

### 2.1.3 The need to catalogue

When Darley says that 'the symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world are replaced here by something different,' (*Quartet* 18) a geographical distinction is immediately made between East and West, between the Hellenic world and the Orient. The word 'replace' emphasises that the narrator is implicitly comparing the two. This cataloguing process becomes clearer when Darley permits himself to assume knowledge of a taxi driver's thinking, and accuses him of cataloguing.

The emotions of white people, he perhaps was thinking, are odd and excite prurience. He watched as one might watch cats making love.  
(*Quartet* 179)

Darley and Melissa are in a taxi and the driver is watching them in the mirror. When Darley speaks of the 'emotions of the white people', he is cataloguing these emotions. Blacks do not perceive things the same way as whites. They do not feel, do not think and do not act like whites. This classification implicitly establishes a law of superiority and inferiority. Advantage is given to Europeans who are tender and affectionate, while Africans see this tactile behaviour as an excessive interest in sexual

matters. When Darley puts his hand over Melissa's mouth out of pity, because speaking will tire her, he assumes the driver is unable to understand his gesture and is relating it to sexual behaviour. Darley assumes he knows what the driver is thinking, in spite of his use of the word 'perhaps'. His knowledge is drawn from what he has learnt and what has been said about the Orient. Needless to say, Darley has come to Alexandria with preconceived ideas, for in reality, nothing in the behaviour of the driver allows him to draw this conclusion.

This concept of 'white' recurs when Darley and Scobie are walking towards the Grande Corniche:

Here he belonged by adoption, here he was truly at home. He would defiantly take a drink from the leaden spout sticking out of a wall near the Goharri mosque (a public drinking fountain) though the White Man in him must have been aware that the water was far from safe to drink.

*(Quartet 224)*

Though Scobie is considered to be an Alexandrian by 'adoption', he remains a white man. The word 'defiantly' suggests a situation involving exposure to danger. The public fountain and the danger it represents for the European, as seen by the latter, suggests a negative attitude towards the Orient. The Orient is dangerous. You have to pay attention to everything. A European puts himself at great risk by living there. The phrase 'must have been aware' suggests the advice issued by authorities and travel agencies to people travelling to countries involving potential risks to health and safety.

Another character who subscribes to this fixed catalogue of differences is Pombal. On moving to the Chancery in Rome, Pombal advises Darley to leave Egypt and go back to Europe, which has no heat, no dust and no flies. The Orient lacks the comfort which Europe offers. Pombal sees Egypt as an unsuitable setting for a European with a level of prestige and an elegant lifestyle.

'You should get out' he repeats, 'back to Europe. This city will undermine your will. And what has Upper Egypt to offer? Blazing heat, dust, flies, a menial occupation. . . . After all, you are not Rimbaud.'

*(Quartet 183)*

Moreover, in her letter to Darley towards the end of the first volume, we learn that Clea has met Justine in Palestine before going to Syria. Clea prefers to emphasise Justine's features rather than the subject of their discussion when she says her 'features seem to have broadened, become more classically Jewish, lip and nose inclining more towards each other' (*Quartet* 192). Clea is using what Said calls a 'physiological-moral classification'<sup>13</sup> to establish a link between Justine and the whole Jewish community. It implies not only a social heritage but also a physiological one. Justine's facial features are used to indicate her ethnic origin and the characteristics of this origin. Such conclusions are clearly the result of preconceptions and built-in prejudices. It becomes clear once again that these differences and distinctions are the means by which they establish what Said refers to as the distance between 'us' and 'them'.

Contrasts between Europe and the Arab world emerge in different situations. The reaction remains the same, regardless of whether the European is engaged in reflection or in a monologue with himself, whether he is with another European reflecting on Egypt and the Egyptians, or whether he is in a situation involving an Arab context. He is constantly comparing and contrasting. Even those who have received a European education are contaminated, and think like Europeans themselves. The fact that Nessim has been 'educated largely abroad' (*Quartet* 408), that his 'English and French were perfect' (*Quartet* 406) and that he is a graduate of Oxford (*Quartet* 406), strengthens his relationship with Europe. This relationship presents him as someone who has been uprooted. His admiration for Europe is unlimited, to the point of losing his identity. During his visit with Narouz to the tents of Abu Kar in the desert, we are told that:

Nessim waited, feeling suddenly like a European, city-bred, a visitor: for the little party carried with them all the feeling of the tight inbred Arab world – its formal courtesies and feuds – its primitiveness. He surprised himself by seeking in his own mind the memory of a painting by Bonnard or a poem by Blake – as a thirsty man might grope at a spring for water. In such a way might a traveller present himself to some rude mountain clan, admiring their bunioned feet and coarse hairy legs, but

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

grateful too that the sum of European culture was not expressed by their life-hating, unpleasure-loving strength. (*Quartet* 267)

Even if no clear comparison has been made, the European is somehow mirrored through the Arab. If the negative words 'feuds', 'primitiveness', 'bunioned feet', 'coarse hairy legs' are used to describe the Arabs of the mountain Nessim is visiting, their opposites are indirectly attributed to Europeans. The Arab functions like a mirror through which the beautiful, intelligent, civilised European is seen. To escape these disgusting scenes, Nessim has to go back to Europe in his imagination. He is forced to think about Bonnard, the Frenchman, and Blake, the Englishman. The fact that Nessim knows and has been influenced by these two European artists indicates the extent to which he has been influenced by European culture. At the same time, the analogy associates Europe with art and artists. In Egypt, there is no work of art in which Nessim can find refuge. Europe is compared to a 'spring of water', and Nessim to a thirsty man, suggesting that Europe is a source of life and pleasure.

In contrast to Europe, life in the Orient is a burden. Nessim without Europe is dead, but at the same time he is Egyptian and struggles to ensure a better situation for the Copts in Egypt. He leads an ambivalent life in the Orient. We are told from the very beginning of Nessim's identity crisis, in that 'Germany and England had done little but confuse him and unfit him for the life of the city.' (*Quartet* 29) Equally, his mother Leila, like her son, is a great admirer of Europe. She visits Europe regularly and has fallen in love with it. She once dreamt of leaving Egypt to continue her studies in Europe but her parents refused. If she wants to escape Egypt, it is because she wants to enjoy the freedom of European women. Her frustrated dream of Europe has been replaced by a subscription to periodicals in 'four languages'. Nessim and Leila are caught between their love of Europe and their life in Egypt.

The European characters of the *Quartet* come to the Orient with preconceptions which involve classifications, such as European/African, White/Black. The first encounter between Mountolive and Nessim is a good example, where Mountolive 'instantly recognized in him a person of his own kind' (*Quartet* 409). Another example is the description of Serapamoun when he is introduced into the story. We are told that '[h]is serene mild face and low voice carried the authority of an education and a poise which spoke of Europe.' (*Quartet*

568) Serapamoun, however, is not European. He is a rich, influential Coptic cotton merchant. Like Nessim, he contributes considerably to the Coptic community. When a person is not European but has good manners, he is in all cases implicitly compared to a European. The European style becomes a standard by which people are evaluated and judged, as when Darley speaks of '[...] the inhabitants of the city whose coarse and derived distinctions, menial preoccupations and faulty education gave them no clue to what style in the European sense was.' (*Quartet* 29) Even the Arabic language does not escape this process of classification, since '[...] nobody can think or feel only in the dimensionless obsolescence of Arabic.' (*Quartet* 408)

Classification is an inevitable process in a context of colonisation. It is omnipresent in the *Quartet*, but can also be found to some degree in the *Trilogy*. In the Cairo of Mahfouz, Egyptians also have to live with Westerners, and because they are Westerners they are different. Once this difference is suggested, the process of observing and comparing begins. In *Palace Walk*, there is an example of classification when an English soldier stops Yasin to ask for a match:

The soldier had asked for a match and smiled. Yes, he had smiled. Yasin had been so astonished to see him smile that he had encountered difficulty understanding what he wanted until the soldier repeated his request. He had never imagined that an English soldier would smile that way. Even if English soldiers smiled like other human beings, he would not have thought one would smile at him so politely. (*Trilogy* 423)

#### **2.1.4 The need for the Occidental**

Said's *Orientalism* teaches us that Occidentals come to the Orient with ready-made ideas. Their voyage starts in Europe, and their plan of action begins there too. They see themselves as the saviours of the sinking Orient. Europeans believe their presence in the Orient is of great importance to the Oriental, giving the latter the opportunity to learn how to read, how to speak, how to dress and how to live. He also saves him from poverty by training him to do a job, and by helping him establish a business from which he can live. The Westerner is somehow a symbol of security and protection. Because the European believes in the superiority of Europe, he does not question his attitude towards Orientals. They are considered uneducated and therefore unable to understand beyond a certain point. It is up to Westerners to

make decisions, to give orders and to impose sanctions if the orders are not respected. In other words, the Oriental needs a guardian since he is unable to manage his own affairs.

The Oriental's need for the West is illustrated in the relationship of Scobie to Abdul. Abdul is Scobie's 'friend' and neighbour. When Abdul wishes to become a 'barber-surgeon', Scobie is irritated but agrees to help him. He says: 'I set him up in his business, just out of friendly affection. Bought him everything: his shop, his little wife.' (*Quartet* 227) Without Scobie, Abdul would have remained jobless and a bachelor all his life. If he now has children, it is thanks to Scobie who 'bought' him a wife. The verb 'to buy' suggests money. Scobie has had to spend money in order to offer a new life to his 'protégé'. Scobie is portrayed as affectionate and human towards an Oriental. But just as the Westerner gives life to the Oriental, he can also take it back from him if the latter does not obey orders.

Scobie set him up in a barber's shop, you remember. Well, he was warned for not keeping his razors clean, and for spreading syphilis. He didn't heed the warnings perhaps because he believed that Scobie would never report him officially. But the old man did, with terrible results. Abdul was nearly beaten to death by the police, lost an eye. (*Quartet* 718)

Again, on the one hand, Scobie is a self-appointed Western guardian of hygiene in the Orient, and on the other hand he is the honest Westerner who is prepared to report behaviour which violates the rules, even if it involves a dear friend. Abdul represents the Oriental who does not care for cleanliness and who has no feeling of responsibility towards others. If syphilis spreads, it is because the Oriental lifestyle is unhygienic. Consequently, Abdul loses an eye and remains blind for the rest of his life, because Scobie is no longer prepared to be his 'eyes'. The phrase 'the old man did' is commensurate with Said's theory that the Oriental is 'something one disciplines (as in a school or prison)'<sup>14</sup>. After the death of Scobie, Abdul becomes guardian of the shrine of his 'master'. The European continues to be necessary to the Oriental even after his death.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

Scobie also presents Abdul's wife with an opportunity by trying to help her learn knitting or crewel-work, but 'she's so stupid she didn't understand.' (*Quartet* 227) Unlike the Oriental man, Scobie is trying to give an opportunity to a woman, to show that European men believe in the equality of men and women. Scobie wants her to be independent instead of confined to the role of a housewife, which tends to be a woman's lot in the Arab-Muslim world. At the same time, he has no desire to persevere with what he considers a 'stupid' woman. In fact, the way he abandons all efforts to persuade her implies that this stupidity is somehow genetic, and that it is therefore pointless to waste his time fighting against it. This becomes clear through the use of 'she didn't understand', which suggests a definitive judgement. Evaluations like this stem from the binomial (inferiority-superiority) on which some Westerners build their opinions about the Orient. They consider Orientals incapable of certain things, so there is no point trying to make them do them.

Returning to Abdul, we discover that 'Amaril spent nearly a year trying to tidy him up.' (*Quartet* 718) Amaril, the gynaecologist, has given generously of his time, spending a long period nursing him. Though Abdul's problem is outside Amaril's area of expertise, the latter makes a major effort to restore the normal functions of Abdul's eye. In the same way as this European doctor is trying to restore the non-European's sight, His Majesty (the King of Egypt) is treated by German doctors. There are other examples of this 'extraordinary' humanitarian aid by Western "experts" towards Orientals in the *Quartet*. One of these involves Semira.

Semira is the daughter of an old, deaf man. Her family has sunk into poverty as a result of a series of misfortunes, and her brothers suffer from 'progressive insanity'. Semira is obliged to wear the veil, and is locked in a house where she has to pray all day. She has no idea about the outside world. Only during carnival time is she tempted to go outside. Semira has no nose because of a 'rare form of lupus - a peculiar skin T.B. of rare kind' (*Quartet* 515). Amaril's love for her moves him to ask her father for her hand in marriage, but it is an unexpected and unusual marriage built on self-denial and limitless goodness. Amaril tells her father: 'I wish to marry your daughter and take her back into the world.' (*Quartet* 514) Amaril wants to recreate Semira and make her into a work of art. His argument with her father, who cannot understand his request, is: 'I am a doctor from Europe and I will give her a new nose,' (*Quartet* 514) a 'somehow typical' (*Quartet* 511) story, in Clea's words.

Europe evokes an image of high standards, which is why Amaril uses it in his argument. Mentioning Europe strengthens his argument, as Europe has the best doctors, the best artists and the best writers.

Clea makes an important comment about Amaril when she says to Darley: 'You see, he is after all building a woman of his own fancy, a face to a husband's own specifications; only Pygmalion had such a chance before!' (*Quartet* 515) There is a parallel between the stories of Semira and Pygmalion. Semira and Eliza Doolittle are both poor and therefore rejected by society. Amaril and Professor Higgins are both scientists who want to transform their subjects. The fathers of both Eliza and Semira are in need of money and agree to give their daughters to the scientists to work on in their laboratories. However, where Eliza is capable of running away to regain her independence, Semira agrees to appear in the 'tableau' which Clea wants to show Darley on his return to Alexandria:

Tonight the Virtuous Semira makes her first appearance on the public stage. It is rather like a *vernissage* for me – you know, don't you, that Amaril and I are the authors of her lovely nose? It has been a tremendous adventure, these long months; and she has been very patient and brave under the bandages and grafts. Now it's complete. Yesterday they were married. [...] You see, she is not very clever, Semira, and I had to spend hours with her sort of preparing her for the world. Also brushing up her reading and writing. In short trying to educate her a bit. (*Quartet* 722)

The 'tableau' of Clea and Amaril is a typical Orientalist scenario. Two Europeans putting a poor Arab girl on public display, to show off how she has been given clothes, education and a new nose. They are proud of their chef-d'oeuvre. Clea has spent considerable time training her to read and write because Semira, like Abdul's wife, is stupid. The European woman is intelligent and can teach, while the Oriental woman is 'simple-minded'. This simplicity left Amaril no choice but to use his surgical skills to improve her looks, as though he were operating on a doll. Samira is then paraded like a toy in the showcases of the European doctor and the European painter.

Where the Egyptian needs the European in the *Quartet*, the *Trilogy* offers a different perspective. Although the *Trilogy* is infused with patriotism, it does not deny the superiority of the West in scientific, philosophical and literary fields. As will become clear later in this chapter, Kamal pays tribute to scientists and philosophers from the West. Mahfouz is suggesting that the Orient can learn from the Occident, and that if Egyptians follow Western social, educational, political and economic models, Egyptian society is likely to evolve. At the same time, Mahfouz believes that the Egyptian mind is as capable as the Western one, and that, with the appropriate resources, Egyptians can lead their nation to prosperity.

### 2.1.5 Representations: ‘formation’ and ‘deformation’

In order to apply Said’s theory to the *Quartet*, it will first be interesting to see how Europeans and non-Europeans are presented in the story. How are Europeans presented physically? What is their function in the city? How are European women portrayed? On the other hand, what is the role of non-Europeans? How are they presented physically? Finally, how are Oriental women portrayed? In terms of analysing the role of European characters, Clea and Moutolive make the most suitable subjects.

Clea, the European artist, spends most of her time drawing and reading in her studio. She is very kind to animals. After the death of Scobie, she pays the expenses of his funeral and adopts his parrot. This is how she is presented in the story:

[...] the warm gold of her hair and a skin honeyed almost to the tone of burnt sugar by sea-bathing in the warm spring sunshine. [...] Her candid eyes were as blue as corn-flowers and set in her head like precision-made objects of beauty – the life-work of a jeweller. (*Quartet* 236)

She is a blonde with blue eyes who represents beautiful European women. She is so perfect that she has no faults at all. Nothing negative is said about her body. She appears as if she were the subject of an elegant tableau by a famous painter. This is illustrated by the scene which finds her sitting ‘with a board on her knees, patiently drawing while her little cat sleeps in its basket at her feet.’ (*Quartet* 343) The little cat

in the basket highlights European tenderness towards animals. The act of drawing implies great sensitivity, and gives Clea the air of a romantic, educated woman.

In the third volume of the *Quartet*, where Mountolive is introduced, we immediately learn that his manners are perfect and that he has been educated in England. He is someone with principles who considers it 'improper' to be the lover of Hosnani's wife (*Quartet* 405). Even though he is young, he is a deep thinker. He is intelligent and able to speak Arabic. He has achieved his objectives with no difficulty, and has succeeded in a brilliant career. Like Clea, he has no physical defects.

Orientalism is presented in quite a different way. Women are described as fat and lacking in beauty, as in the case of the 'hippopotamus-like womenfolk' of the Syrians who are 'lightly moustached' (*Quartet* 58). Arab women are considered to lack qualities normally associated with women. They are obese and do not care for their appearance. The way they are described leaves no room for desire. It is as though, in the mind of the narrator, beauty is an attribute determined by culture and religion. This is what he says of the woman Narouz confuses with Clea during the festival of Sitna Mariam:

[...] the grease-folded body of a Moslem woman who sat unveiled before her paper hut on a three-legged stool. As she spoke, she was eating a sesame cake with the air of some huge caterpillar nibbling a lettuce' (*Quartet* 325).

What is the reason for using the word 'Moslem' if not to highlight once again a need to categorise? 'Moslem' is a category with negative characteristics. The 'Moslem' woman is dirty, greedy and fat, and has no manners. Moreover, Justine's promiscuity is described as follows: 'This sort of giving is shocking because it is as simple as an Arab' (*Quartet* 243). Again, Arab women are apparently known for their capacity to have a number of transient sexual relationships. Representing Justine in this way is tantamount to issuing an invitation to anyone looking for sex and sensual experience. Another feature attributed to Arabs can be found in the telegram sent by Pursewarden to Justine answering her long letter, in which he tells her to: '*stop whining like an Arab*' (*Quartet* 293), suggesting that Arabs are always complaining. In addition, when Balthazar is explaining to Darley the circumstances of Scobie's death in the Interlinear, he says:

Nimrod tells me that once he used to be very popular in his *quartier*, but that latterly he had started to interfere with ritual circumcision among the children and became much hated. You know how the Arabs are. (*Quartet* 332)

Orientalism is represented with a great deal of negativity. Each time a character is introduced, the narrator emphasises his physical faults. He describes Faraj, Darley's loader during the duck shoot, as a 'black barbaric face under a soiled white turban, unsmiling, spiritless.' (*Quartet* 172) He tells us that 'Capodistria's loader is still eating noisily like a famished animal' (*Quartet* 176). He compares Hamid to a 'monkey' while he is getting in the car after the duck shoot (*Quartet* 177), and the old schoolmaster, Mohammed Shebab, also 'had the bright hairy face of a monkey' (*Quartet* 263). Clea sees Narouz like 'some great brown toad, talking; like some story-book troglodyte.' (*Quartet* 375) Whenever Hamid appears, 'the One-eyed' is always added to his name, as if there were a number of characters with the name Hamid and 'the One-eyed' is used to differentiate him from the others. The sheik who comes to preside over the 'Night Of God' in Memlik Pasha's house is blind. Narouz has a split upper lip. It is as if the narrator is constantly seeking to prove that deformity 'confers magical powers in the East' (*Quartet* 322).

Moreover, Oriental violence stands in complete contrast to Clea's kindness to animals. Images of blood and savagery are omnipresent, illustrating the brutal side of Arabs. While the cat sleeps peacefully in the basket at the European's feet, other animals are shredded by Narouz. To show his brother Nessim the effectiveness of the whip Sheik Badawi has sent him from Assuan, he tries it out on a rooster, and is quite satisfied when he picks up 'the mutilated creature, still warm and palpitating, its wings half-severed from its body, its head smashed.' (*Quartet* 255) In the long letter Pursewarden writes to Mountolive, the successful writer notes how he has observed the following while accompanying Nessim to the desert to attend the secret meeting of the Copts:

He [Narouz] was caressing a swashing great hippo's backbone made into a whip - the classical *Kurbash*. Saw him pick dragon-flies off the flowers at fifteen paces with it; later in the desert he ran down a wild dog and cut

it up with a couple of strokes. The poor creature was virtually dismembered in a couple of blows, by this toy! (*Quartet* 485)

Pursewarden continues:

I came upon a grotesque scene which I would gladly have avoided if I had been able. The camels of Narouz were being cut up for the feast. Poor things, they knelt there peacefully with their forelegs folded under them like cats while a horde of men attacked them with axes in the moonlight. [...] The axes bit into them, as if their great bodies were made of cork, sinking deep under every thrust. Whole members were being hacked off as painlessly, it seemed, as when a tree is pruned. [...] A huge soft carpet of black blood spread into the dunes around the group and the barefoot boys carried the print of it back with them into the township. (*Quartet* 488)

Narouz has no feelings towards animals. When Nessim pays him a visit after the warning he has received from Serapamoun about Narouz's fanaticism, he finds him practising on bats.

[...] the courtyard was full of the bodies of bats, like fragments of torn umbrella, some fluttering and crawling in puddles of their own blood, some lying still and torn up. (*Quartet* 572)

Violence is not restricted to animals, but extends to human beings too. The story of the Swedish Vice-Consul is a good example. His wife is decapitated on the Matrugh road, and her head is discovered in the apron of a Bedouin woman. The crime has been committed in order to extract her gold teeth. Another horrible scene takes place when Nessim and Narouz are on their way to Abu Kar, and Narouz stops to free his leather bag from the head of Abdel-Kader in the river.

But he [Nessim] was not prepared to see a shrunken human head, lips drawn back over yellow teeth, eyes squinting inwards upon each other, roll out of the bag and sink slowly out of sight into the green depths beneath. (*Quartet* 265)

Said says that the Occidental ‘travels with unshakable abstract maxims’.<sup>15</sup> These maxims tend to be generalised, but these generalisations are not necessarily based on previous experience. They are either the result of a bad experience which happened to a few people in certain specific conditions, and which has been amplified and generalised to larger groups, or they may simply be the result of experiences related in books, films or documentaries. Said’s statement is borne out by situations in the *Quartet* where some European characters have a tendency to generalise. Pursewarden describes in his long letter to Mountolive the content of a discussion he has had with Maskelyne about the secret organisation of the Copts. Pursewarden tells Maskelyne: ‘I have seen all your sources. They are all Arabs and as such unworthy of confidence.’ (*Quartet* 493) When Maskelyne asks Pursewarden about an alternative, the latter proposes the Englishmen working in the Egyptian Police, but Maskelyne responds: ‘they are as corrupt as the Arabs.’ (*Quartet* 493) A previous experience no doubt forms the background to the negative opinion which prompts him to draw such a conclusion. No effort has been made to distinguish honest Arabs from corrupt ones. Attributing a quality or a fault to a whole ethnic group with no apparent evidence tends to indicate that his opinion is the result of preconceptions he has formed at some point in the past.

Corruption in the *Quartet* manifests itself through Memlik. If Memlik is corrupt, the whole Orient is corrupt. Memlik is the Minister of the Interior, and is described as follows:

To say that a man is unscrupulous implies that he was born with inherent scruples which he now chooses to disregard. But does one visualize a man *born* patently conscienceless? A man *born* without a common habit of soul? (Memlik). (*Quartet* 597)

To delay action, on the day of the prayer meeting Memlik accepts the hidden bank notes Nessim has put between the pages of the Qur’an. The use of the Qur’an by Memlik is an exaggeration which is intended to amplify his dishonesty and present him as the most morally depraved of all the characters. This also suggests the hypocritical side of the Muslim who is prepared to abandon all his principles for money.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

To summarise, the way Europeans are represented in the story highlights the efforts of the narrator to form a set of values around the word 'Europe'. At the same time, no effort has been spared in 'deforming' almost everything connected with Arabs and Muslims. It becomes clear that the *Quartet* is full of negative images about the Orient, and that Durrell's description of this Orient has been influenced by his reading of Lane and Cavafy. Does Mahfouz, however, have the same negative attitude towards the West?

## 2.2 The West in *The Cairo Trilogy*

Mahfouz's attitude towards the West can be investigated in three main ways. First, the West is a model to follow in terms of philosophical thinking and scientific progress, which have allowed the West to establish solid democratic political and social systems. Second, the West respects women and cultivates them, which is why Western women are independent and contribute to the advancement of their societies. By setting the conservatism of Egyptian women against the open-minded Westernised woman, Mahfouz calls for a new place for women in the East, which emulates their position in the West. The third aspect concerns the anti-imperialist approach of the *Trilogy*. The West as a coloniser and occupier is portrayed as unfair, humiliating and inhuman vis-à-vis the colonised. This could be understood as a contradictory message but there is, in fact, no contradiction in it at all.

Mahfouz was not the first to admire the West. His compatriot, Taha Hussein preceded him in this respect:

In order to become equal partners in civilization with the Europeans, we must literally and forthrightly do everything that they do; we must share with them the present civilization, with all its pleasant and unpleasant sides, and not content ourselves with words or mere gestures. Whoever advises any other course of action is either a deceiver or is himself deceived. Strangely enough we imitate the West in our everyday lives, yet hypocritically deny the fact in our words. If we really detest European life, what is to hinder us from rejecting it completely? And if we genuinely respect the Europeans, we certainly seem to do by our

wholesale adoption of their practices, why do we not reconcile our words with our actions?<sup>16</sup>

These are the words of Taha Hussein (1889-1973) in his book *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, published in 1938. Born in Izbet el-Kilo in Egypt, Taha Hussein came from a modest family. Blinded in his childhood 'by the clumsy ministrations of the local barber/surgeon'<sup>17</sup>, Taha Hussein succeeded in becoming one of the most influential writers in Egypt and in the Arab world. In addition to a brilliant academic career, Hussein was a reformer and a thinker. His studies in France and his marriage to a French woman who 'has remained a devout Catholic'<sup>18</sup> made Taha Hussein an admirer of Europe and of Western ways of thinking. In a call to reconsider the whole Egyptian system and adapt it to the European style, Taha Hussein saw no contradictions with Egyptian culture:

Some Egyptians object to Europeanization on the grounds that it threatens our national personality and glorious heritage. [...] However, such fears are completely baseless now that we know our history and are aware of the essential similarities between ourselves and the Europeans.<sup>19</sup>

Taha Hussein's ideas strongly influenced Naguib Mahfouz<sup>20</sup>. Like Hussein, Mahfouz argues that:

Our culture is very close to European culture. This is because they both are based on common foundations. For its part, European culture is based on both the moral principles of the Bible and the modern science inherited from the Greeks. The same is also true of Arabic culture, the difference between the Bible and the Qur'an being here of no consequence as the latter maintains that it embraces both the Bible and the Gospels. The moral values are thus the same. As for the Greeks, we

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<sup>16</sup> Taha Hussein and Sidney Glazer, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Cairo: The Palm Press, 1998, pp. 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> Taha Hussein and E. H. Paxton, *The Days*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1997, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Taha Hussein and Sidney Glazer, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Cairo: The Palm Press, 1998, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 35.

know that the Arabs translated the Greeks and studied them.... Both our culture and that of the West belong in fact to one family.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.2.1 Admiration of Western science and philosophy

Kamal, one of the protagonists of the *Trilogy*, maintains strong relationships with the West in the story. Even though he calls for an independent Egypt, he openly declares his admiration for the West not as a coloniser but as a civilisation which believes in science. In *Sugar Street*, sitting next to the sick patriarch during the air-raids on the old houses of Gamaliya, Ahmad complains: 'Our houses are ancient. They won't stand up to these raids.' Kamal answers:

If our houses are destroyed, they'll have the honor of being demolished by the most advanced inventions of modern science. (*Trilogy* 1203)

This statement should not be understood as a lack of patriotism. For El-Enany, it does not refer to the old houses as such, but the 'old values of their occupants.'<sup>22</sup> Kamal is fighting for the independence of his nation and supports the Wafd party, but at the same time he blames Egypt and the Arab world for not being a civilisation which invests sufficient resources in science to build strong nations like those of the West. The influence of Taha Hussein is very clear here. Hussein acknowledges also that 'to defend our country, with its geographical situation, against aggression necessitates adopting European weapons and technique.'<sup>23</sup> For Kamal, Egypt suffers because Egyptians have not yet made science a priority. Hussein thinks the same:

Had not Egypt neglected culture and science, willingly or unwillingly, she would not have lost her freedom and independence and would have been spared the struggle to regain them.<sup>24</sup>

The West is also present in the *Trilogy* through the inclusion of Western philosophy. The English-language teacher at al-Silahdar School has such a great passion for philosophy that he asks for no remuneration for his essays on the subject

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<sup>21</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 21. (This interview appears in the following reference: Ibrahim Mansur, ed., *Al-Izdivaj al-thaqafi wa Azmat al-Muarada al-Misriyya*, Beirut : Dar al-Talia, 1981, p. 90.)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> Taha Hussein and Sidney Glazer, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Cairo: The Palm Press, 1998, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

in al-Fikr Magazine. Kamal's support and collaboration spring from his love of philosophy and truth. Together with Abd al-Aziz al-Asyuti, the editor who founded the magazine in 1923, they work for 'the advancement of philosophy and culture' (*Trilogy* 1083). Only when Kamal is reading or writing about philosophy does he feel like 'a human being' (*Trilogy* 994). The fact that he relates 'self-preservation' and the 'gratification of desires' to the 'animal concealed inside him' (*Trilogy* 994) remains a purely philosophical approach to life, which is alien to the beliefs and customs of Egyptian society.

In the *Trilogy*, Kamal alludes to *The World as Will and Representation* by the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, to the Absolute Idealism of Hegel and to the 'élan vital' of Bergson. After the failure of his love affair with Aida, Kamal seeks to hide his frustrations in philosophy, but in a rather pessimistic way. The reappearance of Budur, Aida's little sister, stimulates in him memories of Aida. Kamal discovers for the first time that he misses love in his life and that he has gone too far in rationalising everything around him:

In the past, nothing had been of any significance whatsoever, or importance had been ascribed only to sterile puzzles, like the will in Schopenhauer, the absolute in Hegel, or the *élan vital* in Bergson. Life as a whole was inanimate and unimportant. "See how a glance, a gesture, or a smile can make the earth tremble today?" (*Trilogy* 1237)

The essence of Schopenhauer's philosophy is that the universe revolves around the will. Like the world of Schopenhauer, the world of Kamal has been driven by a constantly dissatisfied will. Desires cause pain and suffering, and Kamal is seeking satisfaction in aesthetic contemplation. However, Budur appears to disturb his tranquillity and to remind him that love and passion are two main components of human nature which are difficult to overcome.

Undoubtedly, Kamal has also read Hegel's philosophy. He mentions the Absolute Idealism for which the German philosopher is considered a precursor. Absolute Idealism suggests that reality is a rational process to be attained through reason. Most of Hegel's ideas about the absolute are to be found in his most important philosophical work *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Kamal has probably read. Kamal's attempts to understand things around him echo Hegel's pursuit of

meaning. Like Hegel, he has tried to build a system of thought through which reality is explained in terms of reason and rationality.

In his monthly column in al-Fikr magazine, Kamal's texts are about ancient and contemporary philosophy. To complete his article on Pragmatism, Kamal has to read Bergson's *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. In this book, Bergson approaches the sciences of sociology and anthropology. He explains morality and religion in terms of the 'élan vital' or vital impulse, which refers to the vital force which is responsible for evolution and the continuity of species. For Bergson, when the élan vital is sublimated, it can lead to a moral and spiritual life. This is what Kamal has been striving to achieve, but in his pursuit of this sublimated élan vital, Kamal seems to have underestimated the power of love.

Moreover, to overcome his passions, Kamal turns to the theories of Spinoza on passion and emotion. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza posits that only when a person is liberated from passion can he attain happiness. Spinoza's theories about passion are echoed in the *Trilogy* when Kamal says:

I also refresh my soul with alcohol and sex. I seek consolation with philosophers who specialize in it - like Spinoza, who thinks that time is unreal, that passions linked to an event in the past or future make no sense, and that we're capable of overcoming them, if we can form a clear and distinct idea of them. (*Trilogy* 946-947)

Alongside the works of Darwin and Bergson in Kamal's library are those of the British philosopher Bertrand Russell. Like Russell, Kamal is anti-imperialist. In his famous philosophical essay 'On denoting', Russell sees religion as a form of oppression which fosters fear and dependency. Kamal's rejection of religion is clearly influenced by Russell's principles.

Kamal is someone looking for himself. During an intellectual discussion between Abd al-Aziz al-Asyuti, Riyad Qaldas and Kamal in the headquarters of al-Fikr Magazine, Kamal explains his pursuit of meaning and truth by telling Riyad:

Every philosopher has a special theory of beauty arrived at only after an exhaustive examination of various arts - literature included, naturally.

(*Trilogy* 1084)

Having devoted a great deal of time to the study of materialist philosophy, and after a period of scepticism and doubt, Kamal turns his thoughts to rationalism. Plagued once again by doubt and uncertainty, he plunges into modern spiritualism. Kamal reads a number of philosophers to formulate his own philosophy of life. He is open to all philosophical currents and is quick to apply their principles. He takes refuge in Spinoza's notion of the 'unity of existence' (*Trilogy* 995) to escape his feeling of loneliness. He finds a balance between desire and dignity in Schopenhauer's 'ascetic victory over desire' (*Trilogy* 995). He rationalises Aisha's misfortunes by reading Leibniz's 'explanation of evil'. In terms of his failure in love, he prefers Bergson's 'poetic effusions' (*Trilogy* 995). Kamal's love of philosophy is motivated by 'a desire to learn, a love for truth, a spirit of intellectual adventure, and a longing for alleviation of both the nightmare engulfing him and the sense of isolation concealed within him' (*Trilogy* 995).

The West is also present in the *Trilogy* through Kamal's nephew, Ahmad. In *Sugar Street*, Ahmad borrows René Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* from Kamal's library. Like his uncle, Ahmad believes strongly in political and social change. He is also anti-imperialist and is fighting for an independent Egypt. He takes part in demonstrations and is imprisoned for his ideas. Ahmad embraces communist ideas early in his life and decides to work for Adli Karim, the editor of al-Insane al-Jadid (The New Man) magazine. Ahmad is in charge of translating excerpts from 'international cultural magazines as well as some significant articles.' (*Trilogy* 1188) His journalistic career and his contact with the works of Western writers and philosophers have made Ahmad an activist who uses the words and ideas of the West. Like Kamal, but in total contrast to his fundamentalist brother, Ahmad rejects religion in favour of science and philosophy.

Sawsan Hammad also works for 'The New Man.' Together with Ahmad, she is translating a book about family structure in the Soviet Union. Sawsan greatly admires Karl Marx as an activist to whom humanity owes a great deal. In one of her conversations with Ahmad about marriage and activism, she says:

Let me tell you about Karl Marx, who devoted himself to writing *Das Kapital* while his wife and children were exposed to hunger and humiliation. (*Trilogy* 1245)

Sawsan expects Ahmad to be a militant fighting for human rights, who is ready to sacrifice everything for the cause of freedom and social equality. At the same time, she is ready to lead a life like that of Marx's wife. It is significant that the Marxist couple works for a magazine with a name like *The New Man*, which suggests a rethinking of Egyptian political and social systems.

Their editor Adli Karim, tells Ahmad in one of their discussions:

We desire a school for socialism. Independence is not the ultimate goal. It's a way to obtain the people's constitutional, economic, and human rights. (*Trilogy* 1071)

The editor is clearly an admirer of Taha Hussein, who believed that 'freedom and independence do not constitute ends in themselves, but are merely means of attaining exalted, enduring, and generally practical goals.'<sup>25</sup>

The editor proceeds:

Our primary obligation is not to theorize at length but to raise the proletariat's level of awareness about the historic role they are to play in saving themselves and the world as a whole. (*Trilogy* 1278)

Adli Karim is of course talking about Marxism and socialism. For him, independence is not an end in itself. Egypt is in need of a political and social system similar to Marxist ones. Even though nothing is mentioned about religion, there is an implied message that there is no place for religious fanatics or even religion in governing the state.

Adli Karim is not only a Marxist but also an intellectual who sees science as important to humanity and to progress. His recommendations to Ahmad reveal the philosophical and sociological dimensions of the *Trilogy*:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

Study literature as much as you want, but pay more attention to your own intellectual development than to the selections you're asked to memorize. And don't forget modern science. In addition to Shakespeare and Schopenhauer, your library must contain Comte, Darwin, Freud, Marx, and Engels. Be as zealous about this as if you were religious, and remember that each age has its prophets. The prophets of this era are the scientists. (*Trilogy* 1072-1073)

Adli Karim's advice to Ahmad once again mirrors Taha Hussein, who called for active participation by the Egyptian government in promoting 'science, philosophy, literature, and art'.<sup>26</sup>

In summary, like the *Quartet*, where Plato, Freud, Einstein, Shakespeare, Stendhal, Rabelais, de Sade, Goethe and others provide a philosophical structure for the story, the *Trilogy* presents us with a philosophical structure borrowed from the West, through which Egyptians and Arabs are invited to rethink their social and political systems. Bergson, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Engels, Russell, Leibniz, Comte, Marx, Darwin, Freud and Spinoza are the *Trilogy's* philosophers, and they provide new ideas and a new approach to social and political affairs for the Arab world. In this way, Western philosophy is used as a vehicle for praising the West in a work by an Egyptian novelist about British-occupied Egypt. Thus the encounter between East and West is not always characterised by tension, fear and hatred as Said believed.

### 2.2.2 Admiration of Western women

*Palace Walk* opens with the introduction of a nameless woman. She will remain nameless until the end of the first chapter. This lack of a name means she barely exists. She is subordinate in that she lives in a male society controlled by men. During the first chapter she is 'inside', as though in a prison, and lives in a very limited space. Her duty is to serve her master and look after the children. There is no 'outside' for her. Her husband is out and is referred to as 'the absent'. He tends to come back around midnight, at which point she must open the door and accompany

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

him to his bed, since he is never sober at night. The image of Amina waiting for him reminds us of a slave.

[...] she entered the closed cage formed by the wooden latticework and stood there, turning her face right and left while she peeked out through the tiny, round openings of the latticework panels that protected her from being seen from the street. (*Trilogy 6*)

Amina knows that serving her master when others are asleep is a matrimonial duty. When the lights outside are off, she has to summon her own inner strength to welcome him. Amina lives in this way for 25 years. She married when she was 14, a very early age to assume domestic and matrimonial responsibilities.

Amina rarely speaks. Without the intervention of the narrator, she would remain on the margins of the story. We are introduced to a woman who is passive, and confined to seeing the world from her balcony rather than taking part in society. She is always ‘gazing’, ‘peering’ and ‘wandering her eyes’. In this sense she shares characteristics with Flaubert’s Egyptian courtesan, whom Said describes as a ‘widely influential model of the Oriental woman’ who ‘never spoke of herself’ and ‘never represented her emotions, presence, or history.’<sup>27</sup> In Mahfouz’s *Trilogy*, Amina undergoes the same imprisonment as the women in the works of the Orientalists. Her introduction to the story portrays her as a woman swallowed in darkness, and everything about her is enveloped in gloom. She is a reflection of the women of her time. Her first words are addressed to the demons who accompany her in the spacious, empty rooms. When she gives orders to the demons in a loud voice, she is effectively proclaiming her existence. Though she is terrified by their presence in the house, she needs them to be able to express herself. The only time she makes ‘a polite objection’ to her husband’s repeated nights out, his reaction is: ‘I’m a man. I’m the one who commands and forbids. I will not accept any criticism of my behaviour. All I ask of you is to obey me. Don’t force me to discipline you.’ (*Trilogy 8*)

In fact, al-Sayyid Ahmad will ‘discipline’ her the day she goes to visit the shrine of al-Husayn without his permission. Amina is not allowed to cross the threshold of the house. By not observing one of the rules of the ruler’s constitution,

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<sup>27</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 6.

she is considered to have shown disobedience. As a result, she is expelled from the house of her godlike husband after remaining obedient for 25 years: 'I just have one thing to say: Leave my house immediately.' (*Trilogy* 208) However, he cannot actually manage without a submissive woman, so decides to forgive her, and sends her son to bring her back. Al-Sayyid Ahmad does not make the effort to go and fetch her himself, because he is a man and she needs him. He does not even worry about whether she will refuse to come back, because he knows she will come.

When her master greets her, she replies in 'a low voice' (*Trilogy* 12). When she finishes arranging his clothes, she sits beside 'his extended feet' to remove his shoes and socks (*Trilogy* 12). This is a striking image of the 'owner' and the 'owned'. Another image in the scene which is very representative of women's situation in Egyptian society is where al-Sayyid Ahmad is sitting on the sofa and Amina is sitting 'cross-legged on the pallet at his feet' (*Trilogy* 252). In addition to her devotion, she has to remain silent until he invites her to speak. Such treatment is exceptional, even by Egyptian standards of the time.

Amina is called 'the bee' in her neighbourhood for her perseverance. This comparison is also valid in terms of size, and indicates her status as a married woman in her household. She is of little importance, but unlike the bee, she is unable to sting and defend herself. It is very significant that Amina finds pleasure and security with her husband only when he is drunk. Her religious side sees alcohol as an offence, but her human side sees it as a release from his rigidity and harshness, and thus it offers her a feeling of peace. Amina listens to her husband's conversations with delight and interest because she is aware of her ignorance. She needs to know because she needs to exist. Amina looks for another woman within herself. She also repeats all she learns from her husband to her daughters, in order to make them different from the woman she is. She simply does not want them to be ignorant like her.

Amina has to create a world for herself, a world full of love and tenderness. The world of her husband is devoid of feelings, full of matrimonial duties and almost military discipline. Like all women, she will try to seek a better world somewhere else. She will find solace in the world of pigeons and hens, and has planted a garden on part of the roof. Nature is a refuge and lends an ear to her suffering. Her miserable soul is relaxed when she is in the world she has created. Even in this world, however,

she feels imprisoned. She is obliged to 'gaze through the openings at the limitless space around her.' (*Trilogy* 39) It seems that women in the world of al-Sayyid Ahmad are allowed neither to speak nor to see.

On the other hand, Amina represents the passive woman who does nothing to change her situation. She prefers to be a slave to men than to be without a man. She shows no inclination to rebel. She never refuses orders, and when she is insulted she remains silent. Satisfying her master becomes her only aim in life. She recognises her visit to the shrine as 'a grave error', and sees no injustice in the punishment he inflicts on her. She even tries to ensure this punishment is meted out to Zaynab, Yasin's wife, when she goes with her husband to Kishkish Bey theatre: 'Either that woman is punished too or life has no meaning.' (*Trilogy* 333) Amina is one of those women who 'do not mind their enslavement, perhaps they even cherish it.'<sup>28</sup> This is to say that if Oriental women are oppressed, it is because they are ignorant, passive and incapable of being independent.

When he is informed about the officer who has asked to marry Aisha, al-Sayyid Ahmad becomes infuriated and says sarcastically to her: 'So let me hear your opinion.' He is sure Amina will never offer an opinion that differs from his own: 'My opinion is the same as yours, sir. I have no opinion of my own.' (*Trilogy* 166) Amina's passive attitude makes her responsible for her situation, and the bond of sympathy the narrator shares with her is interrupted at this point. Amina is always looking for safe havens to avoid a sudden change in her situation. She avoids any behaviour that could disturb the stability of her life with her 'protector'. She even accepts all manner of humiliation without showing any objection. In the same context, al-Sayyid tells her: 'You're just a woman, and no woman has a fully developed mind.' (*Trilogy* 166) This is a reference to a quote about women in an Islamic religious text. Mahfouz indirectly denounces the way this text is interpreted by Egyptian men.

Amina is not the only woman who has to endure this type of situation. When Umm Hanafi is introduced, she is presented as a symbol of women's misfortunes. She is in her forties and divorced. She has spent her life serving others, a total negation of the self. She is described as a 'stout woman who is shapeless and formless'. Women in the world of Mahfouz suffer because of their physical defects.

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<sup>28</sup> Haim Gordon, *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in his Writings*, Contributions to the Study of World Literature, no 38, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990, p. 57.

The misfortunes of Umm Hanafi make the reader feel sorry for her, but the narrator is unmoved, implying sarcastically that the way she is explains the life she has.

When they wake up in the morning, Aisha and Khadija go down to the courtyard to join their mother in the kitchen, alongside Umm Hanafi. In introducing Khadija and Aisha, Mahfouz highlights their physical advantages and disadvantages. It is significant that the women's place in the house is downstairs, and the men live quietly on the floors above. There are as many men as women: four women in the kitchen, and four men in the rooms upstairs. This is a representative image of the position of women in Egyptian society at the time of the story. The four women are absent when the meal is served. Amina is standing and waiting for a command. The table represents society, and around the table of Egyptian men, women have no place. After the men's meal, Amina and her daughters are on the balcony observing the male members of the family on the street 'through the holes of its wooden grille' (*Trilogy* 27). The street is the place where people meet, speak and act, while the balcony is a place reserved for spectators only. Through the holes of the grille, they search for hope outside a prison-like house.

Another image which stresses the superiority of men over women lies in the way men and women walk outside. At the end of Aisha's wedding ceremony, when al-Sayyid Ahmad's family is returning from Al-Ghuriya to al-Nahhasin, family members walk in the following order: 'Al-Sayyid Ahmad walked alone in front followed a few meters back by Fahmy and Yasin. [...] At the rear came Amina, Khadija, Kamal, and Umm Hanafi.' (*Trilogy* 293) Women never walk side by side with men. This is a hierarchical system based on authority and imposed by men to emphasise the place of women in society. It is also a way for men to show others that they are the masters.

The first woman to show any courage is Aisha. When she opens the two panels in the window, she is the first to act against the codes of her culture. She is conscious of the consequences of this courage, but she is absolutely determined. Aisha's inner voice makes the reader sympathetic to her cause when she says: 'The earth didn't shake. Everything went off peacefully. No one saw me, and no one will. Moreover, I didn't do anything wrong!' (*Trilogy* 29) Hasan Ibrahim, the officer at the Gamaliya police station who seduces Aisha, is not allowed to look up to the window

to see her, 'for in Egypt in those days it was not considered proper to raise your head in such circumstances.' (*Trilogy* 28) Egyptian women are chained in the Orient of Mahfouz. They cannot see and must not be seen. Later, when Hasan asks her to marry him, her father refuses because Khadija, her eldest sister, is not yet married. Most of the traditions concern women, as if they were made for them alone.

The life of Aisha evokes pity and sympathy. In her thirties she loses her husband Khalil and her two sons Uthman and Muhammad to typhoid. The death of Na'ima, her 'sole hope in the world' (*Trilogy* 988), throws her into desperation and forces her to reject life for ever. The beautiful, blonde Aisha ceases to exist. We now see a woman who speaks to herself, who has lost most of her hair and who has aged prematurely. Aisha's development in the story is tragic. Though she has the qualities of a woman who could have a good life, Egypt offers her the opposite. She is left alone, waiting impatiently 'to go to Him'. Even Na'ima suffers injustice before her death. Her grandfather will not let her continue her education. When she says: 'I wish I had finished my education' (*Trilogy* 989), this can be seen as the voice of all Oriental women who have to stay at home after primary school. Another example of decline in women is the case of Zubayda the singer, the old friend of al-Sayyid and his friends. She becomes addicted to alcohol, cocaine and narcotics. She loses her beauty and all her fortune. She sells her house. We meet her towards the end of the story 'skinny' and 'barefoot', and 'her front teeth are missing'.

To summarise, the women in the *Trilogy* reflect the women of Egypt and the women of the Orient. Culture and traditions condemn them to a series of misfortunes. They cannot be fully educated. They cannot express themselves. They cannot work or demand autonomy. They are just housekeepers and child bearers. At the same time, they share part of the responsibility for their situation because they tend to be passive, relying entirely on men for their economic survival and on God for their ultimate emancipation. Oriental men like Yasin dictate the space where women have the right to move. They consider that the needs of women should be confined to economic survival and sex. The space women occupy in men's lives is no larger than the space occupied by animals. There is no role for women in society, except at home: cooking, doing laundry and bringing up children. In the following passage, Yasin goes further and makes an analogy between women and pets:

What more does any woman want than a home of her own and sexual gratification? Nothing! Women are just another kind of domestic animal, and must be treated like one. Yes, other pets are not allowed to intrude into our private lives. They stay home until we're free to play with them.

(*Trilogy* 363)

This also implicitly suggests that Western women, in contrast, are determined and successful. Mahfouz's criticisms are not meant to humiliate Egyptian women but to call for an improvement in their situation. Women have to play a role in building a modern society. The Orient needs strong, emancipated women like the women of the West.

To illustrate this more explicitly, Mahfouz introduces the Westernised Shaddad family into the story to highlight differences between East and West, between the traditional and the modern, between the passive and the active. Like Nessim and Leila in the *Quartet*, the members of the Shaddad family are great admirers of Europe. They live in a European way, rejecting all the constraints of Egyptian culture. Where Amina is not allowed to walk alongside her husband outside the house, the Shaddad family has a different system it has imported from Europe. When Kamal learns that, in an attempt to reconcile Khadija with her husband, Amina has asked her daughter to obey her husband in the same way she does, Kamal immediately thinks of Abd al-Hamid Bey Shaddad and his wife:

They were [the Shaddad couple] walking side by side from the veranda to the Minerva automobile, which was parked by the gate of the mansion. They did not seem a master and his servant but two equal friends conversing easily with each other, with her arm draped over his. When they reached the vehicle, the bey stepped aside to allow the lady to climb in first. (*Trilogy* 710-711)

The scene appeals to Kamal. His words hide an implicit process of comparison. When he speaks of 'a master and his servant' he is making reference to his father and mother. His father shows none of the gallantry of Abd al-Hamid Bey Shaddad, at least not at home. Saniya Hanim, whose 'face was unveiled and attractive', and from whom there emanated a 'fragrant perfume and a captivating elegance' (*Trilogy* 711), has nothing in common with his enslaved mother. Abd al-Hamid Bey Shaddad was

exiled to France with his family after the fall of Khedive Abbas II. Their contact with Europe has helped them to question some of the values of Egyptian society and Islam. The family openly displays an attachment to a European lifestyle, regardless of the opinions of others.

When Kamal asks Ismaʿil why Aida has so many admirers, Ismaʿil replies by telling him that ‘[...] her western upbringing has provided her social graces that make her seem particularly charming and attractive.’ (*Trilogy* 815) Aida is educated in a French school. The Egyptian school is unthinkable because it is alien to her. She is accustomed to the European educational system and is not prepared to change her views. If she is free and elegant, with good manners, it is because she has not been influenced by the Egyptian educational system. Aida lives in Europe within Egypt. Even the notion of physical appearance has another meaning for her. Although, by Egyptian standards, beauty is synonymous with plump women, Aida prefers to be slim. She has no interest in religion and ‘knows nothing worth mentioning about Islam.’ (*Trilogy* 727) This detachment from religion allows her to be free. She is a woman who reads extensively and educates herself towards a future role in society. Unlike al-Sayyid Ahmad, who forbids his daughters and even his granddaughter to continue their education, Shaddad Bey represents the intelligent father who sees the role and place of women differently, thanks to his contact with Europe.

Kamal sees Aida as a gift from God. She is a woman to be revered because she is free and completely the opposite of his sisters and his mother. Aida is allowed to go out and enjoy her summer days in the resort of Ra’s al-Barr, whereas Aisha and Amina can only see the outside world through ‘the holes of the grille’. Kamal’s love for Aida reflects his love for Europe and the freedom of women there. He sees in her a success story for women’s freedom. Unlike his father, who believes that ‘no woman has a fully developed mind’, Kamal has no difficulty recognising that Aida has influenced his new approach to life and to women in the Orient, when he says to himself: ‘Behind you is sitting the person who has inspired you to see everything in a new way, even the traditional style of life in the ancient quarters of the city.’ (*Trilogy* 725)

The way Mahfouz approaches the situation of women in Egypt reminds us of Durrell’s approach in the *Quartet*. However, while Mahfouz insists that ignorance is

an obstacle standing in the way of women's development, Durrell only dwells on the physical aspects of Arab women. He shows no concern for improving their situation. Moreover, he does not address the relationship between men and women in Egyptian society. In his tetralogy, no character bears any resemblance to al-Sayyid Ahmad, and no relationship reminds us of how he treats his wife Amina.

### 2.2.3 Pro-West but anti-imperialist

Despite the admiration Mahfouz shows for certain aspects of the West, *The Cairo Trilogy* can be read as an anti-imperialistic work. This duality is clearly expressed in the way Kamal is described:

In the morning his heart was ablaze with rebellion against the English but in the evening it was chastened by a general feeling of brotherhood for all mankind as he felt inclined to cooperate with everyone in order to confront the puzzle of man's destiny. (*Trilogy* 1019)

Kamal spends his evenings reading Western books about philosophy and science. Like Mahfouz, he is torn between admiration and criticism but sees no contradiction or hypocrisy in reconciling these two feelings.

The Cairo of Mahfouz displays many features of imperialism. In *Palace Walk*, Amina is scared and also puzzled to see the British encampment in front of her house. This encampment consists of:

[...] a number of tents, three trucks, and several groups of soldiers. Adjacent to the tents, rifles had been stacked up in groups of four. In each bunch the muzzles leaned in against each other and the butts were separated, forming a pyramid. The sentries stood like statues in front of the tents. The other soldiers were scattered about, speaking to each other in a foreign language and laughing. (*Trilogy* 397)

The British arrive in a residential street with heavy weapons to demonstrate their power to the natives. The English soldiers station themselves where streets branch off to control and intimidate the population. They speak their own language and laugh, while the Egyptian inhabitants are terrified.

Fahmy notices a second encampment at the intersection of al-Nahhasin and the Goldsmiths' Bazaar, and a third one in the other direction on the corner of Palace Walk and al-Khurunfush. All these streets are inhabited by poor people who do not have the financial resources to finance armed attacks. The men are either merchants or shopkeepers, and the women are housewives. So the context highlights the lack of equality between the coloniser and the colonised, and the encampments are there only to frighten and humiliate.

The everyday life of the English soldiers in the streets of Cairo shows that the occupying forces have familiarised themselves with the colony. The soldiers prepare food in the military kitchen they have set up as a symbol of how they appropriate space. At the same time, they are always ready for military action to suppress demonstrations as soon as they start:

From time to time many would fall into line at a signal from a bugle. Then they would get their rifles and climb into one of the vehicles, which would carry them off toward Bayt al-Qadi. This suggested that demonstrations were underway in nearby neighborhoods. (*Trilogy* 402)

Complying with a tradition that the occupying forces wish to serve their colonial subjects by giving them access to education and a better life, the British authorities send the shaykh of the district to inform the residents that the British will take action only against demonstrators. Al-Sayyid Ahmad is allowed to reopen his shop, Yasin can return to his place of employment and the children can go to school. This attitude recalls Said's theory about the promises the coloniser makes to the colonised. Now the family can be active again, but any participation in demonstrations or strikes will be severely sanctioned. For the English, to participate in demonstrations against the occupying forces is to violate the laws of the empire. Egyptians cannot govern their country and therefore they must obey orders. The matter is closed, and any attempt to demonstrate will be understood as disobedience and revolt.

On the other hand, the episode involving Kamal and the British soldiers early in the story illustrates the role of the Western coloniser in the East. When the four soldiers stop the boy for fun, they talk to him in the 'Cairo dialect of Arabic' (*Trilogy* 427). The colonisers learn the language of the natives in order to understand local

conversations. Discipline, orders and intimidation are first delivered through language. The British have established a relationship with the young Kamal because the boy can help them discover the activities of the family. The questions of the soldiers reveal an imperialist attitude which does not spare even an innocent boy. 'Do you like the English?' (*Trilogy* 430) one of the soldiers asks Kamal, not to find out about the boy's own feelings towards the English but to discover the feelings of his family towards the English presence in Egypt. When Kamal innocently asks them to bring the nationalist Sa'd Pasha Zaghlul back from exile, another soldier tweaks his ear. The coloniser disciplines and punishes where necessary. However, the question which most reveals the British colonial attitude in Egypt is when the soldiers ask Kamal if there are girls in his house. This supports Said's notion about licentious sex in the Orient. The English soldiers come to Egypt with the idea that the Protectorate is an exotic place with excessive freedom of sexual intercourse.

It is Kamal who discovers the relationship between the soldier Julian and Maryam, the daughter of Muhammad Ridwan. She is also the woman Fahmy loves. He wishes to marry Maryam, but his father objects to the marriage. The image of Maryam at the window, with Julian waving his hand and gesturing to her, symbolises the Orient as, in the words of Said, a 'place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe.'<sup>29</sup> Maryam is the exotic Oriental woman Julian certainly heard about before he was posted to Egypt. To have her is to have the East. Julian sends Kamal to deliver a large parcel to Maryam, not as a declaration of love but as the price for sexual intercourse with her. Julian sees Maryam as a prostitute, and his attitude shows that he comes to the East with the preconception that Egyptian women are poor, uneducated and lustful.

On the other hand, Kamal is surprised to receive a caricature one of the soldiers has drawn of him. When Fahmy looks at the portrait, he tells Kamal:

O Lord, this picture omits none of your defects and exaggerates them ... the small, skinny body, the long, scrawny neck, the large nose, the huge head, and the tiny eyes. (*Trilogy* 469)

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<sup>29</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 190.

The Oriental is illustrated like a creature in a 'zoological manual'.<sup>30</sup> Kamal's friend has been precise in caricaturing the boy. He has insisted on representing all Kamal's physical details, even the most unflattering. When Kamal tells his sister Khadija that the English 'like [his] head and nose a lot' (*Trilogy* 491), we should understand that they have been making fun of his physical defects for some time. If the soldier decides to draw a caricature of Kamal, it is because the Oriental boy is different from Western children. Kamal feels deeply hurt. Again the Western coloniser is portrayed as someone who does not care about the feelings of the colonised. Even though Fahmy understands his brother's discomfort, he decides to confront him:

It's clear what the secret of their fondness for you is. . . . They like to laugh at your appearance and foppishness. To put it plainly, you're nothing but a comic puppet to them. What have you gained from your treachery? (*Trilogy* 469)

The words of the fervent nationalist Fahmy reflect his involvement in the battle against colonialism. He only interprets these matters this way because he is politically involved in the Egyptian cause and participates in demonstrations. Fahmy is shot dead by the occupying forces at the end of the first volume. The West has taken his love from him; now it takes his life too.

There are other examples which illustrate colonial attitudes towards the occupied population, as in the case of Shaykh Mutawalli Abd al-Samad when he says:

Yesterday I was walking in the Muski when two Australian soldiers blocked my way. They told me to hand over everything I had. So I emptied my pockets for them and brought out the one thing I had, an ear of corn. One of them took it and kicked it like a ball. The other snatched my turban. He unwound the cloth from it, ripped it, and flung it in my face. (*Trilogy* 45)

Making fun of Egyptians and humiliating them is a recurring theme in the *Cairo Trilogy*. The British soldiers are free to conduct security checks on anyone, whenever they want. They have full authority to punish Egyptians and to use their services for their private purposes, as shown by the case of Yasin in the following example:

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

The soldier had asked for a match and smiled. Yes, he had smiled. Yasin had been so astonished to see him smile that he had encountered difficulty understanding what he wanted until the soldier repeated his request. He had never imagined that an English soldier would smile that way. Even if English soldiers smiled like other human beings, he would not have thought one would smile at him so politely. He had been transported by delight and remained frozen for a few moments, neither offering an answer nor making a motion. Then with all the energy he could muster, he had tackled this simple assignment for the mighty, smiling soldier. Since he did not smoke and did not carry any matches, he had gone at once to al-Hajj Darwish, who sold beans, and purchased a box of matches. Then he had rushed back to the soldier, holding it out to him. The soldier had taken it and said, in English, "Thank you."  
(*Trilogy* 423)

From a colonial point of view, Yasin is enchanted with the soldier's smile, which reflects the attitude of the English at this moment of occupation. To discipline the Egyptians, they feel they have to be ruthless. The absence of normal contact between the English and the Egyptians emphasises the application of rules which reinforce British superiority. The Oriental is inferior and must be avoided. Only if he is needed must he be approached. Yasin is happy to be approached by an English soldier, but who gives the soldier the right to ask for a match and to accept a box of matches Yasin has bought? The soldier could have gone himself to al-Hajj Darwish to buy matches. Of course, he will not do this because he believes that it is an honour for an Egyptian to be asked to serve his master.

Al-Sayyid Ahmad suffers the same humiliation. As he leaves the home of Maryam's mother after midnight, a soldier who is 'armed to the teeth' 'seized him by the shoulder, forcibly turned him around, and shoved him in the back'. When they reach al-Khurunfush, he sees another soldier driving before him an 'uncertain number of figures.' (*Trilogy* 476) Al-Sayyid fears the worst. He is thinking there will be a repeat of the massacre of Dinshawai. The British soldiers are described as 'stern' and 'cold'. Because he does not understand a single word of English, he has to obey without having any idea why he has been detained. In fact, an Egyptian policeman helps him understand what the soldiers want him to do. He and other Egyptians

have to fill a pit which has been dug to block the road for trucks. With Ghunaym Hamidu, the owner of an olive-oil-pressing firm in al-Gamaliya, he spends all night 'carrying baskets of dirt' and emptying them in the trench. It is worth mentioning here that the Egyptian policemen who are working together with the English soldiers 'had been stripped of their weapons'. This is what Said describes as 'positional superiority', which he defines as putting 'the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.'<sup>31</sup>

The English soldiers do not care about the families of these 'prisoners'. It is of little importance to them that the man has small children, or that he is outside because he is looking for a doctor, or that his wife is pregnant and needs a midwife. Filling the pit to ensure the trucks can move is of greater importance than the private lives of Egyptians. Egyptians are forced to serve the English whenever they need them, without being asked for their consent. This scene presents us with the powerful English humiliating the weak, colonised Egyptian. From another viewpoint, it is ironic to see the man who once humiliated others being humiliated himself.

Humiliation affects not only the uneducated on ordinary streets but the educated as well. When Isma'il complains about the attitude of the teachers from England and their ill treatment of the Egyptian students, Husayn Shaddad responds that '[the] Europeans in their countries don't act the way they do here.' (*Trilogy* 869) Husayn Shaddad is reliable because his European background allows him to draw such conclusions. Husayn's remark features in one of Mahfouz's interviews with Al-Naqqach:

During high school, the relationships we had, my friends and I, with our French teachers were marked by cordiality and a deep sympathy, even if they were not very deep. But we had bad relationships with our English teachers. We saw them as true colonizers and intruders. These teachers, in their majority had no teaching skills. They were attracted to Egypt by the lure of money and a good salary but had no taste for science.<sup>32</sup> (*My translation*)

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Naguib Mahfouz and Marie Francis-Saad, *Pages de mémoires entretiens avec Raga al-Naqqach*, [Arles]: Actes Sud/Sinbad, 2007, p. 69.

In summary, unlike Durrell, Mahfouz's *Trilogy* commemorates Egypt and Egyptian courage against the British occupation by illustrating the resistance of the nationalists in the face of the superior military capacity of the occupying forces. In the world of Durrell, however, nobody dies as a result of nationalist activities. Nor is there any reference to the atrocities committed by British troops in this colonial context. So while *The Alexandria Quartet* seems to be a work which fails to recognise Egypt's right to be a free, independent state, *The Cairo Trilogy* constantly reasserts it. In the *Trilogy*, the death of Fahmy symbolises British tyranny, but at the same time honours the martyrs of Egypt. Moreover, secret gatherings, the distribution of handbills, participation in demonstrations, resistance and people's readiness to sacrifice their life for Egypt are all used to celebrate the patriotic side of Egyptians.

Like Said, Mahfouz sees Egypt as the cradle of human civilisation. In an interview with Mohamed Salmawy, Mahfouz asserted:

For me, Egypt is not just a parcel of land, she is the founder of civilisation. She is the mother country in terms of human history and, whatever happens to her, she will retain a particular consideration and respect among the nations. [...] Egypt is the oldest civilisation, and all peoples of all nations passed through her, one after the other. After the Pharaohs came the Persians and the Greeks, then the Romans and the Arabs, and so on. The Nile valley has become a universal book which all civilisations have signed, leaving their mark.<sup>33</sup> (*My translation*)

It is interesting to note that Mahfouz's early works were about the history of Egypt from a nationalistic point of view. *Abath al-Aqdar (Ironies of Fate)* (1939), *Radubis* (1943) and *Kifab Tibab* (1944) glorify Egypt and its history. For someone like Mahfouz, Egypt is an abundant source of history and riches. To possess it is to possess civilisation.

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<sup>33</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, Muhammad Salmawi, and Gilles Perrin, *Mon Egypte: Dialogues Avec Mohamed Salmawy*, Paris: JC Lattès, 1996, p. 23.

## 2.3 Conclusions

If, in the *Quartet*, the Occidental assumes full knowledge of the Oriental, it is because the former is acquainted with the history and feelings of the latter. In the *Quartet*, the Oriental does not speak for himself; it is the Westerner who speaks for him. He does not represent his history. On the contrary, his history is represented. He does not describe his emotions; instead it is the Westerner who assumes this role for him. Within this Western framework, the Oriental is violent and superstitious, and incapable of managing his own affairs; he therefore needs a guardian.

Another aspect of the *Quartet's* Orientalism is physical deformity: 'one-eyed Hamid', 'blind Muezzin', 'hare-lipped Narouz', 'old blind sheikh', 'the old servant [Ali] with the cropped ears'. Diboll adds:

If the *Quartet's* European protagonists are initiated into the life of the city by physical or psychological mutilation, the tetralogy's native Alexandrians are frequently born deformed, like hare-lipped Narouz or the nose-less Turkish-Alexandrian Semira, or they succumb to disfiguring disease, as when Leila Hosnani's famed beauty is 'melted' by smallpox. In this way they confirm the sickly and deathly nature of Durrell's Orient, 'a death uttered in every repetition of the word, Alexandria, Alexandria'<sup>34</sup>

In addition to these mental and physical handicaps, the way the natives are referred to in the story is significant. Words and phrases with negative connotations are frequently used when these natives are mentioned. Expressions like 'snoring Hamid', 'the black Ethiopian maid', 'black barbaric face', 'stupid', 'whining as an Arab', 'negress', 'child of a negress', 'negro', 'hairy face of a monkey' or 'like a dwarf', constitute the Orientalist repertoire of the tetralogy. The European, on the other hand, is described as human, intelligent and all-knowing. He is the psychologist, the sociologist, the artist and the intellectual. However, his knowledge is focused only on the alien. He observes how the Oriental behaves, how he speaks, how he eats and the way he lives.

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<sup>34</sup> Michael V. Diboll, *Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" in Its Egyptian Contexts*, Studies in British Literature, v.84, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, p. 55.

As we have seen, the theory of Said can be extremely useful in analysing the encounter between East and West in Durrell's *Quartet*. Many details and lengthy descriptions will lose their meaning if they are not approached in terms of the relationship between East and West, between the Occidental and the Oriental. The theory of Orientalism helps the reader to understand Mountolive and his role in Alexandria. His readings, his notes, and his reactions become clearer when we relate them to Edward Lane and his lengthy book on Egypt. In the same way, Darley's position as a spectator in some of the events of the story can be explained by using the Saidian approach. Clea's painting and her role in Balthazar's clinic also give legitimacy to this theory. Scobie's relationship with Abdul, and Amaril's attitude as a European doctor who repairs noses and restores life to Orientals, become significant within an Orientalist analytical framework.

Some of the characteristics of Durrell's 'cultural repertoire' listed above are also recognisable in the Egypt of Mahfouz in *The Cairo Trilogy*. However, they are represented differently. Al-Sayyid Ahmad thinks of 'professional mourners' when Fahmy is shot dead in the demonstrations, but is satisfied with mentioning them in passing, because he is accustomed to them. During the funeral of Narouz in the *Quartet*, however, when 'professional mourners' are hired to animate the procession, the narrator chooses to give a detailed, but negative account of their behaviour, finding them bizarre, and typical of the Orient.

Moreover, the case of Memlik, whose corruption is 'legendary in Egypt' (*Quartet* 592), has its equivalents in the *Trilogy*. Because Yasin has had a fight with a whore, and the copy of the police report has reached the Ministry, the headmaster decides to transfer him to Upper Egypt. Yasin goes to inform his father to 'stop the transfer by using [his] influence.' (*Trilogy* 938) Al-Sayyid Ahmad solicits all his acquaintances to block the transfer. 'A barrage of mediating efforts was aimed at top men in the Ministry of Education' (*Trilogy* 939), and the transfer was rescinded. On another occasion, Yasin profits from the prevailing favouritism in the Egyptian administration to obtain a promotion. Thanks to his son Ridwan, who is Secretary to the Head of the Ministry where Yasin is employed, the Minister himself recommends him and helps him with promotion to the sixth level. Ridwan's influence helps Abd al-Muni'm to obtain a promise from the Minister for an appointment in the Bureau of Investigation (*Trilogy* 1156). In addition, even Kamal, the man of ideals, falls into

the trap of clientism when he is threatened with transfer to Asyut. He first asks his friend, the brilliant judge Fuad Jamil al-Hamzawi, to cancel the transfer, but al-Hamzawi refuses because of his sensitive position. When he contacts his nephew Ridwan, however, the transfer is cancelled the same day.

In the *Quartet*, when we encounter a sentence like: ‘The temper of Egyptian life too was hostile to the freedom of women,’ (*Quartet* 259) Mahfouz and his Cairo society immediately spring to mind. The proximity of the two ‘Orient’ can, in fact, be examined through Amina as a female protagonist in the story, and also through the other women, independently of the role they have been given. Finally, the similarity between the two worlds can also be examined by considering the ambivalence shown by some Egyptians towards religion and culture as a result of their contact with Europe.

Many other realities with similar characteristics are to be found in the *Quartet* and the *Trilogy*. It is important to mention that, while these realities are shared between the two novels, the way they are approached and commented on is different. The difference stems from the different backgrounds of the two novelists. Abnormal realities undergo a process of normalisation with the passing of time. They no longer surprise if they are repeated often enough. On the other hand, these same realities can shock when they are discovered for the first time. Durrell tends to give exaggerated and detailed descriptions of things which Mahfouz only mentions in passing. This does not mean that these realities have less importance for Mahfouz. It simply means that they are now part of an Orient he is struggling to change.

If the Orient of Durrell shares many characteristics with the Orient of Mahfouz, and if the latter can be used to explain the author’s attitudes in the former, one important aspect is nevertheless omnipresent in the *Trilogy* and characterised by its total absence in the tetralogy: the British occupation of Egypt. In the *Quartet*, Darley teaches, Clea paints, Pursewarden writes, Amaril nurses. All of them are intellectuals, and we expect them to promote liberty and defend weaker countries. However, not one of them ever criticises the British colonisation of Egypt. It is as if this occupation were necessary to Egypt. The focus remains on the Egyptians, but there is no criticism of the military presence of the British in Egypt. Nothing is said about the relationship between the Egyptians and the British. In a colonial territory,

conflicts between the coloniser and the colonised are to be expected, yet no checks are carried out in the street, no riots are dispersed, no demonstrations are held and there are no instances of military intimidation on the part of the British. The development of the story is independent of political events. The real problem seems to be between the Copts and Muslims, and the British occupation is normalised. Nothing is mentioned about Lord Cromer or the British Protectorate. All political details are dropped as if they were unimportant to the story. Durrell's omission of this matter is based on the assumption that this state of affairs is as it should be. The Egyptians need the British to govern them because they cannot govern themselves. Durrell's silence echoes what Balfour said to justify the British occupation of Egypt:

Is it a good thing for these great nations – I admit their greatness – that this absolute government should be exercised by us? I think it is a good thing. I think the experience shows that they have got under it far better government than in the whole history of the world they ever had before, and which not only is a benefit to them, but is undoubtedly a benefit to the whole of the civilised West.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p. 33.

## Chapter 3

### The City: between East and West

This chapter will discuss the extent to which Alexandria and Cairo, as portrayed in the novels of Durrell and Mahfouz, are representative of Egypt. This analysis will consider where the boundaries lie between the real and the imaginary, and will begin with the place of Alexandria in the *Quartet*. Alexandria is portrayed as a city of disaster, which forms the backdrop to the misfortunes of nearly all the characters. Darley says: 'It is the city which should be judged though we, its children, must pay the price.' (*Quartet* 17) It is a place rife with conspiracy and plotting, where identities are confused and where crimes can go undetected. Alexandria fosters androgyny and transforms its inhabitants. It is a city of prostitution and venereal diseases. Even children suffer there: they are either lost or abused.

This destructive force of the city is reflected in the story, which is characterised by a number of departures and returns. The fear of failure pushes characters to move away to other destinations. However, as Cavafy says in his poem, 'The City', Alexandria, 'follows' those who escape it. Even on an island in the Cyclades, Darley is still haunted by the city and finds himself compelled to return to it. Like Darley, other characters leave the city but find themselves obliged to come back to it. At the end of the novel, Clea informs Darley that many of their friends are leaving Alexandria. Symbolically, it is a kind of surrender, which highlights the power of 'the great winepress of love' (*Quartet* 18) in squeezing its inhabitants dry.

From another point of view, Darley describes Alexandria at the beginning of *Clea* as the 'capital of memory' (*Quartet* 657). What does this mean? To answer this question, this section will include a comparison with Mahfouz's novel about Alexandria, *Miramar*. *Miramar* will allow us to see whether the difference between Alexandria and Cairo in the *Trilogy* of Mahfouz is due to their geographical positions

and to their contrasting histories, or if it lies in the way each writer approaches the city in his work.

The second part of the chapter will examine the Cairo of Mahfouz and its role in the development of the story. In his foreword to Britta Le Va's *The Cairo of Naguib Mahfouz*, in which the American photographer attempts to 'visually translate'<sup>1</sup> Mahfouz's novels, Mahfouz writes:

My love and attachment to old Cairo are unequalled. There are times when I feel desiccated – experiencing one of those occasional blocks to which writers are prone. Then I take a stroll through old Cairo, and almost immediately I am besieged by a host of images. It is in old Cairo that I have imagined most of my novels. It is there that they have taken place, in my mind before I commit them to paper. And whenever I have felt that an event or an episode in my writing needs to be anchored in a specific place, al-Gamaliya has been the place.<sup>2</sup>

Cairo, where Naguib Mahfouz was born, is the largest city in Egypt and one of the most famous cities in the whole Orient. On a political level, Cairo has always been the centre of Egyptian political life. During the period of colonisation, it was the principle focus for Egyptian demonstrations against the British occupation. On a historical level, the city is associated with ancient Egypt because of its proximity to the pyramids. On a cultural level, the city has the largest number of schools, universities and institutes, as well as an important concentration of Islamic monuments. Its famous al-Azhar university is one of the main institutions for the study of Islam. For this reason, in the Islamic world the city is considered the cradle of Arabic and Islamic civilisation. On the other hand, with its souks, bazaars, picturesque coffeehouses and unique lifestyle, Cairo has always been, and still is, a fascinating city for major writers from both East and West. In other words, with its rich historical and cultural background, Cairo is unique and cannot be compared to other cities.

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<sup>1</sup> Britta Le Va and Gamal al-Ghitani, *The Cairo of Naguib Mahfouz*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

To learn more about Cairo in *The Cairo Trilogy*, it is essential to analyse the role of coffeehouses and shops in the story. In a society ruled by religion, customs and conservatism, it is difficult to access the private life of the inhabitants. An added complication involves the fact that Egyptian women can only be seen and addressed by their nearest relatives. The only possible settings for hearing about sensitive topics such as love, courtship, sex and infidelity are coffeehouses or shops. On the other hand, against a background of occupation by foreign powers, families try to protect their children by preventing them from participating in, or organising demonstrations. Once again, the only place the young can rebel and express their opinion is in the coffeehouses. However, older people like al-Sayyid Ahmad and his friends prefer shops because they allow them to be discreet. In an environment where it is dangerous to invade people's privacy, and where political, religious and matrimonial matters are not subject to discussion, the narrator is permanently faced with the problem of how to delve into these matters and how to establish the most credible approach. In brief, discussing Egyptian society and all its problems, frustrations and hopes is made possible and credible through dialogue in Cairo's coffeehouses and shops. For this reason, it will be useful to examine the role of these places in the Cairo of Mahfouz in the three volumes of the *Trilogy*, and the way this role evolves as the story develops.

The analysis will proceed as follows. First, it will discuss courtship in Egypt as a system where non-verbal messages have to be decoded, focusing on the first and second generations in the story. This will examine the role played by coffeehouses and shops in the decoding process, and then the relationship of these coffeehouses and shops to politics and to the British occupation. Finally, in the last volume, when Ahmad Abduh's old coffee shop is demolished, it opens the way for modern cafés and modern life. Al-Sayyid's shop, a symbol of power and control, is also sold, and with it disappears the patriarch's own power. Symbolically, this is meant to announce the end of an era and the beginning of a new one, where the modern gradually replaces the conservative.

### 3.1 The City as metaphor

#### 3.1.1 Alexandria: a city of disasters

In the first pages of *The Alexandria Quartet*, Darley says of Alexandria that one 'would never mistake it for a happy place.' (*Quartet* 17-18) Darley's statement may appear of secondary importance in the beginning, but as we advance in our reading it becomes clear that this statement is indeed a road map for the story. To illustrate, the *Quartet* devotes long passages to the description of the city, especially to negative descriptions which present it as a symbol of misery, as in the following example:

Streets that run back from the docks with their tattered rotten supercargo of houses, breathing into each other's mouths, keeling over. Shuttered balconies swarming with rats, and old women whose hair is full of the blood of ticks. Peeling walls leaning drunkenly to east and west of their true centre of gravity. The black ribbon of flies attaching itself to the lips and eyes of the children – the moist beads of summer flies everywhere; the very weight of their bodies snapping off ancient flypapers hanging in the violet doors of booths and cafés. The smell of the sweat-lathered Berberinis, like that of some decomposing stair-carpet. And then the street noises; shriek and clang of the water-bearing Saidi, dashing his metal cups together as an advertisement, the unheeded shrieks which pierce the hubbub from time to time, as of some small delicately-organized animal being disembowelled. The sores like ponds – the incubation of a human misery of such proportions that one is aghast, and all one's feelings overflow into disgust and terror. (*Quartet* 26)

With a state of mind which tends to amplify everything negative, it is not easy to live in such a city. The images in the above passage show an Alexandria in chaos. The houses are old and in poor condition. Rats, ticks and the 'black ribbon of flies' suggest dirt and infectious diseases. The smell of the people is disagreeable. Added to these extremely poor living conditions are the noisy streets which disturb everyone's peace of mind. Alexandria is depicted as a symbol of 'human misery' which disgusts and confuses. For Darley, to stay in Alexandria is to succumb to the disastrous influence of the Alexandrian landscape.

Moreover, the city engenders events involving conspiracy, secrecy, mystery and ambiguity. The duck shoot on Lake Mareotis with the presumed death of Capodistria is one such event. In addition, the existence of organisations like the 'Jewish Underground Fighters in Haifa and Jerusalem', which Nessim and Justine support, brings even more tension to the dangerous side of the city. There are also confidential documents with brief messages like the one Maskelyne leaves on Pursewarden's desk: 'Nessim Hosnani, A Conspiracy Among the Copts'. It seems that the less people say in Alexandria, the safer they are. Incidents and events in the city include assassinations, suicide, espionage, encrypted messages, arms smuggling, balls and masques. Pine considers these to be 'affirmations of its [the city's] centrifugal force'.<sup>3</sup>

However, Alexandria not only promotes surreptitious and dangerous activities, it also psychologically and physically transforms anyone who cannot escape from it. When Darley says: 'The symbolic lovers of the free Hellenic world are replaced here by something different, something subtly androgynous, inverted upon itself' (*Quartet* 18), the relationship between the city and androgyny remains unclear. It is only later when he says of Justine, 'I will say only that in many things she thought as a man, while in her actions she enjoyed some of the free vertical independence of the masculine outlook' (*Justine* 27), that we suspect Alexandria may be a city which fosters androgyny. The way in which the city transforms people is also illustrated when Darley discovers a new Nessim on his return to Alexandria from Upper Egypt to attend Melissa's funeral. Nessim appears to have become effeminate:

He had aged like a woman — his lips and face had both broadened. He walked now with his weight distributed comfortably on the flat of his feet as if his body had already submitted to a dozen pregnancies. The queer liteness of his step had gone. Moreover he radiated now a flabby charm mixed with concern which made him at first all but unrecognizable. (*Quartet* 190)

Alexandria is also responsible for the misfortunes of its inhabitants. Melissa is one of the inhabitants who has surrendered to the superior force and destructive

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Pine, *Lawrence Durrell: The Mindscape*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 169.

power of the city. Darley tells us that he found her ‘washed up like a half-drowned bird, on the dreary littorals of Alexandria, with her sex broken.’ (*Quartet* 26) Melissa is, in the words of Weigel, ‘that romantic paradox invented by literature - a virtuous whore.’<sup>4</sup> Her condition in life has forced her to become a prostitute. She is capable of loving but cannot find a serious lover. Melissa leads a miserable life but sleeps with Capodistria to discharge Darley from his debts. She is a victim of the men of Alexandria. She clearly shows her despair when she refuses to see Cohen, her ex-lover, when he is dying in a hospital, even though she once dreamed of marrying him. Instead of a husband and a family, Alexandria has offered Melissa poverty, tuberculosis and death.

After Darley has finished writing *Justine*, he decides to give the manuscript to Balthazar for revision. The old doctor returns the paper with a number of interlinear corrections. The new information Balthazar brings to Darley on the island in the second volume turns everything upside down. Darley relapses. After a seclusion of ‘two or three winters’ (*Quartet* 211) with Melissa’s child on the island, he once again feels compelled to reminisce about the past. In this way, he is thrown back into his old state:

Have I not said enough about Alexandria? Am I to be reinfected once more by the dream of it and the memory of its inhabitants? Dreams I had thought safely locked up on paper, confided to the strong-rooms of memory! (*Quartet* 209)

Darley knows now that when he left Alexandria, the full facts about the city were not at his disposal. Balthazar, whom Darley considers ‘one of the keys to the City’ (*Quartet* 78), provides information for the first time about a political conspiracy. Darley now has to deal with the political side of the city. It seems that Alexandria has not finished surprising Darley. The picture he once drew of the city is ultimately revealed as a first impression. Tension mounts as Balthazar revises his views. The peace of mind Darley achieved in the first volume is disturbed in the second. The narrator, who is searching for the meaning of it all, is obliged to reconsider past events. From a different point of view, the various aspects of reality made possible by the power of the city facilitate a form of layered narration. The political side of

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<sup>4</sup> John A. Weigel, *Lawrence Durrell*, New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1965, p. 58.

Alexandria forms the basis for a smooth transition to the second volume, which tells the same story in a revised way.

In the third volume, Mountolive's misfortunes in Alexandria add much to the character of the city. The young ambassador finds himself naively drawn into the house of child prostitutes, where he undergoes all kinds of humiliation. This event fills him with self-contempt and disgust, and of course it is the city he blames.

He changed his clothes furtively, gathered his belongings together, and set off across the town towards the desert road, leaving the city hurriedly like a common thief. He had come to a decision in his own mind. He would ask for a posting to some other country. He would waste no more time upon this Egypt of deceptions and squalor, this betraying landscape which turned emotions and memories to dust, which beggared friendship and destroyed love. (*Quartet* 631)

The fourth volume, *Clea*, explains what has become of each character. It is a story of the present and of the future, in which Darley quits the Alexandria of his memories to settle in the real Alexandria. The city is now a place of physical rather than psychological mutilation. Nessim has lost an eye and a finger; Justine's eyelid droops; Balthazar is ill. Darley's reminiscences on the island have been substituted by a projection into the future. Darley visits Justine in Karm Abu Girg and realises that she awakens nothing in him. This means that he has succeeded in detaching himself from the past, and has therefore freed himself from the gravitational force of the city.

Because the city takes the blame for the misfortunes of those who choose to live in it, a pattern of departures and returns is established. Characters leave the city and come back to it in search of meaning. This regular movement shapes the narrative and gives the story its rhythm. The very beginning of the first volume, *Justine*, suggests that the island is a mirror through which the city will be seen. When Darley says that he has 'escaped' (*Quartet* 17) to the island, he acknowledges that he considers the island a possible antidote to the city, to which he must return from time to time through 'the iron chains of memory' (*Quartet* 17). Introducing the novel by establishing the two places as major forces gives an initial structure to the narrative. We are informed that the story will move to and from the city, and that the

island is the laboratory where the narrator intends to revisit his experiences in order 'to understand it all' (*Quartet* 17). This makes the island necessary for rebuilding the reality that was destroyed by the city, and also to try and establish a logical relationship between events.

Darley leaves Alexandria a 'sick man'. The voyage to the island is at the same time a quest for meaning and a quest for freedom from the chains of the city. It is also a quest for the self, a quest in which the hero appears to be absorbed in reflection and contemplation most of the time, and one where the poetic takes the place of the prosaic, as shown in the following extract:

In the great quietness of these winter evenings there is one clock: the sea. Its dim momentum in the mind is the fugue upon which this writing is made. Empty cadences of sea-water licking its own wounds, sulking along the mouths of the delta, boiling upon those deserted beaches — empty, forever empty under the gulls: white scribble on the grey, munched by clouds. If there are ever sails here they die before the land shadows them. Wreckage washed up on the pediments of islands, the last crust, eroded by the weather, stuck in the blue maw of water ... gone! (*Quartet* 19-20)

In contrast to the island, the city, with its noise and confusion, stresses the realities of life, where there is no place for making poetry. Poverty, tuberculosis, death, prostitution and sordidness are always vivid subjects where the context of the city is concerned.

A number of departures take place in the story for one reason or another. After the supposed murder of Capodistria by Nessim, the latter discovers that Justine has left Alexandria. Darley decides to leave the city when he receives a letter offering him a two-year contract as a teacher in a Catholic school in Upper Egypt:

With the posting of this letter of acceptance a new period will be initiated, for it marks my separation from the city in which so much has happened to me, so much of momentous importance: so much that has aged me. (*Quartet* 182)

Two years later Darley receives the news from Clea that Melissa is dying. Darley returns to the city to find that Melissa has already died and that she has left behind a daughter. Though Nessim is the father of Melissa's child, it is Darley who decides to raise her as his daughter on the island.

On the island, Balthazar visits Darley and gives him the so-called Interlinear. Mnemjian also comes to deliver Nessim's 'long-awaited message', calling him back to the 'Underworld.' (*Quartet* 657) Each visit disturbs Darley's understanding of reality and drastically destroys the structure of the past. In Alexandria, at the consulate, Kenilworth announces to him that the ambassador has assigned him to the censorship department. When Clea asks for a separation, Darley finds it necessary to leave Alexandria to give their relationship time to mature. He prefers to go back to the island, where he has the opportunity of a post at the relay station, which is looking for someone who 'knows the place and can speak the language.' (*Quartet* 841) In his last letter, Darley explains to Clea that his assignment will end in a month and that he is not sure he will be able to return to Alexandria. Darley continues: 'My mind has been turning more and more westward, towards the old inheritance of Italy and France.' (*Quartet* 872) In this way, information flows continuously from the city to the island through letters or visits.

Not only Darley, but almost all the European characters are involved in these departures. Because of his job, Mountolive is forced to leave Egypt again and again. He has been sent on missions to Prague, Berne, Japan and Russia. He has been to Berlin, where he meets Nessim, before taking up his position as ambassador in Egypt. Pombal's first departure from the city is to Rome, but he comes back to Alexandria and is a 'high man of the Free French now.' (*Quartet* 663) Pombal leaves a letter to Darley on the mantelpiece informing him that 'he was likely to be transferred to Italy shortly and did not think he would be able to keep the flat on.' (*Quartet* 842)

Towards the end of the novel, Justine tells Clea that '[i]t is something much bigger this time, international. We will have to go to Switzerland next year, probably for good.' (*Quartet* 876) In her last letter to Darley, Clea writes:

On the table beside me as I write lies my steamship ticket to France; yesterday I knew with absolute certainty that I must go there. Do you

remember how Pursewarden used to say that artists, like sick cats, knew by instinct exactly which herb they needed to effect a cure: and that the bitter-sweet herb of their self-discovery only grew in one place, France? Within ten days I shall be gone! (*Quartet* 874-875)

She then adds:

I think it will be some long time before I see Alexandria again. It has become stale and profitless to me. [...] For I am not the only person who is leaving the place – far from it. Mountolive, for example, will be leaving in a couple of months; by a great stroke of luck he has been given the plum post of his profession; Paris! (*Quartet* 875)

As Clea's letter clearly states, other characters are leaving Alexandria. Amaril and Semira are leaving for America (*Quartet* 875), for example.

If Alexandria is depicted in the *Quartet* as a city one can neither live with nor live without, the Cairo of Mahfouz plays quite a different role. In the *Trilogy*, Cairo is seen as a city, and not as a force which influences its inhabitants. In other words, the city does not transform people and is not responsible for the misfortunes of those who live in it. Prostitution and other social problems are attributable not to the city but to its inhabitants, who are resistant to change. In addition, no characters feel they are caught in the grip of the city or feel a need to escape to rebuild a lost self. On the contrary, characters such as Kamal and Yasin love their city, and struggle to avoid being transferred elsewhere for their work. This does not mean that Cairo has a minor role in the *Trilogy*. On the contrary, it is just as important as Alexandria, except that the roles of the two cities are different.

From another perspective, if the story in the *Quartet* is characterised by departures from and returns to Alexandria, in the *Trilogy* the characters consider the idea of leaving Cairo inconceivable. Those who have been forced to leave it for professional reasons wait impatiently for the time they can return. Moreover, unlike Durrell's characters, those in the *Trilogy* are deeply nostalgic when they find themselves in the coffeehouses of the city again. Lastly, it is important to mention that the narrative of the *Trilogy* never actually leaves Cairo in the way Durrell's characters leave Alexandria in the *Quartet*. In the latter, there is a suggestion that the

island is a mirror through which Alexandria is projected. What is this city everyone wants to flee? To what extent does the Alexandria of Durrell correspond to the real Alexandria? Is Alexandria a real city or an invented one?

### 3.1.2 The City between 'real' and 'unreal'

At the beginning of *Justine*, Durrell informs his readers that '[only] the city is real'. This is largely true. Geographically and historically the city is real. Streets, hotels and harbours are all parts of the real Alexandria. The British occupation, war and the Coptic cause are also elements of the history of Alexandria. When Durrell went back to Alexandria in October 1977 to make a film about the city in which he had spent four years of his life, he checked in at the Cecil Hotel on the Corniche<sup>5</sup>. It is in this hotel that Nessim and Justine meet to discuss their marriage, and where he asks her: 'I want to ask you to become part of a dangerous. . . .' (*Quartet* 552) In addition, on his return to Alexandria in *Clea*, Darley searches for Clea in the Baudrot Café. Michael Haag reports in his book about Alexandria:

The city seemed to him [Durrell] listless and spiritless, its harbour a mere cemetery, its famous cafés, Pastroudis and Baudrot, no longer twinkling with music and lights.<sup>6</sup>

In the same book by Haag there is a map of Alexandria in the 1930s and '40s<sup>7</sup>, which helps the reader follow the movement of Durrell's characters and the action of the novel. After Justine's departure from Alexandria, Darley's walk in the city introduces the streets as they appear on maps:

It is as if the whole city had crashed about my ears: I walk slowly to the flat, aimlessly as survivors must walk about the streets of their native city after an earthquake, surprised to find how much that had been familiar has changed, Rue Piroua, Rue de France, the Terbana Mosque (cupboard smelling of apples), Rue Sidi Abou El Abbas (water-ices and coffee), Anfouchi, Ras El Tin (Cape of Figs), Ikingi Mariut (gathering wild flowers together, convinced she cannot love me), equestrian statue of Mohammed Ali in the square. . . . General Earle's comical little bust,

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<sup>5</sup> Michael von Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

killed Sudan 1885. . . . An evening multitudinous with swallows . . . the tombs at Kom El Shugafa, darkness and damp soil, both terrified by the darkness. . . . Rue Fuad as the old Canopic Way, once Rue Rosette. (*Quartet* 177-178)

Most of these places appear on Haag's map. We can even find Kom El Dick, where Darley and Justine walk 'through the twisted warren of streets' (*Quartet* 84), as well as Nebi Daniel Mosque and Ramleh Station, and we have a sense of the proximity of the station to the Cecil Hotel. These elements and many others are aspects of a 'real' Alexandria.

Nevertheless, the real Alexandria is not the only city that interests Durrell in the *Quartet*. He is interested in another Alexandria too. Paul Lorenz writes:

I will never forget H.R. Stoneback's presentation at *On Miracle Ground VII*, an international Lawrence Durrell Conference held in Avignon in 1992. Stoney had just visited Saintes Maries de la Mer, one of the key settings used in the *Avignon Quintet*, and he was surprised that Durrell had gotten the geography of the place wrong. Four years later, *On Miracle Ground IX* was held in Alexandria, Egypt, and dozens of Durrellians were amused to find that the Alexandria Durrell had created for them in their imaginations was only the most marginal assistance in navigating the streets of the actual city. Soad Sobhy, an Alexandrian and one of the organizers of the Alexandria conference, described Durrell's Alexandria as "a metaphorical place" in which the actual city was intermingled with Durrell's "personal fantasies and dreams" to create a city in his imagination, a city whose "every aspect . . . is incomplete and equivocal." Durrell's cities, large and small, are real mental images of the actual places, images that form a place in memory where people and events can develop.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, Durrell's Alexandria transcends time. It is not the Alexandria of the present but the Alexandria of all times. It is not only a real city but also a mythological city. The presence of Cavafy in the story illustrates this idea.

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<sup>8</sup> Donald P. Kaczvinsky, ed., *Durrell and the City: Collected Essays on Place*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012, p. 97.

The city of Durrell is a city of monuments, and Cavafy is one of these monuments. Cavafy is present in the *Quartet* as ‘the old poet of the city’ (*Quartet* 18). Richard Pine believes that ‘Cavafy was useful to Durrell as part-author of this metaphor, since he had helped to create the ‘mythological past’<sup>9</sup>. At the end of *Justine*, Durrell inserts his own translation of Cavafy’s poem, “The City”.

You tell yourself: I’ll be gone  
To some other land, some other sea,  
To a city lovelier far than this  
Could ever have been or hoped to be –  
Where every step now tightens the noose:  
A heart in a body buried and out of use:  
How long, how long must I be here  
Confined among these dreary purlieus  
Of the common mind? Wherever now I look  
Black ruins of my life rise into view.  
So many years I have been here  
Spending and squandering, and nothing gained.  
There’s no new land, my friend, no  
New sea; for the city will follow you,  
In the same streets you’ll wander endlessly,  
The same mental suburbs slip from youth to age,  
In the same house go white at last –  
The city is a cage. (*Quartet* 201)

It is as if the first lines were addressed to Darley. When the narrator of *Justine* decides to leave Alexandria and substitute it for the island, he thinks he is saving himself from the destructive power of the city. But, as Cavafy says, there is ‘no new land’ because the city will always ‘follow’ him. The verb ‘follow’ is a metaphor used to highlight the imaginary power of Alexandria. It is not really the city that follows and haunts its inhabitants but the memory of it. The ‘dreary purlieus’ exist only in the mind, and the phrase ‘wander endlessly’ confirms that the streets are located in the mind only. When Darley thinks about his experiences in Alexandria, the ‘black ruins’ of his life also come to mind. On the other hand, Cavafy’s metaphor that the city is a

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Pine, *Lawrence Durrell: The Mindscape*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994, p. 191.

cage can be applied to Darley as well. In both cases, the cage is psychological rather than physical. To free himself, he has to come back to the city, for the key to open this cage is certainly there in the ‘mental suburbs’ and nowhere else.

On the island, it is through memory that the city is reshaped and rebuilt: ‘I had to come here in order completely to rebuild this city in my brain’ (*Quartet* 18). However, the absence of complete truth about the experiences Darley has had in Alexandria means that any interpretation will be the result of speculation and imagination. Darley realises his naivety when he receives a message from Nessim calling on him to return to Alexandria with the child. Darley’s response to Nessim’s request reveals the kind of relationship he has with the city:

A message which was to draw me back inexorably to the one city which for me always hovered between illusion and reality, between the substance and the poetic images which its very name aroused in me. A memory, I told myself, which had been falsified by the desires and intuitions only as yet half-realized on paper. Alexandria, the capital of memory! (*Quartet* 657)

The combination here of ‘illusion’ and ‘reality’ is one of the ‘oxymorons’<sup>10</sup> of the city. Alexandria is a city of contradictions, not in reality but in relation to memory. Darley recognises his failure to understand the realities of the city. His ‘desires’ and ‘intuitions’ have wronged him and have biased his interpretations.

Alexandria is the capital of memory. However, memory has another function in the narrative. It means the past, but also involves selection. Darley is obliged to rework only the elements of the city that will bring him closer to the meaning of the events in which he has been involved. For Durrell, Darley’s memories help him build the story without falling into the trap of history and without being at the mercy of chronology. When Darley says that what he ‘most need[s] to do is to record experiences, not in the order in which they took place — for that is history — but in the order in which they first became significant for [him]’ (*Quartet* 97), he rationalises the fragmentary narration and suggests that memory is the most important key to making sense of these fragments.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

Through memory, the city lies suspended between the real and the unreal. To illustrate, in *Justine* Darley gives his account of the city and its inhabitants. In *Balthazar*, through the ‘Great Interlinear’, the eponymous hero revises the information we have been given in *Justine*. Darley and the reader feel betrayed. It is not in the ‘real’ Alexandria that they have been misled, but in the ‘unreal’ one, in the imagined Alexandria that has been constructed in the memory of Darley.

In *Clea*, Darley returns to find the city is being bombarded. It is enveloped in the darkness of war. During the air raid, Alexandria is a city where life is under threat and any peace of mind is disturbed. In this volume, the symbolic darkness of the city in the previous volumes becomes a physical darkness.

The harbour suddenly outlined itself with complete clarity upon the dark panels of heaven, while long white fingers of powder-white light began to stalk about the sky in ungainly fashion, as if they were the legs of some awkward insect struggling to gain a purchase on the slippery black. A dense stream of coloured rockets now began to mount from the haze among the battleships, emptying on the sky their brilliant clusters of stars and diamonds and smashed pearl snuff-boxes with a marvellous prodigality. The air shook in strokes. Clouds of pink and yellow dust arose with the maroons to shine upon the greasy buttocks of the barrage balloons which were flying everywhere. The very sea seemed to tremble. I had no idea that we were so near, or that the city could be so beautiful in the mere saturnalia of a war. It had begun to swell up, to expand like some mystical rose of the darkness, and the bombardment kept it company, overflowing the mind.

*(Quartet 668)*

Astonishingly, Darley finds the city ‘beautiful’ despite the fearful images in the above passage. The city is perceived quite differently in *Justine* and in *Clea*. Darley sees a clear difference between the city of the past and the city of the present:

I strove to re-establish those forgotten priorities from memory, while I gazed about me. The whole toybox of Egyptian life was still there, every figure in place — street-sprinkler, scribe, mourner, harlot, clerk, priest — untouched, it seemed, by time or by war. A sudden melancholy invaded

me as I watched them, for they had now become a part of the past. My sympathy had discovered a new element inside itself — detachment.

*(Quartet 675)*

It is this ‘detachment’ which has enabled the distinction. Darley is no longer caught in the gravitational field of the city. His freedom is psychological rather than physical.

The city in Durrell’s tetralogy influences the destiny of his characters. It changes the course of events, and is not merely a place, but is itself transformed into a character in the work. Darley says of his experience with Melissa:

It was good to stand there, awkward and a little shy, breathing quickly because we knew what we wanted of each other. The messages passing beyond conscience, directly through the flesh-lips, eyes, water-ices, the coloured stall. To stand lightly there, our little fingers linked, drinking in the deep camphor-scented afternoon, a part of city. . . . *(Quartet 19)*

The absence of an article before the word ‘city’ is, in the words of Richard Pine, ‘a syntactical ploy designed to create the identification between person and city’<sup>11</sup>. The city becomes a person, and people become the city.

The city is not only personified, it is also ‘a world’ in itself. In *Justine*, Darley tells us that ‘[a] city becomes a world when one loves one of its inhabitants.’ *(Quartet 57)* Of course, the city in this sense is more an idea than a place, and since ideas change, the city may change as well. Darley’s conception of the city when he loves Justine differs from how he perceives it when he experiences ‘true’ love with Clea. Before leaving for the island, Darley destroys the city, intending to ‘rebuild’ it because he has been destroyed by Justine. With Clea, however, things are different:

When you are in love with one of its inhabitants a city can become a world. A whole new geography of Alexandria was born through Clea, reviving old meanings, renewing ambiances half forgotten, laying down like a rich wash of colour a new history, a new biography to replace the old one. *(Quartet 832)*

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

The metaphor comparing the city to the world occurs in *Justine* and again in *Clea*. It is expressed in nearly the same words but with a different word order. The inversion suggests a similar inversion in the situation. In the first instance the verb 'to love' is used, while in *Clea*, this becomes the phrase 'to be in love'. In the first example, the city 'becomes' a world, while in the second it 'can become' a world. This shows that the power of the city on Darley has diminished. His certainty in *Justine* has been replaced by probability in *Clea*. It is Clea who is behind the imaginary architecture of the new city. Clea offers Darley a new Alexandria through love. Thus the city is reborn because Darley has 'healed' himself. The difference between the new and the old Alexandria lies only in Darley's imagination. Nothing really changes in the real city. It is in his mind that things have changed.

In summary, the cosmopolitan Alexandria was once a city where 'five races, five languages, a dozen creeds' (*Quartet* 17) coexisted. The presence of Europeans and a variety of religions makes the city an appropriate setting for Durrell to write a story which explores 'relationships within practically every sexual couplet possible.'<sup>12</sup> Alexandria is also a suitable setting for exposing philosophical ideas about love, space, time, life and death. However, the fact that events have their interpretation in relation to time and space reinforces the idea of a relative truth. Alexandria itself becomes a victim of this relativity. To put it simply, Alexandria is not a stable city in the *Quartet*. Instead, it is a city which makes sense in relation to each character, and memory is the only way in which the different faces of the city are exhibited and revealed. In addition, because truth is relative, the city moves between reality and imagination outside the dictates of time. It is this timelessness which makes Alexandria a stage ready to welcome performances of any kind and on any timescale.

Unlike the cities in the works of Mahfouz, the Alexandria of Durrell does not represent relationships between Egyptians as they really exist in Egypt. Put differently, the Egyptian side of the city is not in focus, and there is only partial representation of the oriental side of the Egyptian character. Egyptian discussions are normally characterised by dialogues which generally take place in cafés, but in *The Alexandria Quartet* we rarely have an opportunity to meet Egyptian characters in such a context. On the other hand, the way in which Egyptian men relate to women is

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 83.

totally absent. It is not easy to imagine a work written about Alexandria and about Egypt without taking this oriental aspect into consideration. The tetralogy is about sex and love, but this remains firmly within a European context.

Egypt mirrored through the Alexandria of Durrell differs from the way it is represented in the Cairo of Mahfouz. One cannot disagree that Alexandria is different from Cairo in that its history and geography have made it a mythological city. Alexandria was once one of the biggest trading centres in the world. This is how it became a cosmopolitan city and the favourite destination of traders of different nationalities, who brought with them their religion, their language and their culture. Cairo, on the other hand, though one of the most important cities in Egypt, does not have Alexandria's mythological background. However, this is not the main reason the Alexandria of the *Quartet* represents a different Egypt from the one represented by Cairo in the *Trilogy*. Durrell's Alexandria is a city which mixes reality with imagination. It is a city which belongs to the East and to the West at the same time. To illustrate this idea, it will be useful to compare it with the way Mahfouz portrays Alexandria in *Miramar*.

The main setting of the story in *Miramar* is the boarding house belonging to the Greek, Mariana, and the beautiful maid Zohra is at the centre of the action. Mahfouz uses four narrators in this novel, Amer Wagdi, Hosny Allam, Mansour Bahy and Sarhan al-Beheiry, to tell the same story, each from his own perspective. Politics has an important place in their lives, yet their energies are mobilised by Zohra, the young maid at the boarding house. Naguib Mahfouz uses the story to illustrate the many political and social events which impacted Egyptian society in the 1960s.

It is easy to find traces of Durrell's Alexandria in *Miramar*. For example, it is realistically portrayed in both novels as a gloomy city where it rains all the time and where the sea is usually rough.

I liked the weather in Alexandria. It suited me. Not just the days of clear blue and golden sun; I also liked the occasional spells of storms, when the clouds thickened, making dark mountains in the sky, the face of morning glooming into dusk. The roads of the sky would be suddenly hushed into ominous silence. A gust of wind would circulate, like a

warning cry or an orator clearing his throat; a branch would start dancing, a skirt would lift – and then it would pounce wildly, thundering as far as the horizon. The sea would rage high, foam breaking on the very curbs of the streets. Thunder would blow its ecstasies out of an unknown world; lightning would coruscate, dazzling eyesight, electrifying the heart. The rain pouring down would hug earth and sky in a wet embrace, elements mixing their warring natures to grapple and heave as if a new world were about to be born.<sup>13</sup>

This passage reminds us of the ‘freak thunder-storm of tremendous intensity’ (*Quartet* 180), which Darley describes after Justine’s departure. Darley tells us that he ‘had been wandering about in the rain for hours’ (*Quartet* 180). Thus the weather is another illustration of the real Alexandria. However, whereas in *Miramar* it is part of the city, in the *Quartet* it is used to mirror a state of mind or to create opportunities for characters to reveal realities about themselves or others, as in the case of Darley’s visit to Clea.

Nor is the city responsible for the misfortunes of its inhabitants in *Miramar*, as Darley believes in the *Quartet*. The city does not ‘use’ characters and does not ‘precipitate conflicts’ (*Quartet* 17) in them. *Miramar* is about the transformation of Egyptian society after the revolution of 1952. Its cosmopolitan atmosphere, with a boarding house and a Greek tenant, makes it more appropriate than any other city for a story about sexual relationships and the situation of women in Egypt. In *Miramar*, the city is not a character; it is merely a setting. Mahfouz simply sees in the cosmopolitan city an opportunity for a story with which Egyptians will easily identify.

In addition, *Miramar* describes the city without reference to its physical characteristics:

When I finally went out, it was another Alexandria that received me, the fury past, calm again, giving itself to the clear golden rays of the sun. I looked out at the waves in their nonchalant succession, the little cloud puffs dotted across the sky. Then I went and took my seat in the Trianon and ordered my café au lait as I used to in the good old days

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<sup>13</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, Maged Kommos, and John Rodenbeck, *Miramar*, 1<sup>st</sup> Anchor Books ed., New York: Anchor Books, 1993, pp. 116-117.

with Gharably Pasha, Sheikh Darwish, and Madame Lobraska – the only Frank I ever made love to, once upon a time when I was drowned in women. Tolba Marzuq sat with me for a while, then left for the lobby of the Windsor, where he was meeting an old friend. I saw Sarhan coming toward me. He shook my hand and sat down.<sup>14</sup>

This is typical of Egyptians, who often associate cafés with beautiful scenery. It is in cafés that Egyptians recall old memories, analyse the present and think about the future. Cafés also make it possible for people to meet, and they make the dialogue plausible. The Miramar boarding house is in itself a café, where residents meet to talk and to listen to Umm Kulthum's music. It is also the place where political matters are raised, such as the role of the Wafd Party, and where public figures such as Sa'd Zaghlul are celebrated.

In *Miramar*, the narrative moves from the boarding house to cafés. Sarhan al-Beheiry leaves the boarding house to meet Ali Bakir in the Café de la Paix to discuss their secret deal. Characters also reflect on life in cafés:

So I've changed my route and sit down behind the glass panes of the Miramar Café, watching the clouds and waiting, not with any clear end in view, nor warmed by any touch of emotion, but out of sheer curiosity born of boredom and despair, a simple craving for an adventure of any kind.<sup>15</sup>

Whatever the weather, cafés remain places for contemplation. After lunch at Petro's in Sharia Safeya Zaghloul, Mansour Bahy goes to Ali Keifak in Ramleh Square for a coffee '[to watch] the square busy under an overcast sky.'<sup>16</sup>

In Egypt, topics of the day are discussed outside the home. Even marital problems are exported to outside locations for advice from friends. Meetings are arranged in cafés. In *The Alexandria Quartet*, the role of the city is replaced by written messages in the form of letters, telegrams and phone calls. This is once again a European approach which was alien to real Egyptian culture at that time. In

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

Mahfouz's *Trilogy*, for instance, people in Cairo gather naturally, with no need for written communication.

If the city of Darley is a metaphor, the city which plays host to the Miramar boarding house is more realistic. Mahfouz's Alexandria is not made into a character. It is simply a world where stories are told. Alexandria is not a city where new biographies are born (*Quartet* 832), but a city where biographies are related. On the other hand, if the city in *The Alexandria Quartet* imposes a multi-dimensional story with several narrators, in *Miramar* its different perspectives offer a deep exploration of the Egyptian personality with its richness and diversity.

Finally, in the *Quartet*, Alexandria is represented on two different maps. The Alexandria of the Orient lies on the Mediterranean coast, and offers the author its people, its streets, its monuments and its culture as a setting which is part of Egypt. In the Alexandria of the Occident, on the other hand, actions, reactions, interpretations and thinking processes stem from a purely European background. If Alexandria is the 'most European of cities'<sup>17</sup> as Pine describes it, how is Cairo portrayed in *The Cairo Trilogy*?

## 3.2 Cairo: a real Egyptian city

### 3.2.1 Coffeehouses: Cairo unveiled

In *Sugar Street*, Yasin tells Kamal:

You won't learn about life in a library. Truth is to be found at home and in the street. (*Trilogy* 1011)

Yasin's statement encapsulates Mahfouz's relationship with the city of Cairo. In fact, the primary source for Mahfouz's stories lies in the street, particularly in coffeehouses and shops. In a society dominated by religion and traditions, there are few opportunities for men to make contact with women. Women leave their houses veiled or accompanied by men, and this further complicates any process of seduction. In addition, the notion of honour is very important to Egyptian men. A woman who dishonours her family by having sex outside marriage risks death, or at

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Pine, *Lawrence Durrell: The Mindscape*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 170.

least rejection. Moreover, in a city like Cairo, where streets are narrow and crowded, and where shops are clustered, information and rumours spread very fast. This means that, in order to avoid problems with neighbours, men and women have to ensure they respect tradition.

In the *Trilogy*, both Yasin and his father suffer the tyranny of lust. They are unable to resist the charm of the Egyptian ladies. Yasin is incapable of finding stability in his marriages. Each time he marries, he very soon feels trapped by boredom. As for al-Sayyid Ahmad, he has no wish to divorce the mother of his children, but at the same time cannot imagine a life without entertainment, wine, friends and plump mistresses. In such a conservative context, however, these two vicious men have to pass women by in the street. The street offers Mahfouz an opportunity to reveal the hypocrisy and ambivalence into which Egyptian men are drawn.

While Mahfouz was out walking in the streets of Cairo with Ghitani, a well-known Egyptian novelist, the ruins of an old house arrested his attention as he was returning to Mu'izz li-Din Allah Street. Mahfouz commented:

Some beautiful young women used to live in this house, and some of the rich, prominent men used to sit here, and just lift their eyes up to them and wink, twisting their proud moustaches. These were the accepted norms for flirtation and courtship in the 1920s and 1930s ...<sup>18</sup>

In the *Trilogy*, Yasin and his father use the same strategy of courtship as these men. Yasin operates in al-Ghuriya, where al-Sayyid Ali's coffee shop is located. We are told the following about Yasin and this coffee shop:

He headed toward the Goldsmiths Bazaar and then to al-Ghuriya. He turned into al-Sayyid Ali's coffee shop on the corner of al-Sanadiqiya. It resembled a store of medium size and had a door on al-Sanadiqiya and a window with bars overlooking al-Ghuriya. There were some padded benches arranged in the corners. Yasin took his place on the bench under the window. It had been his favorite for weeks. He ordered tea.

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 39.

He sat where he could look out the window easily without arousing suspicion. He could glance up whenever he wished at a small window of a house on the other side of the street. (*Trilogy* 77)

Yasin finds this coffeehouse strategic for his plan to reach Zanuba. The house of the performer Zubayda, Zanuba's aunt, has a window overlooking al-Ghuriya. Communication between him and the lute player is possible only through this window. Zanuba is aware of Yasin's wishes, and the window is a door for her which could lead to marriage. As a first step in the process of courtship, Zanuba is careful not to close the window completely, but Yasin has to be patient and has to frequent the coffee shop evening after evening before he can hope for Zanuba's consent. The length of the process does not tire Yasin, whose perseverance and persistence allow him to progress to the stage of negotiating:

You've got a deal . . . wait in the coffee shop of al-Sayyid Ali, where you've spent all these evenings. When I open the window, come to the house. (*Trilogy* 263)

Zanuba has to wait for a moment when she is alone in her aunt's house before she can let Yasin in. She also has to check that the shops outside are closed and that there is no pedestrian traffic. No one must know about or even suspect her courtship with Yasin if she wishes to avoid trouble with her aunt and with the neighbourhood at large. Finding an opportunity which satisfies all these conditions is not possible without a vantage point. In other words, without the coffee shop the love affair between Yasin and Zanuba would have been unlikely.

In *Palace Walk*, we are told that Yasin 'would exchange coffeehouses according to the object of his desire.' (*Trilogy* 404) After breaking up with Zanuba, Yasin abandons al-Sayyid Ali's coffee shop and moves to the coffee shop of Ahmad Abduh in Khan al-Khalili.

That coffee shop was situated belowground like a cave hewn from a mountain. Residences of this ancient district formed its roof. Its narrow rooms faced each other around a courtyard with an abandoned fountain, cut off from the outside world. Its lamps were lit both day and night, and it had a calm, dreamy, cool atmosphere. (*Trilogy* 359)

Yasin has chosen this coffeehouse because of its proximity to Costaki's bar. Yasin becomes more and more addicted to alcohol after his marriage. He cannot abstain from drinking even for a single day. His disappointment with marriage makes him increasingly insensitive to his wife's feelings. The antique look of the coffee shop, the bar and the wine help him to escape a world he finds boring.

Ahmad Abduh's coffeehouse was the one he loved best. He would not forsake it, unless scorched by some desire, for as they say: "Desire's a fire." It was desire that had attracted him in the past to the Egyptian Club, which was close to the woman who sold down palm fruit. Desire had also been responsible for tempting him to move to al-Sayyid Ali's coffeehouse in al-Ghuriya, situated across the street from the home of the lute player Zanuba. (*Trilogy* 404)

In the case of Yasin, coffee shops are closely related to women. It is women who give spirit to the place. Once the relationship ends or fails, he looks for another coffee shop near a woman who inspires him. The coffee shop is also a place where Yasin can muse and sink into his dreams of naked bodies. On the other hand, the coffee shop is a place where the narrator highlights the obsessions of Egyptian men with the female body. The coffee shop also helps introduce characters who bring new elements to the story. In other words, coffee shops enrich the story with events and make the Cairo of the *Trilogy* more realistic.

The role of coffee shops in the lives of Mahfouz's characters becomes evident during the military blockade. British encampments have been established in the heart of Palace Walk to suppress demonstrations. Soldiers control every movement in the streets to intimidate people. With soldiers stationed at the entrance to the house, al-Sayyid orders that no one should leave the building. Yasin is now captive in his own house. He has to face the reality from which he has grown used to fleeing. Yasin is perplexed to find himself alone with Zaynab during the coffee hour: 'What can I do from now till midnight?' (*Trilogy* 404) Without the military blockade, Yasin would have continued to seek refuge in bars and coffeehouses. He would have continued to go home intoxicated at midnight, leaving hardly any opportunity for discussion with his wife. He would also have avoided the scandal with Zaynab's

maid. This confrontation therefore reveals the dysfunctions of love and sexuality in the traditional Egyptian family, dysfunctions which only coffeehouses can hide.

Another role of coffee shops is introduced into the story through Fahmy, who calls for revolution against the English.

Fahmy had not learned the route to coffeehouses as the result of any setback to his career as a diligent student. He came in response to the troubled times, which called on the students and everyone else to meet and consult. He and some comrades had chosen Abduh's coffeehouse for the antique characteristics that made it a refuge from prying eyes. They sat there evening after evening to talk, scheme, predict, and await forthcoming events. (*Trilogy* 359)

All topics that cannot be discussed at home are brought to coffee shops. Because Fahmy's political activities are secret, no one in the family, especially his father, can know about them. During family gatherings, Fahmy is forced to listen to discussions contrary to his revolutionary ideas, but he cannot express his feelings. He keeps his participation in demonstrations secret to spare his mother fear and anxiety on the one hand, and to avoid his father's wrath on the other. The only place where Fahmy finds minds responsive to the national issue is Ahmad Abduh's coffee shop. Here he can enjoy the freedom to express his ideas and his admiration for the nationalist liberation movement. The coffee shop also serves to make his comrades more enthusiastic about the Egyptian nationalist cause. In other words, whenever he feels the need to speak freely, he has to leave the house. Unlike his home, the coffee shop is a place for the banned, the outlawed and the proscribed. It allows Mahfouz to highlight another type of contradiction: the hypocrisy of Egyptian families who are in favour of liberation for their country, yet forbid their children to participate in it.

In a coffee shop people have time to eavesdrop, to discuss, to criticise, and to gather and spread information. It serves as a platform for information exchange, where a man can look for additional information about a woman he intends to marry. It is also a dating site for men in search of a woman. From a narrative point of view, the coffee shop allows the narrator to include details about the secret lives of the inhabitants and to develop the characters of the story according to the role he

has assigned them. It also helps to expose the contradictions and hypocrisy to which some Egyptians are subject in a conservative society.

In *Palace of Desire*, Yasin continues to spend his evenings in Ahmad Abduh's coffeehouse. Kamal has taken the place of Fahmy in this coffee shop, which has brought the two brothers closer. Yasin treats Kamal as a friend rather than a younger brother. The coffee shop is the same as in *Palace Walk*. No changes have been made to its interior:

The interior consisted of a spacious square courtyard with large, cream-colored tiles from the village of al-Ma'asara. There was a fountain in the center surrounded by carnations in pots. On all four sides stood benches covered with cushions and decorative mats. The walls were interrupted at regular intervals by cell-like alcoves, without doors or windows. They resembled caves carved into the walls and were furnished with nothing more than a wooden table, four chairs, and a small lamp, which burned night and day and hung in a niche on the back wall. The bizarre setting of the coffeehouse contributed to its character, for there was a sleepy calm about it unusual among coffeehouses. The light was dim and the atmosphere damp. Each group of patrons was isolated in an alcove or on a bench. The men smoked water pipes, drank tea, and chatted idly and interminably. Their conversations had a pervasive, continuous, and languid melody of desire, broken at lengthy intervals by a cough, a laugh, or the gurgling sound of a water pipe. (*Trilogy* 607-608)

Ahmad Abduh's coffee shop plays a role in shaping the personality of Kamal. Like Mahfouz, Kamal's literary and intellectual spirit springs from the conversations of men in coffeehouses. Much of the time he is observing rather than participating. For Kamal, the coffee shop is an abundant source of inspiration. Unlike his friend Fuad, who finds the place depressing, Kamal finds Ahmad Abduh's coffeehouse a 'treasure for the dreamer' and a source of 'much food for thought.' (*Trilogy* 608)

Al-Sayyid Ahmad follows the same path as his son Yasin. He uses al-Sayyid Ali's coffee shop in al-Ghuriya to seduce Zanuba. This first visit seems to be difficult for al-Sayyid, who cares very much about his reputation. He has never experienced a situation like this. A respectable man with a family and a successful business sitting in

a coffee shop waiting for a dancer to appear at her window is extremely humiliating. Nevertheless, his desire proves stronger, and al-Sayyid sees in Zanuba a way of recovering his lost youth. Fahmy's death has given him a sense that he has aged and been deprived of entertainment for too long. Only Zanuba is capable of restoring his energy and his zest for life. During these moments of solitude, al-Sayyid Ahmad, sitting on the bench under Zanuba's window, reflects on his situation:

Do you want to disgrace yourself in front of everyone? What's the use of this anyway? Would you truly like her to see you through the shutters so she can make fun of your downfall? You don't realize what you're doing to yourself. No matter how much you exhaust your eyes and dizzy your brain, she'll never show herself to you. What's even more upsetting is that she's watching you with amusement from the window. Why did you come? You want to feast your eyes on her. Confess. You wish to survey her supple body, see her smile and wink, and watch her hennaed fingers.  
(*Trilogy* 634-635)

The fact that Yasin changes coffeehouses to court other women has made the love affair possible between al-Sayyid Ahmad and Zanuba. It is ironic that father and son use the same coffee shop and the same techniques to seduce the same woman. Al-Sayyid Ahmad falls in love with Zanuba. He is ready to sacrifice everything for her love, but Zanuba does not yield. She cautiously maintains a relationship with the two men. Neither al-Sayyid nor Yasin knows about each other's involvement in this triangle. However, it is Yasin, who has been married twice before, who will make Zanuba his last wife. At this point, the patriarch has to accept Zanuba as the wife of his son and the mother of his grandchildren.

In *Sugar Street*, mentalities have changed and women have acquired some rights. Relations between parents and children are now based more on dialogue than on orders. There are more groups of student activists in the streets to support their leaders. There are also gatherings of Egyptian nationalists, who deliver their addresses to large crowds. Protests against the British occupation have become more frequent. Movements calling for freedom, whether based on religion or communism, begin to worry the English. However, coffeehouses continue to play a role in the narrative. A demonstration to celebrate the national holiday provides an illustration

of this. Kamal, like all nationalists, loves to celebrate these holidays, but on this occasion he witnesses the barbaric acts of the occupying forces in Qasr al-Ayni Street in al-Isma'iliya. To suppress the furious throngs of people, soldiers start shooting and firing heavily into the demonstrators. Kamal rushes to a coffeehouse to save his life.

The third generation also frequents the historic coffee shop of Ahmad Abduh. Abd al-Muni'm, with his religious orientation, and Ahmad, the fervent communist, both go to the same coffeehouse but for different reasons. Abd al-Muni'm has a meeting with the fanatic Shaykh Ali al-Manufi while Ahmad, like Kamal, goes there to drink his green tea and to reflect on life. The coffee shop is the place where the two brothers show their ideological differences. When Abd al-Muni'm invites his brother to his meeting with the Shaykh, Ahmad symbolically frees his arm from his brother's, saying that he once had a quarrel with the Shaykh and does not like fanatics.

Kamal is still a faithful client of Ahmad Abduh's coffee shop, but this time, instead of sitting with Fuad al-Hamzawi, the son of al-Sayyid's assistant, he sits with Isma'il Latif, his old friend, when the latter returns to Cairo on holiday. Kamal informs Isma'il that, sadly, the coffee shop will soon be demolished:

My dear coffeehouse, you're part of me. I have dreamt a lot and thought a lot inside you. Yasin came to you for years. Fahmy met his revolutionary comrades here to plan for a better world. I also love you, because you're made from the same stuff as dreams. (*Trilogy* 1032)

At the same time, however, Kamal rationalises the fact that the coffeehouse will be demolished when he says that he 'advocate[s] demolition of the pyramids if some future use is discovered for the stones.' (*Trilogy* 1032) This statement highlights a desire to break with the traditional and move towards the modern. At the same time, it announces the end of the traditional role of coffee shops in the story.

Kamal's friendship with Riyad Qaldas, a translator in the Ministry of Education, replaces his friendship with Husayn Shaddad, just as other coffeehouses replace Ahmad Abduh's after it is demolished. We see Kamal now with his new friend either in the café of Imad al-Din or the grand coffeehouse of al-Husayn. We also meet the two friends in the Khan al-Khalili coffeehouse, which has replaced

Ahmad Abduh's old one. The setting moves from alcoves in a subterranean coffeehouse to a balcony overlooking the new Khan al-Khalili. The openness of the topics discussed corresponds to the openness of the place. Intellectual exchanges take place. Kamal and Riyad discuss political, social and religious issues with detachment and respect for each other's opinions. However, in this third volume, we meet Egyptians more often outside in streets than in coffeehouses. They are no longer spectators passively discussing the future of their country in the coffee shops of Ahmad Abduh and al-Sayyid Ali. Instead, they head off in streetcars to protest at well-organised demonstrations. They can also be found in libraries learning about other civilisations and the meaning of life.

Already in *Palace of Desire*, in a progressive but timid process, libraries begin to emerge to replace coffeehouses. When Husayn Shaddad asks Kamal about his reading in the gazebo at Shaddad's mansion, Kamal replies:

I can tell you my reading has become more systematic. It's no longer a question of reading anything I want - stories in translation, selections of poetry, or critical essays. I've begun to proceed in a slightly more enlightened manner. I recently started spending two hours every evening at the National Library. There I look up the meanings of deep and mysterious words in the encyclopedia, terms like 'literature,' 'philosophy,' 'thought,' and 'culture.' As I read, I jot down the names of books I come across. It's an extraordinary world. My soul dissolves in it from eager curiosity. (*Trilogy* 746-747)

In *Sugar Street*, libraries occupy even more of the story. Ibrahim Shawkat comments to Yasin:

We rear our children, guide them, and advise them, but each child finds his way to a library, which is a world totally independent of us. There total strangers compete with us. So what can we do? (*Trilogy* 1013)

This indicates a shift of place, and foreshadows the use of libraries as a new strategic point from which to discuss Egypt. Abd al-Muni'm and Ahmad represent the generation of books. Where Ahmad Abduh's coffee shop presented us with Abd al-Muni'm as a disciple of Shaykh al-Manufi and Ahmad as an intellectual opposed to

religion, the library of Kamal introduces another difference between the two brothers. Abd al-Muni'm selects a book of essays on Islamic history while Ahmad chooses the Principles of Philosophy.

Moreover, it is in the university library that Ahmad meets and falls in love with Alawiya Sabri. In the first volumes, attracting the attention of women involved men sitting in coffeehouses in front of windows. In this volume, however, the process of seduction has moved to classes and gardens. Coffeehouses have become libraries where male and female students study together. Books have replaced henna and earrings in terms of establishing initial contact between men and women. Ahmad's attempt at a relationship with Alawiya fails, and he moves on to Sawsan. He meets her in the building of the al-Insan al-Jadid (The New Man) magazine. Their relationship has not been arranged by their families but by themselves. Where the generation of their parents listened to the music of al-Hamuli, Muhammad Uthman and al-Manilawi, this generation is interested in Shakespeare, Schopenhauer, Comte, Darwin, Freud, Marx and Engels.

From a comparative point of view, the presence and the role of coffeehouses in the *Trilogy* indirectly highlights the 'unreal' side of Durrell's Alexandria. It is unthinkable to talk about a city in Egypt without talking about its coffeehouses. It is true that the *Quartet* involves cafés such as Al Aktar, but they have no real relevance to the development of the plot. To illustrate, Egyptian nationalist demonstrations are organised, as we have seen, in the coffeehouses of Cairo, but the intrigue of the Hosnanis evolves without the apparent need for a coffeehouse. The most important moment in the story, where Nessim has to ask Justine for her hand in marriage and where he has to reveal his political plan, takes place in the Cecil Hotel. In this sense, Durrell's choice is occidental, as is the approach itself. On the other hand, while communication is mainly oral in the *Trilogy*, messages in Durrell's tetralogy are delivered in written form using codes and abbreviations. Lastly, where Yasin, his father and the other men in the *Trilogy* use coffeehouses to seduce women, the men in the *Quartet* meet women publicly with no constraint. Even Durrell's Egyptian characters have no difficulty meeting women.

### 3.2.2 Shops: Cairo unveiled once more

Accompanying Mahfouz in the streets of old Cairo, Gamal al-Ghitani writes:

We continued across Suq al-Nahhasin, the coppersmiths' market, where Mahfouz pictures Ahmad 'Abd al-Jawwad's store in the *Trilogy*. I noticed that his look lingered on certain places and that he slackened his pace in front of others, usually raising his head to contemplate and see. I did not want to disturb his memories with questions.<sup>19</sup>

Like coffeehouses, shops play a major role in the narrative of Mahfouz. If Yasin is addicted to coffee shops and bars, his father is addicted to his shop.

He had grown to love the store as much as his evenings of fellowship and music, because in both situations he successfully freed himself from the hell of thinking. (*Trilogy* 495)

At the very beginning of the story, the narrator describes the geographic location of al-Sayyid Ahmad's shop. He informs us that it is in front of the Barquq mosque on al-Nahhasin Street. From his shop, the proprietor can see an 'endless flow of passers-by', carts and the Suarès omnibus. We also learn that the house of al-Sayyid is in the middle of Palace Walk. At the same time, we are told that al-Nahhasin Street, where the patriarch has his shop, leads into Palace Walk. Having a shop in al-Nahhasin allows al-Sayyid to maintain a strong grip on his family. His job is to sit on a chair, to receive customers from everywhere and to drink tea with his friends. This gives him the opportunity to see everything around him and also to find out what is happening in other districts. His wife and children know that he will know about everything they do. So even when he is absent, his authority continues to haunt them through the shop.

We learn that al-Husayn can be reached either by Qirmiz Alley or by al-Nahhasin Street. When Amina decides to visit the shrine with Kamal without the consent of her husband, they decide to cross the frightening Qirmiz Alley. This is not 'the shortest route' (*Trilogy* 178) to the mosque but it does not pass by al-Sayyid

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<sup>19</sup> Britta Le Va and Gamal al-Ghitani, *The Cairo of Naguib Mahfouz*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012, p. 8.

Ahmad's shop. Moreover, the father's business trip to Port Said introduces an excursion into the narrative in which Amina discovers the streets of the city for the first time. In other words, the shop in al-Nahhasin Street is a strategic point from which al-Sayyid controls his family and from which the narrator controls his narrative. When the proprietor leaves the shop and Palace Walk, the rhythm of the narrative accelerates. It also engenders a pleasant atmosphere in the house, with Amina and the children laughing and discussing.

It is well-known in the Arab world that shops are places where social and religious topics are discussed. It will therefore be useful to know what these small retail outlets look like. The architecture of shops in old Cairo encourages encounters and long discussions. Egyptian shops have no front counter to create distance between the vendor and the customer. Instead, the shopkeeper can receive customers, who can take a seat and drink some tea if they have time. Moreover, there is usually a shop assistant who collects products and puts them in bags. Al-Sayyid Ahmad's shop is built in this way, and has all the elements of real Egyptian shops:

Containers of coffee beans, rice, nuts, dried fruit, and soap were crammed on the shelves and piled by the walls. The owner's desk with its ledgers, papers, and telephone stood on the left opposite the entrance. To the right of where he sat there was a green safe mounted in the wall. It looked reassuringly solid, and its color was reminiscent of bank notes. In the center of the wall over the desk hung an ebony frame containing an Arabic inscription illuminated in gold that read: "In the name of God." (*Trilogy* 41)

In the *Trilogy*, Mahfouz exploits this element and uses the shop to address the issue of religion through Shaykh Mutwalli's visits to al-Sayyid. During each visit, the shop becomes a court where al-Sayyid is the accused and the old man is the judge. The shop is the perfect location for judging al-Sayyid's romantic escapades in terms of religion. A coffee shop or a bar would have been unsuitable.

Moreover, like the coffee shop for Yasin, the shop allows al-Sayyid to obtain appropriate information about the women he intends to court. When Zubayda visits his shop for the first time with her maid Jaljal, al-Sayyid already knows that she has been the lover of al-Sayyid Khalil al-Banan and that they have recently separated. At

the same time, this visit initiates a relationship which will last for many years with the beautiful singer. It is not surprising that the famous merchant of al-Nahhasin is deeply affected when he is forbidden to go to his shop during the British military blockade.

Like coffee shops which protect demonstrators from the bullets of the English, al-Sayyid Ahmad's shop is used for political discussions and for the national cause of Egypt. The content of the petition of authorisation is revealed to the reader in the shop when his friend Muhammad Iffat visits him for a signature. The shop is not only a source of income and seduction, it is also the place where al-Sayyid learns about the death of his son Fahmy, who has lost his life as a martyr in a demonstration.

In addition, three of Yasin's mother's four husbands have had shops: al-Sayyid Ahmad, the coal merchant, and Ya'qub Zaynhum, who had a bakery in al-Darrasa. Haniya has also had sexual adventures with the fruit merchant in Palace of Desire. The impact of this relationship still has its effect on Yasin, because he cannot forgive the lovers for exploiting him and threatening his innocence while he was still a child. The seducer offered Yasin sweet fruits to persuade him to turn a blind eye. Yasin, who now understands the man's intentions at that time, suffers considerably as he approaches the shop.

The cul-de-sac known as the Palace of Desire or Qasr al-Shawq came into sight. His heart pounded so strongly it almost deafened his ears. At the corner on the right could be seen baskets of oranges and apples arranged on the ground in front of the fruit store. He bit his lip and lowered his eyes in shame. The past was stained with dishonour and buried in the muck of disgrace constantly emitting a lament of shame and pain. Even so, the past as a whole was not nearly so heavy a burden as this one store, which was a living symbol, enduring through time. Its owner, baskets, fruit, location, and memories seemed a combination of shameless boasting and painful defeat. (*Trilogy* 120-121)

On the other hand, the shop facilitates contact between men and women in the *Trilogy*. Yasin has to wait until Zanuba goes shopping to have his first contact with her. At the same time, Zanuba's visit to the market is a kind of recognition of

Yasin's efforts and patience. It is a sign that she accepts his courtship. Because the shop is a public place where men and women can make their purchases, Yasin and Zanuba can talk easily. To remove any suspicion, they pretend to have come together. To show his gallantry and generosity, Yasin pays Zanuba in henna and tonic, and their relationship can now begin. Outside the context of the shop, it would have been difficult for Yasin to arrange a meeting.

In *Palace of Desire*, Yasin is thinking of buying a shop to give him the same advantages as his father. Enjoying the narrow streets of Qasr al-Shawq (Palace of Desire), Yasin muses:

A voice tells me that I should open a shop in al-Tarbi'a Alley and settle down. Your father's a merchant. He's his own boss. He spends much more on his amusements than you get from your salary. Open a store and put your trust in God, even if you have to sell the apartment in al-Ghuriya and the shop in al-Hamzawi. You arrive in the morning like a sultan. You're not bound to any schedule. There's no supervisor to terrify you. You sit behind the scales, and women come to you from every direction. 'Good morning, Mr. Yasin.' (*Trilogy* 817-818)

This shows how Yasin sees the importance of having a shop in Cairo. The quickest way to enjoy women and sexuality is to own a shop. Yasin wants to leave his job with the state, and emulate his father and the men who courted his mother.

Not only does al-Sayyid Ahmad use al-Sayyid Ali's coffeehouse like Yasin, he also follows Zanuba in the street to take advantage of the opportunities shops offer. When Zanuba enters Ya'qub the goldsmith's shop, al-Sayyid makes use of the moment to establish his first contact with her. Because al-Sayyid also owns a shop, he cannot pretend to be a customer in others. He wisely solicits an invitation from the shop owner, who knows him. In this way, the shop makes it possible for the seducer to be compensated by introducing him to the object of his desires. However, although they have exchanged greetings, Zanuba does not give al-Sayyid Ahmad the opportunity to pay for something for her as she did with Yasin. Moreover, she only spends a short time in the shop and does not agree to exchange her bracelet for the earrings Ya'qub offers her. All this means that she has not yet consented to al-Sayyid's proposal.

Al-Sayyid summons his courage and knocks at Zubayda's door. He is welcomed by Zanuuba. As in the case of Yasin, Zanuuba informs him that she was aware of his intentions when he was sitting in the coffee shop of al-Sayyid Ali. She adds that she also noticed him when he followed her in Khan Ja'far Street. This means that Zanuuba is accustomed to men courting her and always knows how they will behave.

But you forgot to be wise yesterday when you saw me at Khan Ja'far.  
You followed me and even entered Ya'qub's store after I did. (*Trilogy*  
645)

The seduction process in Cairo appears to start in coffeehouses, followed by negotiation in shops, markets and bazaars. A final stage of the process involves meeting at the house, as a way of acknowledging the seducer.

Shops have other roles in the *Trilogy*. Yasin always chooses his father's shop as the setting for their talks because the patriarch at home is different from the shopkeeper in his shop. To ask his father's permission to marry Maryam, Yasin has to choose the most suitable place to discuss the matter. He ultimately comes to the conclusion that the store is 'the safest place to present his proposal to his father.' (*Trilogy* 650) Maryam was loved by his deceased brother Fahmy, who gave his life for the liberation of Egypt. To discuss the subject at home would have provoked his father's wrath. After some objection, and a long exchange between the two men, al-Sayyid gives his consent to a marriage which will revive the painful memory of the martyr. Yasin is unlikely to have obtained this consent at home in the presence of the family.

Yasin decides to leave his father's house because he knows that the marriage will wound his stepmother deeply. Al-Sayyid's shop is also the background for announcing his departure. When the ministry decides to transfer Yasin to Upper Egypt because of his scandal with a prostitute, he informs his father at his shop. The only place left now for the father and the son to exchange news and information is the shop. It completely replaces the house of the patriarch and transforms the private life of the family into a public one where we, as readers, can observe more closely the hidden side of Egyptian life.

In *Palace of Desire*, Mahfouz continues to use shops as a lens through which to examine scandals, disputes, infidelity, hypocrisy and the untold. When Bayumi, the drinks vendor, decides to marry Bahija, his shop allows the narrator to expose the miseries of Egyptian women, and the ignorance with which they try to retain their husbands.

She swooped down on Bayumi in his store, and a fierce battle broke out between them as words, hands, feet, shrieks, and screams were employed within the sight and hearing of their children, who began to howl and implore people at hand and passersby to help. Soon a crowd had collected in front of the store - pedestrians, shop owners, women, and children. When they separated the couple and forced the woman back into the street, she came to rest under Bahija's balcony. Her dress was ripped, her wrap in shreds, her hair disheveled, and her nose bloody.  
(*Trilogy* 719)

Shops in the *Trilogy* exteriorise the hidden problems of Egyptian society on the one hand, and bring realism to the story on the other.

In *Sugar Street*, when al-Hamzawi suggests to al-Sayyid Ahmad that it is time to retire, the proprietor feels depressed. He is 63 and cannot look after the shop by himself. Two years later, al-Sayyid sells the shop and retires. From a narrative point of view, society has evolved and the topics which were being discussed in shops are no longer current issues. New ideas calling for freedom of speech and belief have spread among the new generation, so the shop is no longer a suitable place for discussing these matters. Equally, because this third volume focuses on the third generation, the liquidation of the patriarch's business prepares us for his exit from the scene. External venues now become a focus for the grandchildren whose task is to shape the future of Egypt according to modern principles. When the narrator tells us that al-Sayyid's retirement has 'been an important milestone in the life of the family' (*Trilogy* 1101), he also means that it has been a milestone in his story.

Old age means that al-Sayyid Ahmad now only goes out once a day. When he passes close to the shop, he casts a nostalgic glance at it:

The store was no longer his, but how could he erase its memory from his mind, when it had been the hub of his activities, the focus of his attention, the meeting place for his friends and lovers, and the source of his renown and prestige? (*Trilogy* 1123)

The sign which has proudly born his name for years has been removed, announcing to him that his time has passed. However, al-Sayyid Ahmad will never forget the role the shop has played in his life, and the narrator will not forget the role it has played in the elaboration of his story.

In the *Quartet*, Mnemjian's barber's shop also plays a role in the affairs of the secret services. Mnemjian is a spy who works for Scobie. He uses his shop to receive and deliver messages. In this respect, Durrell uses a real aspect of the city to construct the novel's action. The barber's shop is a place where people from different origins and religious beliefs can be found. It is a place where the colonised can meet their colonisers. It is also a place of rapid, intense flow of information. Mnemjian's shop is therefore crucial to the development of the story in a context of war where the various secret services operate in the dark. However, this is the only example of shops being used in the same way as in the *Trilogy*.

### 3.3 Conclusions

Asked what made him decide to write about Alexandria, Durrell answered:

Alexandria viewed from a distance was a colorful setting for a novel, but according to the poetic plan of symbolism it was one of the greater *centers* of our European culture. Historically it was a vortex in which the East and West met in a deadly embrace. The mythologies of the ancient religions of the East influenced the Greco-Chaldean-Judaic cultures to produce that bloody mixture we call European history. Alexandria is one of the principal seeds which germinated Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Durrell compares Alexandria to a 'vortex', and in the tetralogy Darley compares it to a 'gravitational field'. Thus, the city is depicted as a mass with a force of attraction

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 65.

which makes all those caught in the field gravitate towards its centre. Moreover, throughout its history, a variety of civilisations have passed through Alexandria, making it a point where East and West meet. This gravitational force and Alexandria's rich and diverse background also make it a city of contradictions and aberrations, a city of metaphors. Its central significance and its 'poetic plan of symbolism' therefore make Alexandria the best setting for a series of novels where the East is mainly West and the West is briefly East. To quote Pine:

Alexandria is the archetype, the epitome of ancient and modern disaster, qualified by its innate style and knowledge. It is London, Paris and Athens in one; it is the most European of cities. (And as such, it asks us questions about our attitude towards, and relationship with, the orient.)<sup>21</sup>

In *The Alexandria Quartet*, the mythical past of the city is glorified through the present. The 'ancient' interferes with the 'modern' as if the city were at the same time Paris and Athens. If Durrell sees Alexandria as the seed which germinated Europe, as readers we have to see it as the seed which engendered the whole story.

*Naguib Mahfouz Remembers* is the outcome of a long series of regular discussions between Gamal Ghitani and Naguib Mahfouz. In this book, Mahfouz talks about his childhood and his parents. He discusses Cairo and its place in his heart and his writings. Politics, Egyptian revolutions, art and religion are all topics the two novelists have addressed at some point. Al-Ghitani illustrates how he shared discussions with Mahfouz and his friends in the 'Urabi Café, saying:

I think the Thursday gatherings at the 'Urabi Café were distinguished by their vitality, marked by the loud laughter of Mahfouz as he exchanged sarcastic repartee with his childhood friends. I soon became part of these warm, friendly, inner-circle gatherings. Mahfouz used to leave promptly at eight-thirty every evening. His old friends would insist on keeping me around longer at the coffeehouse or would continue the evening at one of their homes in al-'Abbasiyya. It was not difficult for me to recognize

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Pine, *Lawrence Durrell: The Mindscape*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 170.

in these men many of the characters that I have read in Mahfouz's novels.<sup>22</sup>

Mahfouz regularly visited coffeehouses to drink his morning coffee and to read newspapers. Coffeehouses were also the setting for his gatherings with his friends, in which he exchanged views with them on various topics, including political, cultural and philosophical matters. Coffeehouses inspired Mahfouz, and played an important role in the development of the characters and themes of his novels. It is worth adding here that later in his career Mahfouz used the names of two Cairo coffeehouses as titles for two of his novels: *The Coffeehouse* (1988) as a translation of the Arabic name *Qushtumur*, and *Karnak Café* (1974). Both novels have coffeehouses as their main settings.

The main setting for Mahfouz's *Trilogy* is Cairo. Mahfouz did not invent a city for his story because depicting Cairo realistically was at the heart of his writing. The city's historic landmarks have been faithfully employed in weaving the events of the story. To quote al-Ghitani again, comparing the actual city of Cairo with Cairo as it exists in the *Trilogy*:

I have retraced the steps and movements of the characters of Mahfouz's works and concluded that there was a close and precise correlation between the descriptions in his books and the reality of the surroundings.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, in *The Cairo Trilogy*, characters are portrayed with special attention to detail. Mahfouz made a great effort to replicate perceptions and reactions as they might exist in reality. People's comprehension, interpretation and judgement are mainly Eastern and Egyptian. Even the language they use is realistic. Their jokes are very localised, to the point where they lose their effect in translation. In other words, the settings of *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire* and *Sugar Street* are, to quote Caroline Williams, 'very localized, specific, and restricted in area.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, pp. 48-49.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

Nevertheless, *The Alexandria Quartet*, like *The Cairo Trilogy*, can be considered a reasonably reliable reference to Egypt during the time in which the events took place. Both works revive the memories of streets, coffeehouses, booths, shops, mosques and other landmarks. In addition, if 'Mahfouz's dramatis personae come and go within a circumscribed, descriptively recognizable, and still discernible context'<sup>25</sup>, Durrell's characters also move in a spatial setting which can be traced to, and identified with, the real Alexandria. In other words, the claim that the *Quartet* is only about foreigners is hard to substantiate. It clearly engages with Egyptian history less than the *Trilogy*, but no one can deny that it is also about Egypt and Egyptians. The Coptic cause and the Hosnani family provide a good example. Where Mahfouz was concerned with what Cairo evoked for him and for Egypt, Durrell was concerned with what Alexandria evoked for European culture and the European collective memory.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-54.

## Chapter 4

### Love and sexuality: between East and West

In Egypt between the wars, religion played a pivotal role in the lives of Egyptians. In such a conservative society, talking about sexuality was considered a transgression. Girls were believed to have few or no sexual feelings. Marriage and motherhood were their primary vocations. Once married, the attention of women was directed towards the family. Besides, since sex outside the framework of religion was perceived to be immoral, a woman was only suitable for marriage if she had refrained from any extramarital sexual intercourse.

As regards the subject of sexuality in Islam, the rules are not subject to change. The religion of Islam forbids any sexual relationship outside marriage. Moreover, it allows sexual acts only between a man and a woman. All other forms of sexual satisfaction are prohibited. These rules are not subject to change, regardless of how society evolves politically or technologically. In other words, sexuality involves an organised system in Islam which is not open to modification. Moreover, since the Orient judges every act in terms of religion, sexuality is believed to be a closed chapter of life in which all has been told and defined.

*The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy* are examinations of the societies of Alexandria and Cairo respectively in the period between the two wars. These two cities belong to the same country, are ruled by the same government and have Islam as the official religion. However, the worlds depicted in these two works are different, as Durrell and Mahfouz interpret the same values through different lenses. They meet at certain points but diverge in a considerable number of situations. To be precise, love is the axis around which the worlds of both Durrell and Mahfouz rotate. The theme of love in an Islamic society, as explored in these works, merits investigation because it is portrayed during the same period and in the same context through the European eyes of Durrell and the Arabic, Oriental eyes of Mahfouz.

In the *Quartet*, the main characters are Europeans living in Alexandria. Do the setting and culture change their views on love? Did Durrell adapt his notions about love and sexuality to the Oriental context or did he remain faithful to the European tradition? To put this another way, is love in the *Quartet* Oriental or Occidental? On the other hand, do love and sexuality evolve over the course of the story in the *Trilogy* of Mahfouz? What is Oriental about the portrayal of love in the *Trilogy*?

In addition to an omnipresent moralistic approach to sexuality within a religious framework as a whole, homosexuality was considered to be deviant behaviour which threatened the survival of society. It was viewed by society as a grave and sinful practice, and the homosexual was regarded as a social deviant who should be punished. If homosexuality is still a widely disputed subject, this gives us an idea of how sensitive the subject was during the 1960s when *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy* first appeared. How, in fact, do Durrell and Mahfouz deal with homosexuality in the two stories?

My examination of love and sexuality in the *Quartet* will start by showing the extent to which Durrell's perception of love is mainly Western. To this end, it will be demonstrated that love in the tetralogy shares many characteristics with an Elizabethan understanding of love. Themes such as love and hate, betrayal and revenge, are present in the story with the same force and intensity as in Shakespeare's work. We shall also demonstrate how the meaning of love relates firstly to the literary works which are cited in the story, and then to the theories of Freud and the philosophy of Plato. The acceptance or denial of homosexuality in the *Quartet* will be the final subject of this investigation.

Where Mahfouz is concerned, love in the *Trilogy* can best be understood within its Arabic context. Despite the fact that Mahfouz was influenced by writers from the West, his illustration of love remains Oriental. To exemplify this, marital relationships will be examined within the family of Abd al-Jawad. The next point of examination will be the way the body is represented in a conservative, Oriental society. This will lead to a discussion of how certain aspects of sexuality are largely characteristic of people from the Orient. Following this, love will be examined in terms of Kamal, who represents the sons' generation. For Kamal, love is intellectualised through books about ancient Arabic poetry and Arabic legends. The

chapter will conclude with an investigation into the treatment of homosexuality by Mahfouz. The rather surprising conclusion is that homosexuality is not denied as might be expected, but treated with a degree of openness.

## 4.1 *The Alexandria Quartet: love and sexuality westernised*

### 4.1.1 Love and Western literature

Jeremy Mark Robinson notes in his *Lawrence Durrell: Between Love and Death, East and West* that ‘Durrell regards love in the typical Western manner’<sup>1</sup>. In order to assess whether this statement is true or false, I shall examine the extent to which certain European writers and philosophers influenced Durrell’s notions about love. For this study, I have selected Shakespeare, Stendhal, Huysmans, de Sade, Rabelais and Goethe. It will be recalled that Durrell makes reference to all these writers in his tetralogy.

Durrell’s admiration for Elizabethan literature was highlighted many times in his interviews. For this reason, Shakespeare’s view of love remains essential to understanding the way Durrell portrays it in the *Quartet*. Four aspects of Shakespearean love can be detected in the tetralogy: the love/hate relationship, betrayal and disgust, destructive love and the relationship of love to political ambition.

The lives of Durrell’s characters revolve around love, but at the same time it is the source of their suffering. Nearly all his characters suffer from the paradoxes of love and find themselves engulfed by hatred. Justine acknowledges this transformation when she says to Arnauti: “Quick. *Engorge-moi*. From desire to revulsion — let’s get it over.” (*Quartet* 63) This association between love and hate reminds us of Shakespeare’s plays, where love often breeds hatred.

In *Hamlet*, for instance, the tale of Hamlet’s love for Ophelia begins with his romantic declarations, which present us with an ideal love conveying sincerity and depth of feeling. Hamlet’s love poem to Ophelia in Act II gives him the appearance of a romantic lover who is trying only to win the heart of his beloved:

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Mark Robinson, *Lawrence Durrell: Between Love and Death, East and West*, Maidstone, Kent: Crescent Moon Pub., 2008, p. 179.

Doubt thou the stars are fire;  
Doubt that the sun doth move;  
Doubt truth to be a liar;  
But never doubt I love.<sup>2</sup>

In this short poem, Hamlet tells Ophelia that she might question scientific realities about the stars and the sun but she must never question his love for her. Associating his love with such strong imagery allays any suspicion that one day the Prince of Denmark will suddenly stop loving Polonius' beautiful daughter, yet it is the same Hamlet who says to Ophelia:

Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a  
breeder of sinners?<sup>3</sup>

Hamlet accuses Ophelia of infidelity. 'Get thee to a nunnery' implies that the woman he once loved deeply is now simply an immoral woman to him. He later announces to her that she should not have believed his declarations of love because he has never loved her. This does not contradict Hamlet's love in the first lines. In effect, Hamlet's love has undergone a change because Ophelia has lied to him. When Ophelia says: 'O heavenly powers, restore him'<sup>4</sup>, the word 'restore' emphasises a transformation from love to hatred.

Like Hamlet and Ophelia, Darley's feeling for Justine is Shakespearean in its essence. When Darley comes back to Alexandria after his exile on the island, he discovers that his love towards Justine has undergone a profound transformation. His meeting again with her towards the end of *Clea* is nothing but a great disappointment:

The once magnificent image of my love lay now in the hollow of my arm, defenceless as a patient on an operating table, hardly breathing. It was useless even to repeat her name which once held so much fearful magic that it had the power to slow the blood in my veins. She had become a woman at last, lying there, soiled and tattered, like a dead bird in a gutter, her hands crumpled into claws. It was as if some huge iron

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, New York: Race Point Publishing, 2014, p. 682.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 689.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 689.

door had closed forever in my heart. (*Quartet* 699)

From another perspective, love in Shakespeare's plays is often associated with betrayal and disgust. The story of Narouz, Mountolive, Leila and Faltaus shares many characteristics with the tale of Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude and the Ghost. When Claudius' marriage to Gertrude is announced, Hamlet feels disgusted to the point of condemning the marriage as incestuous: 'With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!'<sup>5</sup> The melancholy experienced by Narouz is no less profound than Hamlet's. Like Hamlet, Narouz sees in his mother's love for Mountolive a betrayal of his father. The helplessness and vulnerability of his father torment Narouz, who accuses Nessim of sullyng their father's honour:

*You* sold our mother to him, Nessim. You knew it would cause our father's death. (*Quartet* 576)

Narouz and Hamlet suffer in the same way because, in each case, their mother has been stolen from their father, by Mountolive and Claudius respectively. At the same time, neither Leila nor Gertrude is particularly attached to her husband, and both are ready to share the bed of another man who has authority and power. Claudius is a king and Mountolive is an English diplomat in colonial Egypt. Neither Faltaus nor the Ghost is able to act. Where Hamlet's father is already dead, Narouz's father is dying in his wheelchair.

Another facet of love is presented in *Othello*, this time the dangerous and destructive love which results from jealousy. In the case of Othello and Desdemona, love simply becomes revulsion. Desdemona, Othello's beloved former wife, is now little more than an 'impudent strumpet'<sup>6</sup> who has to be killed. In the *Alexandria Quartet*, the destructive aspect of love is present in Leila and Faltaus. At the beginning, Mountolive considers it improper to be the lover of a married woman, but his reticence does not last very long. Leila's beauty is ultimately more powerful than his resistance. Although he is aware of his poor state of health and that he is incapable of offering Leila a normal married life, Faltaus is wounded by the love relationship between his wife and the young Mountolive. There is no doubt that Faltaus loves Leila, and his love will be the catalyst for the invalid to consider suicide.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 673.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 847.

Narouz is very moved by the image of his father pointing the pistol towards his reflection in the mirror as he repeats: 'And now if she should fall in love, you know what you must do.' (*Quartet* 419)

Another type of love represented both in the *Quartet* and in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* involves political ambition. Love in the case of Cleopatra and Antony has a great deal to do with political affairs of state, as the following passage illustrates:

Cleopatra: If it be love indeed, tell me how much.

Antony: There's beggary in the love that can be reckon'd.

Cleopatra: I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.

Antony: Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth.<sup>7</sup>

Cleopatra needs to measure the extent of Antony's love for her, and measures it in terms of 'land'. It is related to politics and to the expansion of the state.

Justine is the Cleopatra of the *Quartet*. All her friends and lovers know about her is that she comes from a poor Jewish family, that she has been raped, that her daughter was kidnapped and that she has been married to Arnauti. Her many amorous relationships arouse no suspicion. In the first book, she is simply portrayed as a nymphomaniac who has a number of experiences with men in search of sexual pleasure.

When Justine says that '[l]ove is every sort of conspiracy' (*Quartet* 556), she offers an unexpected definition of love which perplexes us. It is only in *Mountolive* that we understand the meaning of Justine's intentions in terms of her 'loves'. Justine and Nessim are complicit in a political intrigue. Love is an important means of obtaining information towards the success of their plans, as well as a means of concealing information. 'I felt I was saving Nessim with every kiss I gave you.' (*Quartet* 111) Justine, who has renounced Judaism to become a Copt like her husband, uses love in the service of her political cause. With the end of her political project, her attempts at love end too when she is rejected by all her lovers.

On the other hand, Darley shares many characteristics with Antony. It is no

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 924.

coincidence that Darley quotes Cavafy's "The God Abandons Antony". Both Antony and Darley have been betrayed by two women with great powers of seduction. Where Cleopatra abandons Antony at sea during the war against Caesar, Justine abandons Darley on Lake Marcotis during the annual duck shoot. Where Cleopatra uses her beauty to maintain her rule over Egypt, Justine uses hers towards establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Where Cleopatra loses her throne when Caesar defeats Antony, Justine loses her fortune when her plan is discovered. Finally, where Cleopatra ultimately loses her life, Justine loses the meaning of life and the use of her eye.

In summary, pain characterises Durrell's portrayal of love, just as it does with the Elizabethans. Durrell uses innocence, sincerity, jealousy, infidelity, lies, lust and incest to swing between 'priggishness' and the 'bawdry'<sup>8</sup>, and in order to capture the 'enormous range of feeling the Elizabethans enjoyed'<sup>9</sup>. In addition, his fascination with the world of Shakespeare manifests itself in his use of the diseases of the Elizabethan period. Leila loses her beauty because of smallpox, and Balthazar's job is to heal people with venereal diseases.

Where Mahfouz is concerned, in one of his interviews he acknowledged that:

In the theatre I liked Shakespeare immensely. . . . Both his grandness and ironies entered my soul and made me feel at home with him.<sup>10</sup>

Despite his great admiration for Shakespearean theatre and his fascination with Shakespearean poetry<sup>11</sup>, the way Mahfouz portrays love in the *Trilogy* is far from Shakespearean, simply because it lacks many of the elements that characterise Shakespearean writing. Kamal, for instance, bears no resemblance to any of the heroes of Shakespeare's plays. Moreover, no love relationship is characterised by the love/hate dichotomy. It is true that the death of Aïda is quite dramatic, and that Kamal's presence at her funeral without his being aware of it adds more to the drama of the event, but this is far from being Shakespearean, as Kamal does not consider suicide as the heroes of Shakespeare would have done.

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<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

Stendhal is another important reference for the study of love in Durrell's tetralogy. In his book *On Love*, published in 1822, Stendhal explains the concept of crystallisation. This involves the phenomenon of mental metamorphosis which takes place at the beginning of a love relationship, and which transforms the perception of the lovers. Stendhal attributes this metamorphosis to passion. Though he considers love to spring from a certain reality, this nevertheless takes place in such a way that the lovers are transfigured by passion. Stendhal compares this to a leafless bough thrown into a deep salt mine. After some months the bough has been transformed and is now covered with shining crystals.

According to Stendhal, crystallisation is a seven-step process:

- 1- Admiration.
- 2- Pleasure, etc.
- 3- Hope.
- 4- Love is born.
- 5- First crystallisation
- 6- Doubts appear.
- 7- Second crystallisation<sup>12</sup>

In his analysis of his relationships with women, Amaril mentions the process of Stendhal's crystallisation. Amaril's dedication to women is remarkable. His existence is centred on them. Amaril looks for 'complete love', but always fails before reaching the fifth step of Stendhal's process:

I cannot understand it. Before my love has a chance to crystallize, it turns into a deep, a devouring *friendship*. These devotions are not for you womanizers, you wouldn't understand. But once this happens, passion flies out of the window. Friendship consumes us, paralyses us. Another sort of love begins. What is it? I don't know. A tenderness, a *tendresse*, something melting. Fondante. (*Quartet* 299)

Amaril's problem lies in his exaggerated devotion to women. He yields too soon and gives them too much. By doing so, he unintentionally kills passion and love. In other words, his overestimation of women's qualities freezes love at step four and turns it

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<sup>12</sup> Stendhal, *On Love*, London: Hesperus, 2009, p. 12.

into friendship. Tenderness continues to exist but passion has already been lost.

*A Rebours* or *Against Nature* by Huysmans is another work referred to in *The Alexandria Quartet*. The hero, Des Esseintes, whose voice is considered to represent Huysmans himself, is the last member of the Des Esseintes family. His disgust with society leads him to retire to Fontenay to devote his life to aesthetic contemplation. The environment of his new house reflects his state of mind. Colours, rooms, paintings, accessories and furniture all have to be organised with extreme refinement. Old trinkets he has bought from antique shops in Paris and second-hand dealers in the provinces make his house resemble a museum. Even the books in his library have been chosen carefully. John is an admirer of Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Stéphane Mallarmé.

However, he is ultimately weighed down by loneliness and gradually turns to religion. Seeking distraction, he procures flowers with strange shapes, and with morbid, obscene aspects. As time passes, Des Esseintes begins to suffer olfactory and auditory hallucinations. Memories of his erotic adventures with a perverse ventriloquist, and with Urania, a masculine American acrobat, begin to disturb the young man. *Against the Grain* is an example of modern neurosis which results in perpetual dissatisfaction and inexhaustible pessimism. In a society full of luxury and comfort, Des Esseintes chooses isolation and retirement, where he indulges his preferences for obsessive sensual experiments and perverse sexuality.

In *The Alexandria Quartet*, an obvious reference to Huysmans' *A Rebours* appears during the encounter between Clea and Darley. The night after Justine's departure, Darley visits Clea in her modest studio in Rue Fuad. The atmosphere is gloomy. The heavy rain and the thunderstorm exacerbate Darley's sadness, and his feelings are torn between love and remorse; love for Justine, who has already left Alexandria, and remorse for Nessim who has lost his wife. Darley sees a copy of *A Rebours* beside the ashtray, and it appears that Clea has been reading the book before Darley's visit. Clea already knows about Justine's departure, and she recalls her brief love affair with Justine, tears running down her face.

Like Jean Des Esseintes, Clea also lives 'without lovers or family ties, without malices or pets, concentrating with single-mindedness upon her painting which she takes seriously, but not too seriously.' (*Quartet* 108) During Carnival, Clea manifests

her rejection of people in her preference for drawing and reading in her studio, rather than participating in society. In other words, Clea finds consolation only in art and loneliness. By the end of the novel, she leaves Alexandria for France to dedicate herself to her art. In her letter to Darley she writes:

On the table beside me as I write lies my steamship ticket to France; yesterday I knew with absolute certainty that I must go there. Do you remember how Pursewarden used to say that artists, like sick cats, knew by instinct exactly which herb they needed to effect a cure: and that the bitter-sweet herb of their self-discovery only grew in one place, France?  
(*Quartet* 874-875)

On the other hand, Des Esseintes' retreat to Fontenay also recalls Darley's self-imposed exile to the island. Both Darley and Des Esseintes are disgusted with human beings, and both feel estranged from their societies; they seek refuge in isolated places to heal their wounds. It is no accident that the book *A Rebours* lies 'face down on the floor' (*Quartet* 180) between the artist-painter and the artist-writer, both of whom feel isolated in the city of Alexandria.

Another major writer whose epitaphs help encapsulate Durrell's philosophy of love in *The Quartet* is The Marquis de Sade. De Sade, known for his libertine sexuality and his sexual excesses, is quoted repeatedly in *The Alexandria Quartet*. Durrell said of him in one of his interviews:

Sade, well, he did a very important and negative work. It was necessary that someone should go as far as he did [...] He has gone so far that he has cut the abscess of our sexuality. It's always useful to have an abscess cut! Even if it's the wrong way and not artistically. I used him as a good symbol of our epoch. . . .<sup>13</sup>

For Durrell, de Sade allowed critics to 'measure the scope of the tragedy.'<sup>14</sup> Sexuality, he adds, is 'an avenue towards real interior liberation.'<sup>15</sup> In this context, Durrell has borrowed the words Henry Miller used at a press conference when a reporter

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<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

suggested the *Tropics* was obscene: ‘Mr. Duschnock, I am not sure that you understand that the subject of my work is not obscenity, but interior liberation.’<sup>16</sup> Durrell believes that de Sade’s excesses were ‘voulus.’<sup>17</sup> When he quotes him, he is celebrating de Sade’s courage in tackling the thorny issue of sexuality. Even if de Sade failed in Durrell’s estimation, at least he tried to break taboos about sexuality in a society where freedom was restrained by morality and religion.

The sexual world of *The Quartet* shares many characteristics with that of de Sade. However, unlike de Sade, Durrell converts his ‘energy to laughter’<sup>18</sup>. For him, the main reason behind de Sade’s failure is that he was ‘the champion whiner of all time’<sup>19</sup>. Durrell identifies more with Rabelais:

But if you wish to enlarge the image turn to Europe, the Europe which spans, say, Rabelais to de Sade. A progress from the belly-consciousness to the head-consciousness, from flesh and food to sweet (sweet!) reason. Accompanied by all the interchanging ills which mock us. A progress from religious ecstasy to duodenal ulcer! (It is probably healthier to be entirely brainless.) (*Quartet* 757)

Durrell does not use laughter merely for the sake of comic relief. For him, a novel warrants laughter provided it is ‘as vulgar as it is satiric.’<sup>20</sup> Rabelais is cited here because he combined humour and vulgarity in his bawdy style. ‘But I want to stay nearer Rabelais: I want to be coarse and vulgarly funny.’<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Durrell combines the perversity of de Sade with the bawdiness of Rabelais in addressing matters of love and sexuality in the *Quartet*.

In conversation about Groddeck and his work *The Book of the It*, Durrell said in one of his interviews: ‘I liked him [Groddeck] because he introduced for me the Romantic German psyche – like Goethe’s Werther and company’<sup>22</sup>. Goethe is cited by Darley in *The Alexandria Quartet* during a discussion with Justine.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

Once at the Café El Bab where we were sitting over an *arak*, talking, she burst into tears and kissed my hands, saying: ‘You are a good man, really a good man. And I am so sorry.’ For what? For her tears? I had been speaking about Goethe. Fool! Imbecile! I thought I had perhaps moved her by the sensibility with which I expressed myself. (*Quartet* 244)

Darley is probably referring to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, because his relationship with Justine shares many similarities with the story of Werther and Charlotte. The epistolary novel by Goethe relates how the two meet at a dance and fall in love. Charlotte, however, is engaged to Albert, an upstanding man. Werther’s love grows more and more as time passes. Werther meets Albert and the two men become friends. Even though Werther finds Albert to be an honest, respectable and intelligent man, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to accept that Charlotte is engaged to him. Werther leaves Wahlheim in order to forget Charlotte, but discovers on his return that his infatuation has grown stronger. By this time, Charlotte is married to Albert. When he realises it will be impossible to possess her, Werther commits suicide.

Justine is married to Nessim, a rich, handsome businessman in Alexandria. Nessim and Darley know each other, as Justine introduces Darley to her husband after a lecture on Cavafy. Darley loves Justine and has an affair with her. Like Werther, Darley is unable to possess Justine, and if he talks about Goethe with “a high sensibility”, it is only because he identifies strongly with Werther and the way his story ends. Darley leaves Alexandria to free himself from the love of Justine, but his return to her is different from Werther’s return to Charlotte because he has healed himself of the infatuation he once had.

Shakespeare, Stendhal, Huysmans, de Sade, Rabelais and Goethe provide the tetralogy with a framework through which Durrell examines the subject of love. These writers belong to different literary periods and different literary schools, but they are all European. Durrell’s philosophy of love combines the thoughts of all these writers. The tetralogy is at the same time a work about romantic Shakespearean love, the romantic love of Stendhal, the sensual perversity and decadence of Huysmans, the sexual perversity of de Sade, the amusing vulgarity of Rabelais and the romantic love of Goethe.

Like Durrell, Mahfouz had read not only Shakespeare, but the complete canon of Western literature. He said of Western writers :

Next to Shakespeare I liked Eugene O'Neill much and also Ibsen and Strindberg. In the contemporary theatre I was truly shaken by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. As for Chekhov's theatre, I found it flaccid and boring. In American literature I rate Melville's *Moby Dick* among the world's greatest novels if not *the* greatest. Out of Hemingway's work I only liked *The Old Man and the Sea*. His other work left me surprised at the fame he has acquired. I did not like Faulkner; he is too complicated. I also liked Dos Passos, but none of them has written a *Moby Dick*. I very much admire the all-encompassing outlook in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The novel offers a very realistic story but contains at the same time a broad universal view. This is what I have been trying to do in my latest novels [NB interview was given in 1973].<sup>23</sup>

The above might lead us to expect traces of these writers in the way Mahfouz portrays love in his work, but this is not the case. Even though the *Trilogy* includes references to Western writers Mahfouz admired, the theme of love shows no Western influence. This is because, as we shall see later, Mahfouz was interested in love from an Eastern point of view.

#### 4.1.2 Love and Western philosophy

Love in *The Alexandria Quartet* is primarily Freudian. Incest, homosexuality, bisexuality, lesbianism and narcissism can all be found in Freud's theories on psychoanalysis, and they are all present in a Freudian way in the tetralogy. Firstly, Freud defines incest as 'the prohibition against seeking sexual satisfaction from near blood-relations'.<sup>24</sup> In psychoanalytic theory, the sexual life of children before puberty differs from when they are adults. Aspects considered to be perverse in adult life are normal in childhood. In other words, a child seeks to satisfy his desires regardless of the barriers of morality, custom or religion. For Freud, '[none] of these barriers existed from the very beginning; they were only gradually erected in the course of

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<sup>23</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, New York: Norton, 1977, p. 258.

development and education.<sup>25</sup> After puberty, sexual lust is no longer directed towards members of the family but is transferred to people in the outside world.

In the *Alexandria Quartet*, Pursewarden and his blind sister Liza have an incestuous relationship in the story. Freud's theories suggest that sexual deviation always has its origins in childhood. However, we do not know about the childhood of the novelist and his sister, so we cannot know why they maintain their incestuous relationship into adulthood. However, Freud adds in the opening page of his book *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* that

Whoever is to be really free and happy in love must have overcome his deference for women and come to terms with the idea of incest with mother or sister.<sup>26</sup>

Through Liza, Pursewarden seeks to be 'free and happy in love'. From a psychoanalytic point of view, the deference Pursewarden shows towards women prevents him from experiencing true love. He has to use Liza to free himself and to free his sexuality. Pursewarden's encounters with other women have not affected his incestuous relationship with his sister. Justine, Clea or Melissa could have taken Liza's place, but none of them succeeds because Pursewarden is still seeking self-realisation. His sister, on the other hand, finds complete happiness. She falls in love with Mountolive and decides to abandon the incestuous union. The loss of his sister means the end of Pursewarden's quest for love. It also means the end of his writing, as he can no longer correspond with her. Pursewarden fails professionally and sentimentally. The reason he commits suicide is that he has lost his *raison d'être*.

Moreover, the influence of Freud on Durrell manifests itself in the way Durrell relates jealousy to love. In his theory of 'object choice', Freud describes the mechanisms which motivate the choice of a woman:

The "need for an injured party"; its effect is that the person in question never chooses as an object of love a woman who is unattached, that is, a girl or an independent woman, but only one in regard to whom another

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud and Philip Rieff, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*, New York : Simon & Schuster, 1997.

man has some right of possession, whether as husband, betrothed, or near friend.<sup>27</sup>

In most cases, love relationships in the tetralogy involve more than two partners. Nessim is 'the injured party' in the love triangle with Darley and Justine. Justine is married to Nessim, but at the same time maintains extramarital relationships with Pursewarden and Darley. Darley could find an unattached woman but cannot free himself from Justine. His relationship with Melissa, who is unattached, could be taken further, but he does not wish to do so. In the same context, Mountolive's love for Leila comes from a desire to steal her from her husband and possess her. The handsome British officer is quite capable of finding a beautiful young girl, but his desires are directed instead towards the beautiful married woman whose elder son is the same age as him.

Freud adds:

Strange to say, it is not the lawful possessor of the loved one against whom this jealousy is directed, but new acquaintances or strangers in regard to whom she may be brought under suspicion.<sup>28</sup>

Darley's jealousy towards Pursewarden is more profound than his jealousy of the 'lawful possessor', Nessim. Mountolive has never been jealous of Faltaus. Pursewarden is unable to have feelings of this kind towards Nessim. Clea's love for Justine does not affect her deep friendship with Nessim.

Finally, Clea experiences love in all its forms in the search for a sexual identity. She is first heterosexual, but then falls in love with Justine and embraces lesbianism. She then turns her back on men and women to search for self-realisation in narcissism. Clea says to Darley, when he mentions the subject of marriage to her:

If we are to be friends you must not think or speak about me as someone who is denying herself something in life. My solitude does not deprive me of anything, nor am I fitted to be other than I am. I want you to see how successful I am and not imagine me full of inner failings. As

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

for love itself – *cher ami* – I told you already that love interested me only very briefly – and men more briefly still; the few, indeed the one, experience which marked me was an experience with a woman. I am still living in the happiness of that perfectly *achieved* relationship: any physical substitute would seem today horribly vulgar and hollow. But do not imagine me as suffering from any fashionable form of broken heart. No. In a funny sort of way I feel that our love has really gained by the passing of the love-object; it is as if the physical body somehow stood in the way of love's true growth, its self-realization. Does that sound calamitous?' She laughed. (*Quartet* 108)

Clea pursues another form of love, one which is not built on the traditional pillars of man and woman. Love in its traditional meaning is closely related to possession of the other. Clea's love is now a love of herself. The 'passing of the love-object' shows how Clea embraces narcissism in her quest for self-realisation.

When she speaks of her experience with Justine, although it still gives her happiness and she considers the relationship to have been 'perfectly achieved', Clea does not describe what she has experienced. She prefers the term 'relationship' and does not give a precise definition of this relationship. It was simply an experience and now it is over. Clea has already turned the page of homosexuality and feels at ease with her narcissistic attitude towards love. However, a return to heterosexuality is not impossible, as she does not exclude love or men from her life when she uses the term 'briefly'. What interests Clea now is her growth as a person. Love in its traditional sense stands in the way of self-achievement. Therefore, she rejects any 'physical substitute'. Is love only possible between a man and a woman, or between a man and a man, or between a woman and a woman? Clea answers: 'No'. Love is also possible with oneself. What has motivated this orientation? Darley believes that, if Clea prefers solitude, it is either because of her 'search for her subliminal self' or because she is suffering from some 'psychic instability', or some 'insurmountable early wound.'

Because heterosexual love involves belonging to someone else, for Clea heterosexuality remains 'vulgar' and 'hollow'. Clea is aware that her ideas may be shocking and 'calamitous', but she does not mind. She asks a question but requires

no answer because she already has one. Indeed, Clea is still suffering the wound inflicted by her lesbian affair with Justine. After the incident at the duck shoot, Justine flies to Palestine. Only then does Clea confess to Darley that Justine is the woman she 'loved so much', and only now does it become clear that Clea's solitude is the result of her failed love with Justine.

Plato is also an important reference in understanding Durrell's portrayal of love in the *Quartet*. He evoked Plato when he was asked about the multitude of relationships in the story:

**Gray:** In *The Alexandria Quartet*, for example, you explore relationships within practically every sexual couplet possible. How systematically did you tackle this?

**Durrell:** What I wanted to use was that wonderful notion that Freud had resurrected, which is the ancient Greek eros notion; namely, that we're all male and female, and that our relationships are balanced in measure to our maleness and femaleness. And that a successful love affair is very much dependent on the balance of homosexuality in the two. The coordination of the faculties, the mixture, is a balance between two sexes. It's the *Symposium* of Plato, the butterfly.<sup>29</sup>

*The Symposium*, mentioned in Freud's '*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*', is a philosophical text in which Plato develops his conception of love. It consists primarily of a long series of speeches on the nature and virtues of love (Eros). On the occasion of an organised party in the house of the tragedian Agathon, seven speakers are invited to talk about love: Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates and Alcibiades. The speech in which we are interested here is the one given by Aristophanes.<sup>30</sup>

According to Aristophanes, human nature was originally different: there were three categories of human being: male, female and androgynous (man-woman). In addition, the human form was a sphere with two sexes, four hands, four legs, and a head with two faces and four ears. Humans could move forwards or backwards, and

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<sup>29</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 83.

<sup>30</sup> Plato, Alexander Nehamas, and Paul Woodruff, *Symposium*, Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1989, p. 25.

they used all eight limbs to run. The male was a child of the sun, the female of the earth, and the androgynous of the moon. They were so strong that they challenged and offended their gods. Zeus decided to weaken and humiliate them without annihilating the race, so he cut them in two.

Zeus then asked Apollo, healer and protector from evil, to turn their face around, to heal their wounds and to give them a suitable form. In pity, Zeus therefore decided to move the genitals to the front of the body, making it possible for a man and woman to couple. Zeus' plan was meant to establish sexuality in humans. Sexual intercourse between a man and a woman would allow the race to continue, while sexual intercourse between a man and a man would offer satisfaction and pleasure.

Aristophanes adds that androgynous men are lovers of women, that the women belonging to the female group have no interest in men, and that men belonging to the male group have male attachments. Each of us is looking for our other half. When we meet him or her, we are struck by a feeling of affection and love, and thereafter we refuse to be separated. Our nature is constantly trying to turn us into a single being. This is nevertheless impossible, except in the sexual act.

Plato's ideas about love are echoed in the *Quartet*, where love can be said to be multifaceted. The notion of binary relationships is seen as illusory where love in the tetralogy is concerned. Love becomes a complex system of interconnected elements. Each element is essential and indispensable to the others. We cannot isolate a relationship from the whole. Each character looks for love through a multiplicity of experiences. Relationships take the form of an experiment where one partner uses the other to project the image of other partners. We cannot understand Justine without investigating her relationship with Darley, Pursewarden, Nessim and Clea. We cannot explain Darley's frustrations without analysing his relationship with Melissa, Justine and Clea. Love in the *Quartet* is a network where memories intersect. Darley, Justine and Clea know they are subject to this multidimensional love. Darley says:

My 'love' for her, Melissa's 'love' for me, Nessim's 'love' for her, her 'love' for Pursewarden – there should be a whole vocabulary of adjectives with which to qualify the noun – for no two contained the

same properties; yet all contained the one indefinable quality, one common unknown in treachery. Each of us, like the moon, had a dark side – could turn the lying face of ‘unlove’ towards the person who most loved and needed us. And just as Justine used my love, so Nessim used Melissa’s. . . . One upon the back of the other, crawling about ‘like crabs in a basket’. (*Quartet* 297-298)

The various permutations of sexual relationships require other words to provide more information about each situation. The word ‘love’ is written between quotation marks in each case. These ‘loves’ have only one aspect in common: ‘infidelity’. The verb ‘used’ means that each character has a hidden face. The alleged love is used only to hide other affairs. Melissa loves Darley. Darley and Nessim love Justine. Justine loves Pursewarden. Pursewarden loves Liza and Justine. Mountolive loves Leila and Liza. Leila loves Mountolive and Faltaus. These characters all have ‘the lying face of ‘unlove’’. The image of the ‘crabs in a basket’ suggests that each partner affects and is affected by the other.

To summarise, love in *The Alexandria Quartet* has been investigated within a European context, spanning a timescale from Plato to Huysmans. Durrell was more concerned with the psychology of love than sexual intercourse in itself. Durrell’s lovers are Europeans who love and hate in the European tradition. They are also Europeans who see sexuality with a European eye and who suffer in a European way. To quote Jeremy Mark Robinson again:

Durrell’s lovers, like most lovers in fiction, manifest the usual states of love that are familiar from any Western art: paranoia and faith, lust and repulsion, idealism and cynicism, dependency and isolation. In Durrell’s lovers we see the typical crises of desiring to ‘merge’ with the other, and the desire to remain inviolate, intact and individual.<sup>31</sup>

These complex and contrasting emotions are, however, only to be found in the *Quartet*, where love exists in all its forms, while in the *Trilogy* love is still viewed in a traditional way. The portrayal of love in the *Trilogy* respects Arab and Muslim sensitivities despite the presence of a number of daring passages. Assuming the

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<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Mark Robinson, *Lawrence Durrell: Between Love and Death, East and West*, Maidstone, Kent: Crescent Moon Pub., 2008, p. 183.

writer expects to be read and acknowledged by an ordinary readership, we cannot expect an incestuous relationship like the one between Pursewarden and his sister Liza in a work written in the 1960s by a Muslim Egyptian for Arab readers. The lesbian affair between Justine and Clea is another aspect which could exist only in Durrell's Egypt, and never in the Egypt of Mahfouz. In the *Trilogy*, even jealousy is dealt with from a perspective which is not Freudian. Kamal's jealousy of the men who approach Aïda is simple, and does not seem to require a theoretical Freudian explanation. Clea's narcissism is completely absent in the world of Mahfouz, as it is again a European aspect of love which has no place in the *Trilogy*. In other words, love in the *Trilogy* is portrayed in the way most Egyptians would have felt and understood it. To include Plato or Freud would have been inappropriate when Mahfouz's focus was clearly to criticise the relationships men have with women in a traditional society.

#### 4.1.3 Homosexuality denied

Even if it is given a voice in the *Alexandria Quartet*, homosexuality is seen as a source of degeneration. Homosexuals are not only humiliated, they can also lose their life. Discussing sexuality in the works of Durrell, Jeremy Mark Robinson writes:

Durrell's fictions show a 'heteropatriarchal' world in which anything outside of the sexual norm is condemned, problematized, ambiguous, difficult.<sup>32</sup>

This is true of *The Alexandria Quartet*. The stories of Scobie, Toto de Brunel and Balthazar illustrate the concept of problematised homosexuality.

Scobie is the subject of most of the comic passages in the tetralogy. His homosexuality provokes laughter and pity at the same time. When Scobie decides to reveal the secret of his homosexuality, he takes Darley into his confidence.

Before you go, there's a small confession I'd like to make to you, old man. Right? [...] 'Well then: sometimes at the full moon, *I'm Took*. I come under *An Influence*. (*Quartet* 230-31)

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

The transvestite uses the word 'confession' for his revelation. He is admitting a sin from the very first words. By giving the exact time of the event, he adds a supernatural power to the affair. It is as if he is not responsible for his deviations. Nature is the one behind all this, as it happens 'at the full moon'. Moreover, he uses the passive form of the verb 'to take'. He is manipulated and guided by an external power and not his own will. It is not a choice but 'an influence'. For what purpose are the noun and its article capitalised? It is something new and strange, something indefinable. We know Scobie as someone with authoritative manners because of his job, but now he is broken and wearing the costume of the victim. He manifests his regret in order to justify himself and to gain the sympathy of Darley. His words arouse pity. Scobie's homosexuality is a heavy burden, and at the same time a threat in a society like Egypt, where sexuality by definition refers to an act between a man and a woman.

Scobie's discomfort in confessing his nocturnal adventures in female clothes is not taken seriously by Darley. Scobie is 'quite disturbed by his own revelation' (*Quartet* 231), but Darley is untouched by the old man's dilemma. Scobie adopts a 'humble voice' (*Quartet* 231) and a pathetic look when he finally dares to utter the words: 'I slip on female duds and my Dolly Varden' (*Quartet* 231). Homosexuals are humiliated in Durrell's world. Darley shows 'intense surprise' (*Quartet* 231) when he learns about Scobie's perversity. His reaction is more humiliating than reassuring. Darley's reaction discriminates against and rejects practices which go beyond sexuality involving only the opposite-sex. Moreover, Darley's silence highlights the presumption that people should be heterosexual and that relationships are based on attraction towards the opposite sex.

When Scobie dresses himself in the Dolly Varden, Darley comments that '[l]aughter and astonishment packed themselves into a huge parcel inside me, neither finding expression.' (*Quartet* 231) Darley's behaviour during Scobie's revelations emphasises the alienation of the homosexual. Darley exclaims, laughs or gestures but he formulates no real response. Instead, he keeps 'hovering explosively between amazement and laughter at the thought of Scobie's second life at full moon' (*Quartet* 232). For Darley, Scobie's revelations are 'indigestible' (*Quartet* 232).

Even Scobie manifests disgust towards his own homosexuality. He describes

himself as 'silly'. In showing his female clothing to Darley his eyes begin to fill with tears. The fact that Scobie swings from the comic to the pathetic not only provokes laughter, it also ridicules him. When Scobie suddenly hears someone knocking at the landing door, he leaps into the cupboard and locks himself in. Metaphorically, this is the place of the homosexual in the work of Durrell.

In the *Quartet*, homosexuals are humiliated and ridiculed. They are silly and have no control over their lives. Scobie asks Darley to confiscate his Dolly Varden because it is the 'only way of controlling the influence'. For him, the whim is 'too strong' to overcome. It is Darley, the heterosexual, who is supposed to save the life of the irresponsible homosexual.

Scobie's death at the hands of outraged British sailors occurs in tragic circumstances. It is during the dinner with Socrates that Nimrod receives the news of Scobie's death by phone. Balthazar and Nimrod rush to the scene to find that Scobie 'had been battered to death in ugly enough fashion.' (*Quartet* 330) They have first to remove the woman's clothes in which he was disguised. To preserve the dignity of the old man, Balthazar and Nimrod have to go to Scobie's house and bring his uniform before journalists arrive. Scobie must be buried in his uniform, and his homosexuality must be buried with him too.

After his death, Scobie continues to provoke laughter. His identity has changed. He is El Yacoub now, a Muslim saint. His bath-tub, 'which had been responsible for so many deaths' (*Quartet* 717), has become an object of reverence. It is invoked 'to confer fertility upon the childless' (*Quartet* 715).

Meanwhile Scobie, after his death, had become a figure of affectionate memory in the neighbourhood. Tales began to circulate about his great gifts. He was clever at magic potions (like Mock Whisky?). A cult began to blossom around him. They said he was a necromancer. Gamblers swore by his name. "El Scob spit on this card" became quite a proverb in the quarter. They also said that he had been able to change himself into a woman at will (!) and by sleeping with impotent men regenerate their forces. He could also make the barren conceive. Some women even called their children after him. Well, in a little while he had already joined the legendary

of Alexandrian saints. (*Quartet* 716)

Another homosexual with a tragic destiny in the story is Toto de Brunel. He is also introduced into the story with a degree of levity. He is an elegant man with womanly manners, who is appreciated by old women. His death occurs in unclear circumstances during the masked ball where he is disguised. He is savagely murdered:

The hatpin from Pombal's picture hat had been driven sideways into his head with terrific force, pinning him like a moth into his velvet headpiece. (*Quartet* 360)

Durrell uses the masquerade to shed light on the close relationship between disguise and homosexuality. The homosexual is condemned to live disguised. However, instead of protecting homosexuals, disguise kills them. Both Scobie and Toto die wearing their masks. They are killed because they have violated the way gender is identified.

As mentioned above, Balthazar learns about Scobie's death while he is with Nimrod, another homosexual and Scobie's boss. Balthazar and Nimrod are competing for the love of Socrates Pittakakis, a young Athenian actor. The three are dining at the Auberge Bleue. The two men behave like adolescents who are jealous of each other. Each attempts to show off his qualities to the young man, who is interested only in the champagne and the dinner offered by Nimrod. The young actor refuses both of them because he is in love with a 'heavily moustached Armenian girl' who works in Balthazar's clinic. The event is reported in a humorous way in order to ridicule the two homosexuals. The doctor and the official are ultimately humiliated and rejected.

Balthazar is humiliated again, but this time with more seriousness:

Within a matter of months I became a hopeless drunkard. I was always found hanging about the brothels he frequented. I obtained drugs under prescription for him to sell. Anything, lest he should leave me. I became as weak as a woman. A terrific scandal, rather a series of them, made my practice dwindle until it is now non-existent. Amaril is keeping the clinic going out of kindness until I can pick myself off the floor. I was dragged

across the floor of the club, holding on to his coat and imploring him not to leave me! I was knocked down in Rue Fuad, thrashed with a cane outside the French Consulate. (*Quartet* 704)

Balthazar has completely lost confidence in himself. He is unable to maintain control over his homosexuality. He abandons his clinic, his dignity and his place in Alexandrian society. The homosexual has, in effect, lost everything. It is important to mention here that Balthazar compares himself to a woman. In fact, Darley also says of Toto that 'he [is] a woman.' This shows that homosexuals are denied an independent existence. Only the gender of men or women exists – no other status is possible.

Equally, female homosexuality is portrayed as a failure in the *Alexandria Quartet*. When Balthazar comes to tell Clea of her father's concern about the 'illicit relationship' (*Quartet* 236) she has with Justine, she tells him:

I have not been alone with Justine for months now. Do you understand? It ended when the painting ended. If you wish us to be friends you will never refer to this subject again (*Quartet* 237).

Clea is so hurt that she can no longer bear to talk about this subject. If homosexuality has driven Scobie to his death, it has driven Clea to solitude and narcissism. I should add here that Clea's lesbian experience is compared to 'a bruise' (*Quartet* 236). On the other hand, her father prefers to talk to Balthazar instead of addressing his daughter directly. This shows that homosexuality is still seen as alien to Alexandrian society. The phrase 'illicit relationship' suggests religion and morality. Clea's father is worried that his daughter might be hurt, since society forbids such a relationship. He compares the lesbianism of his daughter to 'watching a small child skipping near a powerful piece of unprotected machinery.' (*Quartet* 237)

If homosexuals are ridiculed, humiliated and in some cases murdered, heterosexuals are honoured and respected. Darley, Pursewarden and Mountolive are portrayed as sophisticated in the story by emphasising their successful social positions. Darley is an English teacher and lectures on Cavafy. Pursewarden is a successful novelist in the story, and dies as an artist. As for Mountolive, he begins his

career as a brilliant secretary at the High Commission and ultimately becomes Ambassador to Egypt.

It is now evident that, although sexuality is a dominant theme in the *Quartet*, it does not simply involve sexual intercourse in its narrow sense. Instead, if we are to appreciate the depth of Durrell's ideas about love, his portrayal of sexuality needs to be understood by standing back from the sexual act itself. Where the *Quartet* provides a paradigm for investigating love and sexuality in the West, involving fewer barriers in terms of the sexual act, it will now be useful to compare this approach with the *Cairo Trilogy*.

## 4.2 *The Cairo Trilogy: love and sexuality orientalisised*

### 4.2.1 When love simply becomes sex

A deeper insight into the personality of the Oriental man and the role of sex in his life will involve an examination of the patriarch's relationships with Amina and Zanuba. At the very beginning of the story, we are introduced to a husband with no lover's qualities. Every day, al-Sayyid Ahmad stays out late and comes home only after midnight. Spending his nights with friends and mistresses gives him the pleasure he cannot find at home. Moreover, at home he hardly ever participates in conversations, and often seems absorbed in musing over memories of past adventures. Al-Sayyid is only physically present in his marriage; his feelings and attention are reserved for wine, women and friends outside his home. He is nevertheless proud of himself, as he provides his family with everything they need. As he is the family breadwinner, no one is allowed to criticise his conduct.

Al-Sayyid Ahmad is a man for whom 'love and sex are forever divorced.'<sup>33</sup> He never utters a word of love to Amina in the entire story. Nor does he ever manifest sexual desire towards her. Sex with Amina is, in the words of Gordon, 'a duty which will bring forth children [and] heirs'<sup>34</sup>. Amina, on the other hand, is obliged to consider herself fortunate since she is al-Sayyid's only wife. The patriarch could have 'taken second, third, and fourth wives' (*Trilogy* 10) if he had wished. There is a reference here to the right of a man in Islam to marry four women. Marrying more

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<sup>33</sup> Haim Gordon, *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in his Writings*, Contributions to the Study of World Literature, no 38, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

than one wife may have been justified within the context of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, but in the Egypt of Mahfouz, having more than one wife has no bearing on the socio-economic conditions of women, and is instead related to sexual greed. Women are considered to be objects in the hands of men. Only the woman's body is present. Her personality does not exist. Under these conditions, love becomes no more than sex.

Al-Sayyid Ahmad is a man with disproportionate sexuality. Sex is the real motivation for his relationships with women. Because he is healthy and wealthy, no woman dares refuse his propositions – apart from Zanuba. The beautiful young dancer has already identified al-Sayyid's weaknesses, and knows how to ignite his passion. For the first time, al-Nahassin's most famous merchant finds himself stripped of his authority. Zanuba enslaves him by being sexually inaccessible. She is intelligent because she knows that by not offering him what he wants, she will, in fact, obtain exactly what she wants. Zanuba has already understood that Oriental men are interested only in sex. Once they are sexually satisfied, they will reject one woman for another. In other words, to weaken al-Sayyid, Zanuba has only to force him to struggle with his lust. When she tells him that she will only consent to sexual intercourse with a man she loves, al-Sayyid feels humiliated. Indeed, Zanuba knows that al-Sayyid Ahmad 'never loves the women with whom he has sexual intercourse, the women whose bodies he penetrates.'<sup>35</sup> To offer him her body before marriage will kill his passion for her and will also kill any hope of marriage. Nor does Zanuba only injure al-Sayyid's pride; she also evicts him from the houseboat he has offered her. The man whose coughs make Amina tremble is ultimately held to ransom by a belly dancer. If Zanuba had yielded to al-Sayyid's wishes, she would simply have been another Amina.

Al-Sayyid Ahmad and his elder son Yasin epitomise Egyptians, for whom '[l]ust alone – not love, not passion, not even affection – is the moving force in almost all their sexual relations.'<sup>36</sup> It is no surprise that Yasin is the one to discover his father's secret life, as both of them indulge in behaviour which is forbidden by society and religion. In the image of his father, Yasin pursues pleasure through a variety of sexual adventures. Love has never been his ultimate aim. In a society where

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

religion remains the main reference for all conduct, Yasin has been transformed into a bundle of deviance. Prohibitions have killed any rationality in him. His sexual perversion reaches a peak during his visits to the mother of his next wife, Maryam. He sees no harm in having sexual adventures with his prospective wife's mother. Umm Maryam, like him, is a lustful woman who permits herself to have a sexual relationship with her future son-in-law, knowing that he has come to ask for her daughter's hand. No one will disagree that this relationship is purely sexual, with no sense of love. Yasin marries Maryam in spite of this. What kind of love should we expect from such a marriage? Is it possible for their marriage to last? Both Yasin and Umm Maryam have been blinded by lust. The future husband does not care about his future wife, while the latter's mother is ready to ruin her daughter for the sake of her own sexual gratification.

The consequence of seeking sexual satisfaction alone is boredom. Yasin is the one who most suffers from the monotony of marriage:

Religion supports my view, as shown by its permission to marry four wives, not to mention the concubines with whom the palaces of the caliphs and wealthy men were packed. Religion acknowledges that even beauty itself, once familiarity and experience make it seem trite, can be boring, sickening, and deadly. (*Trilogy* 362)

In Yasin's words, the meaning of love as profoundly tender and passionate affection towards a woman is completely absent. Yasin complains about the boredom of marriage and seeks refuge in religion to justify his failures. Frequently, where difficult situations are concerned, men in the *Trilogy* hide themselves behind religion. If Yasin fails with women, it is because he simply fails in love. Why do Yasin's marriages not last? Why does he fall into the trap of boredom immediately after a marriage? It is because his marriages simply lack love on one hand, and because lust is 'the motivating force in [his] sexual relations'<sup>37</sup> on the other. Whenever he desires a woman, he has to marry her. Once he has been sexually gratified, the 'devastating effects'<sup>38</sup> of lust manifest themselves in his life.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

Aisha and Khadija both marry without being in love. Ibrahim has never seen Khadija, and Khalil never sees Aisha before the marriage. Their families decide for them. Khadija is happy to have a husband, regardless of his personality. The most important thing for her is to be married before her beautiful little sister in order to avoid criticism from the other women in the neighbourhood. As for Aisha, she quickly forgets her frustrated first love for the young officer and has no objection to marrying Khalil Shawkat.

Neither Khadija nor Aisha have anything to say about their marriages. Their father has only to make sure their husbands can satisfy their needs. Ibrahim and Khalil have little education and no respectable social position, but since they have an income, they are suitable husbands. By marrying his daughters to Ibrahim and Khalil, al-Sayyid is offering Khadija and Aisha a life devoid of love, just like Amina. We are given little information about the Shawkat family. We know that Ibrahim has been married and has lost his wife and two children. His younger brother has no occupation. It is clear that the two men are looking for wives to satisfy their sexual needs and to have a family and children.

Because marriages are based on arrangements and not on true love, men quickly succumb to boredom. As a consequence, there is great temptation to seek other experiences to inflame their passions and give them back their sense of virility. Such a striking absence of love, and this exaggerated lust, make men's perception of women outside the household, and the representation of the female body in their talks, intriguing points of inquiry.

Firstly, an important detail is given about Yasin in *Palace Walk*:

It was characteristic of him to devote all his attention to a woman's body and neglect her personality. (*Trilogy* 261)

A woman's body remains an obsession for Egyptian men. In fact, it is difficult to talk about love and sexuality in Mahfouz's *Trilogy* without talking about the body. This phenomenon is a result of the fact that women are inaccessible to men in a society which segregates the two genders. The more unattainable women are, the more attention men tend to direct towards the body. When Zanuba leaves her house with

the troupe of musicians for a wedding, the scene where she climbs into the donkey cart presents Yasin with an opportunity not to be missed.

Finally Zanuba appeared. The edge of her wrap was placed far back on her head to reveal a crimson kerchief with little tassels. Beneath it there gleamed laughing black eyes with glances full of merriment and deviltry. She approached the wagon and held out the lute to a woman who took it. Zanuba raised a foot over the wheel. Yasin craned his neck and gulped. He caught a glimpse of her stocking, where it was fastened above her knee, and of a stretch of her bare leg. The pleasantly clear skin showed through the fringes of orange dress.

“If only this bench would sink into the ground with me about a meter. My Lord, her face is brown, but where it doesn’t show, her skin is white, really white. So what do her thighs look like? And her belly? Oh my goodness . . .” (*Trilogy* 80)

It is acknowledged in the Orient that the female body is a source of desire, passion and lust. For this reason it is forbidden for women to go out unless their bodies are wholly covered. In other words, the cover is believed to protect women from men’s voyeurism. However, when sexuality is repressed, the cover tends to feed obsession instead. Any part of the body, such as knees or ankles, becomes sexually exciting. Yasin struggles to see what Zanuba’s wrap is protecting, because in his case seeing is a form of sexual gratification. Voyeurism also feeds the imagination: what cannot be seen is imagined. Yasin’s excitement gets the better of him when he thinks about Zanuba’s thighs and belly. This intimate part of the body is the area most protected by women because it is related to virtue, and can be reached only through marriage. Therefore, the only way to gain full access to the body is through the imagination. It is therefore no wonder that, when he is alone, Yasin often strips bodies of coverings in his imagination and enjoys them ‘naked the way God created them.’ (*Trilogy* 79)

Yasin leaves the coffee shop as the wagon moves off. He follows the singer’s bodily motions closely. Because night is falling and shops are starting to close their doors, Yasin devotes himself to gazing and dreaming.

O God, may this street never end. May this dancing movement never cease. What a royal rump combining both arrogance and graciousness. A

wretch like me can almost feel its softness and its firmness both, merely by looking. This wonderful crack separating the two halves – you can almost hear the cloth covering it talk about it. And what can't be seen is even better . . . (*Trilogy* 81)

The rump has been made 'royal' by repression. The absence of physical contact and lack of sexual satisfaction lead to the magnification of the body. Burning passion intensifies with what 'can't be seen'. Men in *The Cairo Trilogy* derive sexual gratification from observing bodies in the streets or on the roofs. Gordon describes the way Egyptian men gaze at women as 'a gaze that rapes.'<sup>39</sup> It is important to mention here that the focus is always on only an isolated part of the body. The body as a whole and the harmony between its different members is impossible because of the short observation time. Besides, women in the Egypt of Mahfouz were not allowed to stroll outside by themselves.

If a woman's body is unattainable, it is because religion forbids it. No sexual intercourse is allowed outside marriage. The body therefore becomes a source of male fantasies, and these fantasies are primarily centred on the parts of the body which are known to induce sexual excitement in Oriental culture, such as the 'thighs', the 'belly' and the 'wonderful crack separating the two halves'. In other words, Yasin's musings about the female body in the *Trilogy* confirm what John Atkins suggests in his *Sex in Literature*, that 'the Arabs are addicted to rotundities, particularly in the hindquarters.'<sup>40</sup>

The body is not the only aspect of sexuality which has been orientalised in the *Trilogy*. Al-Sayyid Ahmad is described as follows:

He had never been accused of making a pass at the mistress of a companion or of looking lustfully at the sweetheart of a friend. He chose friendship over passion. He would say, "The affection of a friend endures. A girlfriend's passion is fleeting." For this reason, he was content to select his lovers from unattached women or to wait until a woman had ended her previous relationship. Then he would seize his

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> John Alfred Atkins, *Sex in Literature; the Erotic Impulse in Literature*, An Evergreen Black Cat Book B-356, New York: Groove Press, 1972, p. 179.

opportunity. At times he would even ask permission from her former companion before beginning to court her. (*Trilogy* 240)

The fact that al-Sayyid refuses to make a pass at women who belong to other men is characteristic of the Oriental man, who insists on being seen by his fellows as someone they can trust. Again, women are seen here as objects, and men must agree about how they are acquired. On the other hand, in the case of attached women, the fact that al-Sayyid prefers waiting until they are free again connotes possession. Women have no opinion. They are transferred from one man to another like commodities. They should never be left alone because they simply need men.

Another aspect which lends love and sexuality an Oriental dimension in the novel is the attitude towards virginity. Zanuba is the only woman who resists the lustful wishes of al-Sayyid Ahmad. The only reason the latter can give for her refusal to have sexual intercourse with him is that she wishes to preserve her virginity. Virginity for Oriental people means purity, virtue and an absence of any sexual intercourse before marriage. In some Arab countries, the first thing a man does on his wedding night is to check for an unbroken hymen. Some families even insist on seeing the blood from the hymen to be sure of the bride's purity.

In addition, sexual intercourse is strictly regulated in the Orient. A man and a woman wishing to make love face a great number of obstacles if they are not married. They cannot be accepted by hotels if they do not show their marriage certificate, and of course, no one from their respective families will agree to receive them. Even friends cannot help. There is a consensus about the prohibition of adultery, and everyone has to contribute to its eradication. This is why the coachman proposes the banks of the Nile late at night as the best place for Yasin and Zanuba to make love freely. The reason for the coachman's proposal is that, by the Nile, the 'light's dim, and no one's around.' (*Trilogy* 827) Only thieves operate in similar conditions, which suggests that having sex before marriage is similar to theft. This only happens in cultures with a strong religious background like Egypt. Such an attitude towards sex is unlikely to be associated with the West.

In comparative terms, if Mahfouz's *Trilogy* is concerned with sex as a physical act, Durrell's *Quartet* treats it as a psychic one. Darley, Pursewarden, Mountolive and Nessim are never interested in it in terms of sexual gratification only. Moreover,

before, during and after the sexual act, a succession of ideas usually imposes itself on the lovers, as in the case of Darley with Clea in the following passage.

And lying awake at her side, listening to the infernal racket of gunfire and watching the stabbing and jumping of light behind the blinds I remembered how once in the remote past she had reminded me of the limitations which love illuminated in us: saying something about its capacity being limited to an iron ration for each soul and adding gravely: 'The love you feel for Melissa, the same love, is trying to work itself out through Justine.' Would I, by extension, find this to be true also of Clea? I did not like to think so – for these fresh and spontaneous embraces were as pristine as invention, and not like ill-drawn copies of past actions. They were the very improvisations of the heart itself' (*Quartet* 727-728).

During this romantic meeting with Clea, Darley never ceases to think about the past. In a moment of intense sexual desire he uses the phrase 'my steps had led me back again, I realized, remembering the night so long ago [...]' (*Quartet* 726) as a way of describing what is going on in his mind. This means that lust as a moving force is not typical of Durrell's characters. Even reactions to the female body are different in the two works. The *Quartet* does not deal with the body in relation to sexual excitement. Moreover, sexually obsessed characters like Yasin and al-Sayyid Ahmad have no parallels in the work of Durrell, although they represent a category of real Egyptian men which is a prevalent factor in shaping the society Durrell is writing about, and which cannot be ignored.

#### **4.2.2 Love and Eastern literature**

The attitude of Egyptian men to a woman's body has become so ingrained by repression that it leaves no place for a woman's personality to emerge. As a result, nearly all the marriages in the *Trilogy* are devoid of love. However, with the younger generations, more attention begins to be paid to love as a form of affection. Through the eyes of the intellectuals, we meet love in its Oriental meaning, as it appears in ancient Arabic poetry and classical Arabic literature.

As Mahfouz explains most of his ideas through Kamal, examining Kamal's relationship to books and literature will allow a better understanding of Mahfouz's conception of love. In the following extract, we are told of Kamal that:

These yearnings had been aroused by things he had read that could not be classified under a single heading. There had been literary and social essays, religious ones, the folk epic about Antar - the heroic black poet of ancient Arabia, *The Thousand and one Nights*, a medieval anthology of Arabic poetry called *al-Hamasa*, the writings of al-Manfaluti, and the principles of philosophy. (*Trilogy* 589)

This passage is taken from *Palace of Desire*, where Kamal is shaping his personality. Kamal has earned his baccalaureate and decides to devote himself to reading and learning, in pursuit of knowledge about the origin of life and his role in it.

*The Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights* is a collection of Middle Eastern stories which are very representative of the Orient. Kamal has read these stories. They are the tale of how the infidelity of a woman transforms a man into a killer, and how this man is transformed again by the love of another woman. When Shahzaman tells his brother Shahriyar about the infidelity of his queen, Shahriyar kills his wife and decides to take a virgin to his bed each night, only to kill her the next morning. When the Vizier can find no virgin, his daughter, Shahrazad, makes the following proposal:

Give me in marriage to this king: either I shall die and be a ransom for the daughters of Moslems, or live and be the cause of their deliverance.<sup>41</sup>

Shahrazad knows that all the virgins who have been in the king's bed have been executed. However, she is courageous and determined. Shahrazad has acquired wisdom from books and oral literature. She recounts fables and legends to her husband for a thousand and one nights. Shahrazad is not merely a storyteller; she is also an educator. Her tales are lessons directed towards Shahriyar's conduct with women. Not only are her stories didactic par excellence, they are also entertaining. By

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<sup>41</sup> N.J. Dawood, ed., *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*, The Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth, Eng., Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 19.

combining the pleasant with the useful, Shahrazad is implicitly criticising jealousy and misogyny.

Shahrazad's tales are her ticket to deliverance. Stories generate love, and love changes Shahriyar from a man who hated women and who found consolation only in revenge into a man capable of saying 'I loved you because I found you chaste and tender, wise and eloquent.'<sup>42</sup> Shahrazad has never told her husband she was chaste and tender. She knows it would have been useless to swear her good intentions in order to save her life. Without her tales, Shahriyar would never have seen her as different from the Queen he had killed. When Shahriyar tells her 'I swear by Allah, Shahrazad, that you were already pardoned before the coming of these children'<sup>43</sup>, we become aware that love has transformed him into a completely different man from the king we have known.

We learn from the very beginning of the story that Shahrazad 'possessed many accomplishments and was versed in the wisdom of the poets and the legends of ancient kings.'<sup>44</sup> Women in the *Trilogy* stand in stark contrast to Shahrazad. Kamal's mother and sisters know nothing about poetry or philosophy. They are weak because they are ignorant. None of them have the wit or power necessary to transform a man from a beast obsessed with sex into a human capable of loving and respecting women. Kamal wants Egyptian women to be as strong as Shahrazad when she says: 'Nothing will shake my faith in the mission I am destined to fulfil.'<sup>45</sup> The mission of Oriental women is to struggle for their emancipation, and to revolt against tradition and despotic Oriental men. They have the right to love and to be loved. Mahfouz's use of this story adds to the Oriental background of his concept of love in the *Trilogy*. We should add here that in 1982, Mahfouz wrote the novel *Arabian Nights and Days* as a 'recasting of *The Thousand and One Nights*'<sup>46</sup>, where characters from the ancient book appear once again, such as Shahriyar, Shahrazad, Sindbad and Aladdin.

There is also a parallel between Kamal's story and the story of Antar ibn Shaddad. Antar lived in the Jahiliya epoch just before the coming of Islam. He grew

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 128.

up in the ancient Bedouin tribe of Abs. Though he was destined to be a noble Arab, the black hero was always struggling for an honourable position in his tribe as his mother had been an Ethiopian slave. He spent his childhood as a shepherd dwelling in tents. Antar's skill in riding horses and throwing spears earned him the reputation of a hero. In battle, the great Arab warrior was invincible, and his heroic exploits continue to inspire Arabic literature.

The cavalier-hero and romantic poet dreamt of marriage with his cousin, the beautiful Abla. Antar had asked for her hand in marriage but his proposal had been rejected because he was the son of a slave. However, Antar's love was more powerful than these considerations. He persevered and continued to defend his tribe bravely. He was so admired within the tribe for his courage and heroism that Antar's father was compelled to acknowledge him as his son. Love triumphed in the end, and Antar married his beloved cousin.

Antar's love for Abla is greatly admired in the Arab world, and his poems are still quoted. In one of his poems he says:

When Abla smiles  
Between her teeth  
Is a mixture of wine and honey;  
She passes the night with musk under her veil;  
And its fragrance is increased  
By the still fresh essence of her breath.<sup>47</sup>

Kamal, who sees Aïda with the eyes of Antar, dreams of a happy ending like that of Antar and Abla, but unfortunately, Aïda is not Abla. Nevertheless, Kamal admires Antar and his romantic spirit. The poetry of the Bedouin hero influences Kamal, and Oriental women rise considerably in his estimation. We should note here that the images of Antar in the above poem are poetically sophisticated, and share many characteristics with Kamal's poetic ideas. On the other hand, Antar stands in total contrast to Yasin, whose vulgarity and triviality reduce women to a sexual object.

The story of Antar and Abla presents us with ideal love as it was understood in ancient Arab poetry. Kamal sees in this an example to follow. Through Antar's

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<sup>47</sup> W.A. Clouston, *Arabian Poetry for English Readers: Mu'allaqat*, "n.p.": Zuubooks, 2011, p. 313.

idealism, Kamal criticises his father, Yasin, and the superficiality of Egyptian men, for whom women are fit only for sex and household duties.

In addition to *The Thousand and One Nights* and the poetry of Antar ibn Shaddad, Kamal also reads *Divan al-Hamasa*, an anthology of Arabic poetry compiled by Abu Tammam in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Abu Tammam was considered ‘the prototype of the “difficult” poet, with his artful and often rather contrived style’<sup>48</sup>. Kamal is not only interested in the poetry of the pre-Islamic period and classical Arabic literature, he also has an interest in contemporary literature. He has read works by Mustafa Lutfi al-Manfaluti and by Muhammad Ibrahim al-Muwaylihi. In a word, Kamal loves these writers and puts ‘his whole heart into living in the ideal world reflected in the pages of their books.’ (*Trilogy* 587)

The *Trilogy* also makes reference to the story of Layla and Majnun. In his translation of *Layla and Majnun*, Rudolph Gelpke writes in the preface:

Among the legendary love stories of the Islamic Orient that of Layla and Majnun is probably the best known. The two lovers live up to this day in poems, songs and epics of many tribes and nations from the Caucasus to the interior of Africa, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.<sup>49</sup>

*Layla and Majnun* (Layla’s fool) tells the story of a young man called Qays ibn al-Mulawwah, a Bedouin poet who falls in love with Layla, a woman from his tribe. The story takes place in the Ummayyad era in the second half of the seventh century A.D., in the Najd desert in the Arabic peninsula.<sup>50</sup> When people learn of their love affair, Layla is banned from leaving her tent, and Qays is not allowed to approach her. He asks for Layla’s hand in marriage. Her father refuses and Layla marries Ibn Salam. When Qays hears of her marriage, he deserts his tribe to wander the wild desert. Layla becomes ill and dies. When Qays learns about her death, he returns to her tomb, where he lies down and dies.

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<sup>48</sup> Geert Jan van Gelder, ed., *Classical Arabic Literature: A Library of Arabic Literature Anthology*. Library of Arabic Literature, New York: New York University Press, 2013, p. 58.

<sup>49</sup> Ganjavi Nizami, and Rudolph Gelpke, *The Story of Layla and Majnun*, New Lebanon, NY: Omega Publications Inc, 2011, p. xi.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

The use of the classical Arabic story of *Majnun and Layla* in the *Trilogy* re-establishes love in its Oriental context. Somehow Kamal identifies with Qays. Like Qays, Kamal is an excellent pupil. Qays ‘mastered the arts of reading and writing and when he talked it was as if his tongue was scattering pearls.’<sup>51</sup> Kamal is also an avid reader and a gifted writer. He suffers because of his love for Aïda, and the images and words he uses to describe his love have much in common with the language used by Qays. We should note here that the name ‘Aïda’ is pronounced ‘Ayda’. Layla and Aïda have the same number of syllables and sound alike. Both Kamal and Qays lose their beloved. Layla and Aïda marry other men, and both women die, leaving Kamal and Qays behind. The way Kamal expresses his sorrow betrays the fact that he has read *Majnun and Layla*, and that he identifies with the hero of the most romantic of Arab folk tales.

Where Qays says to Layla: ‘Oh my beloved, had I not given my soul to you, trembling with desire like the wind, it would have been better to lose it’<sup>52</sup>, Kamal acknowledges that ‘[n]othing save love is stronger than death.’ (*Trilogy* 729) Where Qays ‘walked aimlessly, driven only by his aching heart, without heeding the staring eyes’<sup>53</sup>, Kamal imagines himself to be choking, ‘imprisoned’, ‘lost’ and ‘wandering aimlessly.’ (*Trilogy* 552)

Unlike his father and brother, Kamal believes in the love described in books. Kamal is an example of a romantic lover who finds his inspiration in the literary works he reads. Through his love for Aïda, we encounter a meaning of love uncommon to the ordinary Egyptian. Kamal associates Aïda with the ‘*Night of Destiny*’ (*Trilogy* 551). This night, which takes place at the end of Ramadan, is an opportunity for repentance for Muslims. They implore God to forgive all their sins from the previous year. It is a holy night with deep meaning for all Muslims, firstly because prayers are answered, and secondly because God pardons and forgives repentant sinners. Again, Kamal’s love derives its strength from a strong Eastern context.

During a stroll with Aïda, Kamal is enraptured, while Aïda herself remains silent and ‘amuses herself by counting pebbles.’ Mahfouz demonstrates his skill once again by giving Kamal the opportunity to exercise his poetic imagery during the silent

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

walk. Kamal is jealous of the wind which is penetrating Aïda's lungs. Kamal's metaphor here is purely Oriental. This expression is used in Arabic contexts to indicate profound jealousy.

Love and sexuality are inseparable. Kamal is aware that the ideal love of books is usually juxtaposed against the reality of sexual desire. How does Kamal manage the existence of these two elements in his life? In one of his reflections on the subject he says:

If one day I'm permitted to find love and lust united in a single human being, a desirable stability will be achieved. I still see life as a set of mismatched parts. I'm searching for a marriage that will affect both the private and public aspects of my life. I don't know which is more basic, but I'm certain that I'm miserable, despite having created a life that assures me both intellectual pleasures and bodily delights. (*Trilogy* 1093)

However, sexual desire is instinctive in humans. To talk about love in its spiritual context only would be incomplete. Without some element of submission to lust, Kamal would seem different from other human beings. At the same time, Kamal's respect for women prevents him from using them. He cannot marry simply to satisfy his 'bestial' side. Kamal believes marriage to be a balance between spiritual and physical love, and believes it should not otherwise be considered. In order to remain faithful to his ideas, Kamal chooses to pay for satisfaction. His first visit to a brothel affects him profoundly, as he has not expected to find himself in such a situation:

You'll have a good time laughing at yourself later, but you're a winner not a deserter. Suppose life is a tragedy; still, it's a duty to play your role in it. (*Trilogy* 914)

Kamal, who has always tried to intellectualise sex, is now rationalising it. However, his decision to make use of the services of a prostitute remains courageous because he refuses to be like his father and brother. In a word, he refuses to use marriage as a way of gaining access to the sexual act.

Comparing how Mahfouz deals with the theme of love in his *Trilogy* and the way Durrell approaches it in the *Quartet*, both have clearly remained faithful to their

cultures. They both make reference to well-known books and to great literary and philosophical figures, but while one prefers to stick to his European roots, the other plunges into the cultural heritage of the Orient. Nevertheless, the way in which Mahfouz portrays Oriental love helps to highlight the characteristics of Durrell's European love, and vice versa. From another point of view, where Durrell calls his series of novels 'an investigation of modern love'<sup>54</sup>, Mahfouz has no need to qualify his work in this way because the *Trilogy* is a realistic work, and the form of love it portrays can be none other than that which ordinary Egyptians experience or can experience.

#### 4.2.3 Homosexuality accommodated

For an Egyptian Muslim to approach the subject of homosexuality in an Egyptian context is not an easy task. Homosexuality is considered objectionable in Egypt and in the Orient in general, because it is clearly stated in the Qur'an that it is a transgression:

“Verily, you practice your lusts on men instead of women. Nay, but you are a people transgressing beyond bounds (by committing great sins).”  
(7: 81)<sup>55</sup>

However, in the *Trilogy*, homosexuality is neither rejected nor denied. On the contrary, it is seen as a component of Egyptian sexual life. Mahfouz takes this a step further by dedicating part of his story to homosexuals. The message behind this is that homosexuality exists in Egyptian society and there is no need to hide it.

On the other hand, Mahfouz treats homosexuality with a considerable degree of caution. Both the Arabic and English versions of the *Trilogy* are devoid of the word 'homosexuality', or any word related to it. The homosexual discourse is understood from the context, as in the following example:

I love learning. I love life. I love people. My practice is to offer a young man a hand until he grows up. What is there in the world that's better

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<sup>54</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 60.

<sup>55</sup> Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Noble Qur'an Transliteration in Roman Script with Original Arabic Text (Mushaf al-Madinah) and English Translation of Meanings*, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darrussalam, 2001, p. 235.

than love? If we run into a legal problem, we must solve it together. When we think about the future, we shall do that together. If we feel like resting, we should rest together. I've never known a man as wise as Hasan Bey Imad. Today he's one of a select group of prominent diplomats. Never mind that he's one of my political enemies. When he concentrates on a subject, he masters it. Yet when music makes him ecstatic, he dances nude. The world can be a delightful place, if you're wise and broad-minded. Aren't you broad-minded, Ridwan? (*Trilogy* 1053)

The love between Ridwan and Hilmi is free from the conflicts experienced by heterosexuals throughout the story. Ridwan and Hilmi study together and are both fashionable, beautiful youths who are indifferent to girls. They are unduly concerned with their stylish appearance. They have learned to understand each other and have no problem sharing the same bed. Their complicity grows with the fact that they spend nights together studying and planning for their political careers. Their relationship is self-contained. Their reciprocal generosity and mutual love are missing in the heterosexual relationships and marriages of the story. Through the love between Hilmi and Ridwan, Mahfouz institutionalises homosexuality in Cairo society.

Abd al-Rahim Pasha is an old politician with a certain influence in Cairo. Hilmi introduces Ridwan to him. The Pasha represents authority and is therefore a symbol of power. The homosexual has nothing to envy about the heterosexual. Hilmi and Ridwan do not need the sentimental side of the Pasha because they are emotionally satisfied. The Pasha offers them the ladder that can help them reach a comfortable social position. The Pasha is aware of their ambition and agrees to help them, since it is not easy to find partners with the same sexual orientation. Abd al-Rahim Pasha has never married. He is a man of literary taste, keen intelligence and intellect. He loves literature and music. He uses humour mixed with intellect to rationalise his homosexuality.

The Pasha displays his sexual identity without fear of being excluded from society. Homosexuality is a right for him. However, he makes a distinction between his private life and his public one. Where professional tasks are concerned, he behaves with professionalism. The Pasha assures Hilmi and Ridwan that managed

homosexuality can lead to success. If they aspire to political advancement, they have to follow his model. He serves as teacher to the two youths. He is homosexual but nationalistic and patriotic. Homosexuals play just as important a role as heterosexuals in the affairs of colonial Egypt. Provided homosexuality does not disturb the national cause or public order, it remains a personal affair.

For Abd al-Rahim Isa, who assumes his homosexuality and defends it, the real hypocrite is the one who 'claims to be absolutely pure.' (*Trilogy* 1281) When he says to Ali Mihran, his deputy: 'Say what you like' (*Trilogy* 1281), the message is directed to Egyptian society. He is aware of the seriousness of the matter in a Muslim context, but is ready to justify it: 'An old bachelor like me would seek companionship even in hell.' (*Trilogy* 1281) Abd al-Rahim Pasha plays a leading role in the political affairs of Egypt. Thanks to him, both Ridwan and Hilmi attain their goals through a career in government. Homosexuals are not inactive in the *Trilogy*. They are capable of changing things, of influencing the lives of others and placing themselves at the service of a cause. When Ridwan says: 'a man can live without a woman' (*Trilogy* 1286), he recognises that homosexuality is a private choice. It is ironic that, where Scobie is killed in Durrell's world, Abd al-Rahim, Ridwan and Hilmi remain unharmed in the world portrayed by Mahfouz, and none of them are punished in any way.

Mahfouz approached homosexuality in the *Trilogy* in the full knowledge that these issues were unacceptable to his readership, believing that the writer's mission is to challenge public morality and values. Introducing homosexual characters was a daring idea and a considerable risk at the same time. The presence of homosexuality in the novel simply illustrates that homosexuality exists in Cairo and in the Orient in general. The homosexual characters in the *Trilogy* are integral links in the chain of Cairo society. They have good positions and enjoy life to the full.

Later in his career, in *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, Mahfouz took another important step regarding homosexuality. Ibn Fattouma leaves his homeland in a caravan, and embarks on a journey to find the ideal state. He visits several destinations, but when he arrives in the land of Halba he seems to have found the land of his dreams. Halba is a land of freedom in which the traveller witnesses for the first time a demonstration which is demanding the legalisation of homosexuality.

The second thing I saw, though, aroused my disconcerted astonishment: the passing of a demonstration of men and women shouting their demands, while the police followed them without interfering in any way. I recollected a similar demonstration I had witnessed in my homeland, which was on its way to the sultan to complain about increased taxes and the straitened material situation. But this demonstration was demanding legal recognition of homosexual relations.<sup>56</sup>

To talk about recognising homosexuality in 1983, the year the Arabic version of the book was published, was unprecedented in a Muslim country. By doing so, Mahfouz did his job as the artist whose task is to challenge morality. Moreover, Halba is a land of tolerance. ‘All religions are to be found in it. It has Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Buddhists; in fact it also has atheists and pagans.’<sup>57</sup> The ideal land of Ibn Fattouma is simply the land Mahfouz himself seems to have dreamt of for so long.

While Durrell approaches both male and female homosexuality in his *Quartet*, Mahfouz limits his work to male homosexuality only. Durrell’s female characters are free women. They can go out and meet both men and women. They can visit men and women and also be visited by both men and women. Durrell’s female homosexuals are given opportunities to meet one another, in order to introduce temptation into the story and make their homosexuality more credible. Mahfouz, on the other hand, needs to illustrate a context where women are expected to stay at home. His women characters rarely have the opportunity to meet other people. The only free woman in the story is Aïda, who has lived outside Egypt with her husband, but her freedom is relative because she is generally accompanied either by her brother or her young daughter.

The other free women in the story are prostitutes, who serve as examples of the misfortunes of women in the male-dominated society of Cairo. Mahfouz is interested in the situation of women in relation to men in Egyptian society, and not relationships between women. Moreover, had he introduced female homosexuality, his work would have been rejected by his readers. He had already taken a huge risk in introducing the subject of male homosexuality. Female homosexuality was impossible to imagine in the society of that time. To mention it was tantamount to a

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<sup>56</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, 1<sup>st</sup> Anchor Books Ed., New York: Anchor Books, 1993, p. 83.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

declaration of war on religious authorities and public opinion. His caution proved justified if we consider what happened to him when he attempted to go a step further in the story of *The Children of Gebelawi*.

### 4.3 Conclusions

Love dominates the pages of the *Quartet*. It affects the lives of all the characters and changes their destinies. Each character experiences it in a variety of situations. The result is a web of complex relationships where each partner is seen through the eyes of other partners; each affects a number of other characters and is in turn affected by others. The definitions of love given by Darley, Justine, Clea and Pursewarden are all different, and are all the result of an experience influenced by time and context.

In the *Trilogy* of Mahfouz, love is discussed from a more realistic point of view. Its meaning develops with the story. At the beginning, we are presented with relationships which only involve sexual gratification. Love in a spiritual sense is unknown to most married couples. With subsequent generations, love is introduced as the result of a change in the position of women in Egyptian society. By the end of the story, women have acquired a voice similar to men. They work together and take decisions together, as in the case of Ahmad and Sawsan:

I owe her all my happiness. All my hopes are pinned on her. We are devoted partners. We have never openly agreed to be in love, but I have no doubt that we are. Our cooperation is perfectly harmonious. We began as comrades in the struggle for freedom, working together like one person – each of us a candidate for incarceration. Whenever I praise her beauty, she stares at me in protest, frowns and reprimands me – as if love were beneath us. Then I smile and return to the work at hand. One day I told her, ‘I love you! I love you! Do whatever you want about it.’  
(*Trilogy* 1241)

On the other hand, because an Oriental and a Westerner make Egypt the setting for their novels, and because ideals of beauty in the East differ from those in the West, it is interesting to see how culture influences the representation of the body in the texts. The way it is represented in the *Trilogy* highlights Arab standards of

female beauty. Beautiful Arab women are often described in terms of fleshy bodies. In expressions like ‘royal rump’ and ‘huge breasts’ it is the size of these parts which is emphasised and not the parts themselves. However, the Western approach to the female body is different in that parts are highlighted which do not change in size or shape. In *The Alexandria Quartet*, Clea is ‘struck by the dark Alexandrian beauty of [Justine’s] face’, and Clea herself is described as follows:

[...] the warm gold of her hair and a skin honeyed almost to the tone of burnt sugar by sea-bathing in the warm spring sunshine [...] Her candid eyes were as blue as corn-flowers and set in her head like precision-made objects of beauty — the life-work of a jeweller. (*Quartet* 236)

Here the emphasis is on the colour: ‘gold’, ‘honeyed’, ‘blue’. Other parts of the body, which are not subject to shape or measurement, are used to indicate how beauty is categorised in the West. For example, it is not common in Oriental literature to characterise beauty according to the position of the eyes in the head. The following passage involving Yasin reveals the striking contrast in views:

May our Lord be gracious to me and to every poor rogue like me who can’t sleep for thinking about swelling breasts, plump buttocks, and eyes enhanced by kohl. Eyes come last, because many a blind woman with a fleshy rump and full breasts is a thousand times better than a skinny, flat-chested woman with eyes decorated with kohl. (*Trilogy* 260)

However, with the generation of the sons the focus shifts to beauty which has nothing to do with the shape or size of the body. When Aïda is leaving Cairo with her family to go to Ra’s al-Barr in the summer holidays, Kamal expresses his admiration in the following words:

[...] my imagination will never lose sight of your dark black eyes, your eyebrows which join in the middle, your elegant straight nose, your face like a bronze moon, your long neck, and your slender figure. (*Trilogy* 552)

Finally, both the *Trilogy* and the *Quartet* address the theme of homosexuality. Whereas Mahfouz gives a voice to homosexuals, Durrell deals with homosexuality from a traditional, conservative point of view, where the homosexual is rejected

rather than given a voice. Where female homosexuality is concerned, it was impossible for Mahfouz to introduce the subject because the Arabic novel was not yet ready to accommodate it.

In conclusion, love and sexuality are approached in *The Cairo Trilogy* from the point of view of the real inhabitants of Cairo. Even though Egypt was among the first Arab countries to defend women's liberties and to adopt revolutionary ideas opposed to conservatism and religious fanaticism, the position of women remained a controversial issue. The way al-Sayyid and his son Yasin see women reflects a reality which was typical of Egypt between the wars, and typical of the Orient in a more general sense. The patriarch and his son are very representative of real Egyptian men. They are very close to the people Mahfouz met in his life. The personality of the despot may be a combination of several people who shared a coffee with Mahfouz in the coffee shops of Cairo. In the *Trilogy*, therefore, Cairo is real, and the themes of the book are as real as the city and its inhabitants.

The fact that the issue of love and sexuality is approached from a realistic point of view in the *Trilogy* allows Mahfouz to present Egypt as a mirror of the Egypt of Durrell. More precisely, marital relationships in the *Trilogy* highlight all the more the contrasting nature of European love relationships in the *Quartet*. *The Cairo Trilogy* uses an Oriental catalogue of Arabic writers and ancient Arabic legends to question love and sexuality in the Orient. *The Thousand and One Nights*, the story of Antar and Abla, *Majnun and Layla*, al-Manfaluti, al-Muwaylihi, Hafiz Ibrahim and Ahmad Shawqi constitute the intellectual Oriental repertoire through which Mahfouz describes issues related to love and sexuality. Love in Durrell's *Quartet*, on the other hand, is questioned through an Occidental repertoire consisting of Shakespeare, Stendhal, Huysmans, de Sade, Rabelais, Goethe, Freud and Plato. The two repertoires reflect and complement one another to show how Egypt facilitates the encounter between East and West.

## Chapter 5

### Religion: between East and West

In *The Alexandria Quartet*, religion seems to be of minor importance. Rarely does religion surface. As for the word 'God', it is used only on rare occasions, and even when it is used, the impact on the characters seems minor. However, as we shall see, religion is, in fact, used with the same force and importance as in the *Trilogy*. In the *Quartet*, the main action of the novel is based on the Coptic plot, and religion is the motive for a conspiracy against the British. Religion is behind several deaths and a suicide. It ruins all the Hosnanis: Narouz is killed, and Nessim and Justine lose all their money and wealth.

In addition, if Alexandria is known for its religious diversity, it is also considered the cradle of European mysticism. This point is made strongly in Durrell's tetralogy, where theosophy provides a new philosophy of life. Whereas Christianity, Judaism and Islam are seen as a source of ambivalence, mysticism is seen as leading to freedom and coherence. From another viewpoint, the religious and metaphysical worlds of the *Quartet* are exploited to commemorate the rich past of the city as a part of Western culture, rather than to present us with the content and practices of these religions and esoteric traditions. On this point, Durrell said in an interview recorded in 1975 in London:

I used Alexandria and its religious and metaphysical side as a sort of telescope to examine Western culture.<sup>1</sup>

In *The Cairo Trilogy*, religion is used in a more realistic sense, with an emphasis on the role it plays in the life of Egyptians. For most of the characters, religion is the reference for making decisions, particularly in the wake of illicit action. The word 'God' is repeated frequently, showing that Egyptians prefer flight to confrontation.

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Durrell and Earl G. Ingersoll, *Lawrence Durrell: Conversations*, Madison, N.J.: London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 156.

Instead of relying on themselves to improve their living conditions, they hide behind God. Religion is therefore seen as a barrier to progress. Even the national cause fails to reduce the influence of religion, since people are waiting for providence to free the country from the British occupation.

In order to approach the topic of religion effectively, therefore, it will be more useful to see it through the lens of Western culture in the *Quartet*, while in the *Trilogy* it will be more rewarding to examine it in its oriental context. The first part of this chapter will be dedicated to *The Alexandria Quartet*, while the second part concerns *The Cairo Trilogy*. Religion in the tetralogy will be examined through the Coptic plot, around which the main action of the novel is based. What is the function of the Coptic plot? If the official religion of Alexandria is Islam, why did Durrell choose a Coptic plot and not a Muslim one? To answer these questions, and to help understand the significance of events, a summary of the plot will be a useful first step, since the story is not told chronologically and the narrative is complicated by the presence of other writings such as letters, novels and diaries.

Moreover, the Coptic plot ends in failure, and this suggests the failure of religion where it is used to serve political goals. However, this not only criticises the political side of religion but religion in a more general sense. To illustrate this point, I will show how Balthazar, Darley and Justine remain distant from religion and from a sense of the 'licit' and 'illicit'. As a final point, I will examine the theosophical side of Alexandria through Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism and Kabbalah. These esoteric traditions are important to the understanding of the novel because they function as an alternative to religion on the one hand, and because they have a Western resonance on the other.

The second part of the chapter will deal with religion in *The Cairo Trilogy* and its impact on Mahfouz' characters. Firstly, I shall discuss ignorance and the irrational dependence of characters on God. This step will centre on two dialogues, but for reasons of clarity and simplicity, the analysis will not focus on the narrator's commentaries. The first dialogue, which takes place between Kamal and his mother, shows how legends can mingle with science, and how it is very difficult to rationalise and intellectualise religion. The second dialogue concerns Shaykh Mutwalli and al-

Sayyid Ahmad. Here we shall see how religion can be an obstacle to progress, and how it can be a source of flight from social and political responsibilities.

Secondly, I shall examine religion and science. This investigation will focus on the conversation between Kamal and his father, which takes place after Kamal's publication of an article on Darwin's theory of the origin of species. Despite his father's objections, Kamal continues to pursue meaning and truth by rejecting religion. As a final step, by using the conversation between the extremist Shaykh al-Manufi and his followers, I shall show how misinterpretation of the religious discourse can lead to fanaticism.

By comparing the ways in which the two texts use religion, I shall assess the importance of each text to the understanding of the other. This will involve answering the following questions: does the text of Mahfouz add something to how we understand the way religion is treated in Durrell's text? Without reading *The Cairo Trilogy*, would the role of religion in *The Alexandria Quartet* be clear? Does religion in the *Trilogy* explain the reasons behind the use of theosophy in the *Quartet*? Finally, how does religion connect Cairo to the Arab world, and how does it link Alexandria to Western culture?

## 5.1 Religion through Western lenses

### 5.1.1 The Coptic plot: when religion is politicised

The following remark by Durrell about religion appeared in 1962 as part of 'The Kneller Tape' in *The World of Lawrence Durrell*:

But I rather dread the word religion because I have a notion that the reality of it dissolves the minute it is uttered as a concept. I don't like the political idea inherent in religions claiming to be the only exclusive path; that is sad and silly. All religions say the same thing in different dialects.<sup>2</sup>

Based on this understanding, what is the place of religion in the story of the *Quartet*? Does religion encourage political plots? A synopsis of the story will help clarify these issues.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

The first volume of the *Quartet* opens with Nessim and Justine already married. Nothing is said about the period which precedes their marriage. At first glance, Nessim and Justine are like any husband and wife. The absence of past events marking their relationship leads the reader to think they simply fell in love with each other and then married in order to have a family. In addition, the focus in this volume is to give a portrait of each character individually, rather than focusing on relationships or the feelings the characters might have towards each other.

On a superficial level, *Justine* seems to be a biographical novel in which the writer introduces his characters by providing information about who they are. Considerable space is devoted to Justine, who gives her name to this volume. Justine's first meeting with Darley takes place when she attends his lecture on the Alexandrian poet, Cavafy. She takes him home to introduce him to her husband. The context of this meeting places the relationships above suspicion. Darley becomes acquainted with Nessim and Justine and, as in all contexts where people are introduced to each other, a friendship begins under ordinary circumstances. No one can guess that Justine and Nessim need Darley for other purposes. The friendship between Darley and Justine evolves to become a complex love relationship which affects both Darley and Nessim, the supposedly jealous husband.

Little is known about Nessim's work as a banker, except that he does not care for money. Moreover, his relationships with Justine, Darley and Melissa are calculated to avoid any suspicion about his real role in the story. Instead, we are driven to focus on his jealousy and his love for a woman who betrays him with his new friend. Nessim's main role in the first volume involves his organisation of the yearly duck-shooting party, which takes place on Lake Mareotis, and also his role in the supposed death of Capodistria. After the duck shoot, Justine leaves suddenly for Palestine. Her departure adds more complexity to the story because it brings no closure to the first volume. Darley also leaves Alexandria to teach in a school in Upper Egypt.

When the narrator insists, at the beginning of *Justine*, that Nessim is 'a Copt, not a Moslem' (*Quartet* 29), the information seems to be of little importance. However, *Balthazar* provides us with new insights. In fact, noting that Nessim is a Copt is necessary to the reading of the tetralogy and to understanding the plot. If

Nessim's education has been largely in Europe, it is not for the purpose of being appointed to a prestigious position which could guarantee him an honourable place in Alexandrian society, but in order to give him sufficient power to defend the community of Copts. Nessim needs to speak French and English fluently in order to build relationships with the British and the French. Access to information is only possible by understanding those who have power in the country and in the region.

The marriage of Nessim and Justine could naively be taken as the beginning of a story which will develop with the passing of time. We are not tempted to question the events which took place before this marriage because we simply assume they are of little importance. However, what came before their union is of crucial significance in terms of understanding the plot. In fact, Nessim is leading a dangerous mission in Egypt, and to achieve the aims of his political conspiracy against British interests in the country, he has to marry Justine:

You will see from all this my immediate worries. You can deal with them. First the doubts and hesitations of the Jewish Committee. I want *you* to talk to them. They think that there is something questionable about a Copt supporting them while the local Jews are staying clear, afraid of losing their good name with the Egyptians. We must convince them, Justine. It will take a little while at least to complete the arms build-up. (*Quartet* 556)

Nessim and Justine enter into an alliance around supporting a 'Jewish Palestine that would stand as an ally with the Copts against growing Muslim power in Egypt.'<sup>3</sup> However, their marriage is not a simple affair since Justine is a woman with 'a different faith from his own.' (*Quartet* 263) For the sake of her husband, Justine renounces Judaism and becomes a Copt. Despite the reluctance Leila has shown towards this marriage, she finally agrees to it and gives it her blessing. The wedding eventually takes place at Karm Abu Girg.

The marriage of Nessim and Justine is a political alliance rather than any other arrangement. Both are active members of a movement conspiring against the British presence in Egypt. For the Hosnanis and for Copts in general, the British

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<sup>3</sup> Michael von Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 149.

have weakened the position of the Copts in the country. Nessim and Justine support a Zionist organisation which aims to establish an independent Jewish state: 'Jewish Underground Fighters in Haifa and Jerusalem'. To provide help, they must facilitate the smuggling of arms into Palestine. The role of Justine lies in acting as a secret agent, and part of her mission is to extract information from Darley, the naïve teacher, and Pursewarden, the successful novelist, who both work for British intelligence.

As the story advances, we realise that most of the events are related to the Hosnanis' intrigue. Statements and declarations which seem to have minor importance become of great significance when they are related to the political aspirations of the Coptic characters. *Mountolive* provides the details which explain how the Hosnanis' plan is discovered. In London, Kenilworth, the Head of Personnel, informs Mountolive, who has been appointed ambassador in Egypt, that Pursewarden has many enemies in Alexandria and that these include the Brigadier, Maskelyne. In fact, Maskelyne has developed suspicions about Nessim and his role in the conspiracy against British interests. Maskelyne leaves a document on Pursewarden's desk entitled: *Nessim Hosnani: A Conspiracy Among the Copts*. Even though the content is alarming, Pursewarden ignores the paper, considering the accusation against Nessim to be unfounded. Despite the fact that Kenilworth has cautioned him, Mountolive decides to transfer Maskelyne to Jerusalem and offers Pursewarden a promotion.

It is ultimately Melissa who tells Pursewarden that Nessim is at the centre of the plot against the British.

I used to be the mistress of a very important man, Cohen, very important and very rich. [...] He was working with Nessim Hosnani and told me things. He also talked in his sleep. He is dead now. I think he was poisoned because he knew so much. He was helping to take arms into the Middle East, into Palestine, for Nessim Hosnani. Great quantities. He used to say "*Pour faire sauter les Anglais!*" (*Quartet* 535)

Justine's conviction that Melissa 'knows nothing' (*Quartet* 560) is an irreparable mistake. Cohen, who was the chief agent for arms shipments, has told her about the whole affair. Only now does Pursewarden realise that Maskelyne's charges against

Nessim were right. Pursewarden asks Telford for a cyanide tablet to poison a sick dog, and swallows it to commit suicide. He leaves a legacy of five hundred pounds to Darley and asks him to spend the money on Melissa.

Just before his final act, Pursewarden leaves a message written on his mirror with a wet shaving stick: 'NESSIM. COHEN PALESTINE ETC. ALL DISCOVERED AND REPORTED' (*Quartet* 566). Nessim is the first on the scene because Pursewarden has telephoned him: 'It is a matter of life and death, as they say in books. Yes, please, come at once. There is a message for you in an appropriate place: the mirror.' (*Quartet* 565) When Nessim receives the call, he rushes to the hotel where Pursewarden has been staying and locks himself into the room. Balthazar describes Nessim's hysterical behaviour when he arrives at the scene with Justine:

He was turning out drawers and desks and cupboards like a maniac, examining manuscripts and papers, tossing things aside and picking things up with a complete lack of his usual phlegm. "What the hell are you doing?" I said angrily, to which he replied "There must be nothing for the Egyptian Police to find." And then he stopped as if he had said too much. Every mirror bore a soap-inscription. Nessim had partly obliterated one. I could only make out the letters OHEN . . . PALESTINE. . . . (*Quartet* 312)

The obliterated word is of course 'Nessim'. Nessim erases most of the message immediately, before journalists can read it. It is difficult to make out the missing part of the message simply by reading *Balthazar*. Even the letter 'C' is missing in the word 'Cohen'. The only complete word is 'Palestine', which seems to have no relevance to Pursewarden's suicide. So we are held in suspense about the mystery of Nessim and the word 'Palestine' until the third volume, when Nessim reveals to Justine 'something which neither his mother nor his brother knew — the extent of his complicity in the Palestine conspiracy.' (*Quartet* 556)

Nessim's activities are discovered by Mountolive. It will not take long to denounce him, even if he asks Errol, the Head of Chancery, not to inform the Egyptian government until they have stronger evidence. Even Leila can be of no help to her two sons when she learns about Nessim's plans and writes to Mountolive to inform him that she knew nothing about 'this business' until Carnival. Mountolive

rejects Leila and her request as if he had never been in love with her. To delay his intervention, Nessim bribes Memlik Pasha, the Minister of the Interior. The corruptible Memlik collects copies of the Qur'an, and Nessim has no hesitation in presenting him with copies in which he has inserted bank notes. However, pressure from Mountolive eventually pushes Memlik to consider taking action. Rafael, Memlik's toady, has anticipated his master's dilemma and shrewdly proposes they sacrifice Narouz:

[...] the papers you received from his Excellence were signed Hosnani — in the family name. Who is to say which brother signed them, which is guilty and which innocent? If you were wise in deed would you sacrifice a moneyed man to a landed one? I not, Excellence, I not.  
(*Quartet* 614)

Memlik follows Rafael's advice and arranges the assassination of Narouz, who is murdered at Karm Abu Girg. Alexandrians nevertheless consider Nessim to have brought about his brother's murder.

The political intrigue of Nessim and Justine collapses. Justine is arrested and placed under house arrest at Karm Abu Girg. In *Clea*, Justine gives Darley her account of the events:

When everything collapsed in Palestine, all our dumps discovered and captured, the Jews at once turned on Nessim accusing him of treachery, because he was friendly with Mountolive. We were between Memlik and the hostile Jews, in disgrace with both. The Jews expelled me. This was when I saw Clea again; I so badly needed news and yet I couldn't confide in her. (*Quartet* 696)

Basing the action of the novel on a Coptic conspiracy constitutes a direct criticism of politicised religion. Blinded by religious motives, characters sacrifice everything, even their families. Nessim and Justine could have established a happy family, but religion ruins them. The young couple had enough financial resources to lead a normal life in their community, but the religious cause is fatal to them. Narouz also loses his life for the same religious cause. Faltaus and Leila dedicate their lives to religion, but their end is no better than that of their sons. In the *Quartet*, religion

fosters conspiracy and instils hatred. It also establishes a hypocritical environment where people have to hide what they really are. Simply put, religion ruins people in the *Quartet*.

It is also a major theme in *The Cairo Trilogy*, but not in relation to the action of the novel. Because the story in the *Trilogy* follows the life of a family across three generations, there is no principle plot. We only follow the sons and grandsons through different stages of development, where they experience the impact of religion and become either religious fanatics or atheists. Although no lives are lost as a result of religious commitment, abuse of religion leads to serious loss in the nation as a whole.

Fanaticism is also present in the *Quartet* through Narouz. Serapamoun, the richest and most influential of Alexandria's Coptic cotton traders, tells Nessim:

Nessim, in starting this community movement you had no idea of initiating a *jehad* – a holy war of religion – or of doing anything subversive which might unsettle the Egyptian Government? Of course not. That is what we thought, and if we joined you it was from a belief in your convictions that the Copts should unite and seek a larger place in public affairs. (*Quartet* 568)

Jihad is a holy war Muslims can undertake against unbelievers. Jihadists use religion to preach violence and hatred. The word jihad is borrowed in this context to stress the hidden consequences of religion when it is used for political or personal reasons. It is also used to emphasise that fanaticism is the same in all religions and calls for the same type of war. Serapamoun invites Nessim to this discussion because he strongly objects to Narouz's religious deviation. Historically speaking, Serapamoun's reaction is typical of an Alexandrian. The religious communities of Egypt have always sought a peaceful relationship with the Egyptian government because Egypt, and especially Alexandria, was once a land where different cultures coexisted. Narouz, however, has gone too far, and his misuse of religion has driven him to extremism. Here, Narouz is not simply a Copt who is incriminated, but a religious extremist. Whether Christian or Muslim, extremism can be defined and described in the same words. Muslim and Christian extremists often share similar backgrounds.

Seclusion, frustration, social rejection and lack of education are common reasons why fragile individuals are driven to acts of extremism.

Plans to ‘unsettle the Egyptian Government’ help to establish religion as a source of fanaticism. Serapamoun’s description of Narouz’s behaviour shows how religion and ignorance can transform a person into a criminal with strong terrorist tendencies:

His head is a jumble of strange fragments of knowledge, and when he preaches all sorts of things pour out of him in a torrent which would look bad on paper if they were to reach Memlik Pasha. (*Quartet* 568)

Fanatics are often uneducated individuals who are incapable of finding a balance between religious precepts and human values. They often have serious problems with interpreting religious texts. Unlike his brother, Narouz has not been educated in Europe. He does not speak another language and spends most of his time looking after the estate of his parents. He has no friends, and lives in seclusion because of his harelip. Clea’s rejection of his love has worsened his situation. In other words, solitude has made him into a candidate ripe for carrying out terrorist acts. Narouz finds refuge in religion, which compensates him for all his frustrations. He represents religious men who consider themselves a divine revelation, sent to the world to establish justice, to reverse current circumstances and to rebuild the world in accordance with the way they interpret religious discourse.

Narouz reminds us of Shaykh Ali al-Manufi in the *Trilogy* of Mahfouz, in which fanaticism is represented as a serious problem in Egypt. Narouz and al-Manufi share many characteristics. They have both elected themselves guardians of their communities and of the word of God. They both preach violence in the name of religion. Neither is in favour of discussion or negotiation. Where Narouz uses religion for the Coptic cause, al-Manufi uses it to reinforce the Muslim Brothers’ movement in Egypt. Their speeches are also similar in that they use strong words which present them as zealous defenders of the religion of God. In summary, Durrell and Mahfouz treat fanaticism and extremism in almost the same way, using the same techniques.

In the *Quartet*, religion is used only for political objectives. It is a veil which helps the Copts hide their political plans and their opposition to the government. It is true that Serapamoun is against using religion for terrorist ends, but he is not against using it in other contexts: 'the Copts should unite and seek a larger place in public affairs.' (*Quartet* 568) On the other hand, religion is not only criticised through the Coptic cause. There are other direct criticisms, such as when Balthazar says in *Justine*:

None of the great religions has done more than exclude, throw out a long range of prohibitions. But prohibitions create the desire they are intended to cure. (*Quartet* 85)

By great religions, Balthazar means Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Religion is a set of beliefs and rules as well as commands. It involves obedience, compliance and submission to God's authority. Religion distinguishes between right and wrong, good and bad, permitted and forbidden. Prohibitions address our behaviour directly. For Balthazar, prohibitions often fail to resolve the issues they are intended to address. Instead, they feed obsession and transform the forbidden object into a source of pleasure. This is also true in the *Trilogy*. Religious prohibitions fail to prevent al-Sayyid from pursuing his sexual adventures or from enjoying alcohol and nightly entertainments. Prohibitions do nothing but worsen Yasin's sexual deviance. For Kamal, Ahmad, Abd al-Rahim Pasha and other characters, desire overrules any prohibitions.

In the *Quartet*, not only has Coptic Christianity failed to make the Hosnanis good citizens, Islam has failed to furnish Memlik Pasha with human values:

'My work' said Memlik with a glint 'is done on Tuesdays only. For the rest of the week I take pleasure with my friends.' (*Quartet* 603)

Memlik Pasha is a sadistic police chief, who cold-bloodedly orders the murder of Narouz. 'My work' is understood in inverted commas because it refers to God. There is a reference here to the Days of Creation, and to Tuesday as a day when God created evil. In Memlik's case, religion appears once again in its political guise, and is analogous with death. Moreover, Memlik's passion for the Qur'an and his organisation of the '*Wird*', a kind of prayer meeting, are connected with conspiracy

and the falsification of truth. If Memlik takes great risks to serve Nessim, it is because he knows that no one can suspect religious activities of being used to hide political intrigue. Here religion is implicitly related to hypocrisy.

In addition to this open criticism, Durrell criticises religion indirectly. To illustrate, characters such as Balthazar, Justine and Darley show no interest in religious conversion. None of them are in any way repentant of their sins, even though they all indulge in a sinful life in a religious sense. Balthazar's homosexuality, Justine's betrayal of her husband and Darley's adulterous relationship with a married woman are all acts forbidden by religion, yet none of these characters show any remorse. Balthazar, for example, does not regret his homosexual orientation. The fact that Scobie has been kicked to death does not awaken in him the religious feeling death often arouses in people. He himself has been beaten and humiliated, but he sees no relationship between morality and misfortune. Darley has also had a tormented life in Alexandria. He regrets his affair with Justine but never connects his suffering with the amoral life he has led in the city. Darley does not even make this connection on the island, where we expect him to question his religiosity and seek reconciliation with morality. Instead, he only sees in his exile an opportunity to understand what has happened. Justine's life changes radically after the failure of the plot. She loses her beauty, her riches, her friends and her liberty. She is transferred from Nessim's heaven to house arrest in Karm Abu Girg. She once enjoyed the love of three men but now finds no one to love her. Pursewarden has committed suicide, Nessim is no longer attached to her and Darley rejects her. These misfortunes revive no religious feeling in her.

In the *Quartet*, therefore, fate is not related to a lack of compliance with religion, and misfortunes do not force characters to question their behaviour or make any attempt at reconciliation. In the *Trilogy*, on the other hand, characters are constantly reforming their attitudes in order to redeem themselves. Al-Sayyid Ahmed generously gives alms to the poor to expiate his sins. Another character, Abd al-Rahim Pasha, decides to go on a pilgrimage to wash away his sins and to start a new and pious life. Moreover, unlike the *Quartet*, characters in the *Trilogy* such as Kamal, Ahmad and Riyad Qaldas openly reject religion and opt for philosophy and science. This step is absent in the tetralogy because religion does not have such an important impact on the characters as it does in the *Trilogy*.

In fact, in the *Quartet*, only negative characteristics of religion are highlighted. However, it is reasonable to ask why Durrell chose a Coptic plot instead of a Muslim one. Even though Durrell was criticised for the historical fallacy of the Coptic plot<sup>4</sup>, it helped him to question the relationship of religion to politics. At the same time, the Coptic plot permits Durrell to situate Alexandria within its ancient legacy. The Jews and the Copts are used in the story to hint at Alexandria's early history where 'Jews, pagans and Christians lived and taught side by side'<sup>5</sup>. This was the Alexandria of great philosophical ideas, which was once 'the fountainhead of Western thought'<sup>6</sup>.

To commemorate the historical significance of Alexandria to the West, and to write about it as a cosmopolis of Western ideas, Durrell was forced to focus on elements which highlighted these aspects of the city. A plot built on a Muslim cause, for instance, would have given the city a different atmosphere to the one Durrell ultimately created. Focusing on the Muslim aspects of Alexandria would not have allowed him to approach the city as the 'capital of memory', or as the starting point of Western civilisation.

### 5.1.2 Alexandrian theosophies: towards an aesthetic of self-indulgence

If religion in *The Alexandria Quartet* is related to plotting and conspiracy, and is seen in the context of fanaticism and extremism, the Alexandrian theosophies possibly represent an aesthetic where the individual's wholeness triumphs over prohibition. In *Justine*, Balthazar says:

None of the great religions has done more than exclude, throw out a long range of prohibitions. But prohibitions create the desire they are intended to cure. We of this Cabal say: *indulge but refine*. We are enlisting everything in order to make man's wholeness match the wholeness of the universe – even pleasure, the destructive granulation of the mind in pleasure. (*Quartet* 85)

The phrase 'indulge and refine' is hard to interpret if it is not seen in context. The fact that Durrell wrote it in italics means that it has a certain significance. In fact, the

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<sup>4</sup> Michael V. Diboll, *Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" in Its Egyptian Contexts*, Studies in British Literature, v.84, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, p. 190.

<sup>5</sup> Michael von Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 85.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

word 'indulge' must firstly be related to the word 'prohibitions'. Prohibitions result in exclusion, while indulgence leads to wholeness. The meaning of this quotation only becomes complete, however, if we take into consideration what Michael Haag says about one of Durrell's communications:

[...] he [Durrell] also sent an airgraph [...] to Diana Gould: 'Myself I have been drafting notes for the book of the dead which is to be about (a) incest (b) Alexandria (C) The Hermetics. I have been examining the doctrine of the modern cabbalists and have evolved from it a philosophy of self-indulgence very Alexandrian in its refinement. My Grand Inquisitor says: "What I have to offer the world is not a morality but an aesthetic. Where all religions tend to prohibit, exclude or sort out human behaviour, my aesthetic *includes*: Our object is the same: to remove envy, greed and other vices from the human nature. I say indulge them but *refine yourself* by them and thus refine them too. Take experience for a laboratory. No sin can remain sin if it is informed by this principle which I call the heraldic principle. Where you wish to conquer indulge and refine, never prohibit. Prohibition by the law of opposite increases demand.'<sup>7</sup>

Durrell's ideas in this passage are expressed through Darley, who says:

I have dabbled in these matters before in Paris, conscious that in them I might find a pathway which could lead me to a deeper understanding of myself — the self which seemed to be only a huge, disorganized and shapeless society of lusts and impulses. I regarded this whole field of study as productive for my inner man, though a native and inborn scepticism kept me free from the toils of any denominational religion.  
(*Quartet* 84)

The *Quartet* is not a spiritual biography of one or more characters. It is not a story where a hero searches for reconciliation with God and atones for his sins. It is not a story about God and His role in the lives of the characters. Nor is it a story where characters are portrayed as victims of the vicissitudes of fate. It certainly

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

involves a long series of misfortunes, but these remain unrelated to religion. They are not attributed to a sinful life, and do not result in expiation or religious conversion. At the end of the story, no single character is seen to make amends for his guilt. This attitude towards religion suggests mysticism as an alternative where most characters find reconciliation in the self and in others.

Durrell lived in Alexandria from 1941 to 1945. The war years brought him into contact with forms of mysticism which had left their traces in the city. Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism and Kabbalah are systems Durrell used to build the philosophical and theological world of the *Quartet*. Gnosticism is a syncretic religious movement according to which the demiurge created the imperfect material cosmos in an imperfect manner. Its teaching is based on Gnosis, a Greek word meaning 'knowledge'<sup>8</sup>. Knowledge obtained by experience is at the heart of Gnosticism.<sup>9</sup> In Gnosticism, life is synonymous with suffering, though this suffering is not caused by humans as most religions believe, but by the creator. Gnostics believe that salvation is only possible by 'the acquisition of arcane knowledge, secrets of an initiated elect.'<sup>10</sup>

Gnosticism was revived after the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library in 1945 in Upper Egypt. A collection of books and manuscripts was found hidden underground. The year is significant in that it marked the end of the Second World War, and Durrell's departure from Egypt:

Durrell maintained a life-long interest in Gnosticism during the post-war period. The Nag Hammadi Library had been discovered in Upper Egypt in 1945, around the time that Durrell left Egypt for Rhodes, and discussion of their contents had begun to reach the public domain by the mid-1950s when work on the tetralogy was well under way. This library, written in the Coptic language on papyrus, consisted of 45 separate Gnostic titles dating from the middle of the fourth century AD, although many titles are undoubtedly later versions of earlier works, probably translated from the Greek. Until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi

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<sup>8</sup> J.M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, p. 273.

<sup>9</sup> Michael V. Diboll, *Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" in Its Egyptian Contexts*, Studies in British Literature, v.84, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> J.M. Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*, London: Penguin, 2004, p. 273.

library knowledge of early Gnosticism was very fragmentary, being based largely on passing references and pagan and Christian anti-Gnostic polemics.<sup>11</sup>

In the tetralogy, it is Justine who introduces Darley to Alexandria's Gnostic circle. Darley believes that '[t]he tragic seed from which her thoughts and actions grew was the seed of pessimistic Gnosticism.' (*Quartet* 39) Justine attends cabalist meetings and is interested in the doctrine. Darley informs us that:

[...] it was always what he had to say about gnosticism which most interested her. I remember her asking one night, so anxiously, so pleadingly if she had interpreted his [Balthazar's] thinking rightly: 'I mean, that God neither created us nor wished us to be created, but that we are the work of an inferior deity, a Demiurge, who wrongly believed himself to be God? Heavens, how probable it seems; and this overweening *hubris* has been handed on down to our children.' (*Quartet* 39)

This is Balthazar's explanation of the central concept of Gnosis as knowledge of spiritual mysteries. The term 'our children' refers to the Alexandrians who have been infected by this demiurgic 'overweening *hubris*'. The demiurge is the deity responsible for creating and maintaining the physical universe. In the tetralogy, Alexandria is a demiurgic city in that it continues to subject its inhabitants to the laws of the demiurge by tying them to the physical world.

Valentinus was an influential Christian Gnostic theologian, born in Alexandria about 100 AD. He was a leader of the Alexandrian Christian community, and the best-known Valentinian schools were in Rome and Alexandria. There is also a reference to his theology in the *Quartet*, when Durrell has Darley compare Justine to Sophia:

In her, as an Alexandrian, licence was in a curious way a form of self-abnegation, a travesty of freedom; and if I saw her as an exemplar of the city it was not of Alexandria, or Plotinus that I was forced to think, but

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<sup>11</sup> Michael V. Diboll, *Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" in Its Egyptian Contexts*, Studies in British Literature, v.84, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, pp. 103-104.

of the sad thirtieth child of Valentinus who fell, ‘not like Lucifer by rebelling against God, but by desiring too ardently to be united to him.

(*Quartet* 39)

Valentinus is part of the history of Alexandria and its rich cultural heritage. To mention him in the tetralogy is to evoke a universal Alexandria which ‘emerged as a leading centre for philosophical speculation’<sup>12</sup>, the city which promoted art and science.

Another aspect of Alexandria’s theosophy involves Hermeticism, an esoteric tradition which attempts to embrace both the theory and practice of natural science:

Hermeticism is founded upon a body of writings which purport to have originated in the mythic ancient Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus, or ‘Hermes the Thrice-Great’.<sup>13</sup>

Balthazar is the voice of Hermeticism in the *Quartet*. To quote Diboll:

Just as Durrell-Darley puts Valentinian Gnosticism into the mouth of Justine, so Balthazar is the tetralogy’s Hermeticist.<sup>14</sup>

In the *Quartet*, Darley, who now attends meetings of the Cabal, reports that Balthazar speaks of Hermes Trismegistus in his discourses:

I was called upon to begin my new job for Scobie and addressed myself helplessly to the wretched *boustrophedon* upon which Balthazar continued to instruct me, in between bouts of chess. I admit that I tried to allay my pangs of conscience in the matter by trying at first to tell Scobie’s office the truth — namely that the Cabal was a harmless sect devoted to Hermetic philosophy and that its activities bore no reference to espionage. In answer to this I was curtly told that I must not believe their obvious cover-story but must try to break the code. Detailed reports of the meetings were called for and these I duly supplied, typing out Balthazar’s discourses on Ammon and Hermes Trismegistus with a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

certain peevisish pleasure, imagining as I did so the jaded government servants who have to wade through the stuff in damp basements a thousand miles away. (*Quartet* 138-139)

On the other hand, Balthazar says of himself:

I am a Jew, with all the Jew's bloodthirsty interest in the ratiocinative faculty. It is the clue to many of the weaknesses in my thinking, and which I am learning to balance up with the rest of me – through the Cabal chiefly. (*Quartet* 80)

So the occult doctor identifies himself as a Kabbalist and at the same time as a Hermetic. Here the relationship between Hermeticism and Kabbalah must be clarified. Michael Diboll examined this relationship and provides the following explanation:

The Kabbalah has two traditions: the Hebrew Kabbalah, which is properly part of the Jewish mystical tradition; and the Hermetic Kabbalah, which developed later in Renaissance Europe where study of the Kabbalah became melded into a 'Hermetic' tradition that also included Alchemical, Hermetic and occult strands. In this way, the Hermetic Kabbalah connects to the *corpus Hermeticum*, the Alexandrian text which is concerned with the rites and Magic of Hermes Trimegistus [*sic*].<sup>15</sup>

Kabbalah is one of the main sources of mysticism at the heart of Judaism. Its known origins date back to medieval times, when it appeared in Provence and Spain, but its teachings go back several centuries beyond this. It may have evolved from the mystical schools of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. Typical patterns of the Tree of Life were found on engraved stones belonging to the period of these cultures. The most important symbol of Kabbalah is the Tree of Life, which shows how the cosmic principles operate and how they are related to all living things, including people. As in astrology, the Oracle of the Tree of Life makes use of the planets, houses, signs of the zodiac and cards. European culture learned about Kabbalah during the Renaissance. From there, it became one of the most important Western mystical

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 113-114.

philosophies. It also continued to evolve in Jewish teachings. Kabbalists believe that putting their principles into regular practice helps to understand sacred cosmology. Kabbalah traces the paths between man and God, and believes that creation is a process of progressive revelation.<sup>16</sup>

Another important figure in Alexandrian mysticism is Plotinus. From the very beginning, the importance of Plotinus to Alexandrian philosophical history is made clear through Justine, of whom Darley says:

As she speaks I am thinking of the founders of the city, of the soldier-God in his glass coffin, the youthful body lapped in silver, riding down the river towards his tomb. Or of that great square negro head reverberating with a concept of God conceived in the spirit of pure intellectual play – Plotinus. (*Quartet* 38)

Plotinus founded Neo-Platonism in the 3rd century AD, a philosophical and religious system which was developed in Alexandria. It combines the teachings of Plato and other Greek thinkers with oriental mysticism, especially Judaic and Christian concepts. Neo-Platonism heavily influenced theosophy in Alexandria with its four existing systems: Christian, Gnostic, Jewish and Islamic. In his book about Alexandria, Michael Haag says that ‘Durrell had also been reading Plotinus, heir to Plato, Aristotle and Stoics and the founder of speculative mysticism in the West.’<sup>17</sup>

The central idea of Neo-Platonism lies in the principle of the ‘One’:

Plotinus believed in God, whose highest manifestation he called the One. The One is unity – which is the One. There is nothing more to say. But the One emanates, rather as light streams from the sun or as a fountain overflows, and its emanations descend through stages until the lowest of realities is reached, the one in which we live. Yet the One is not diminished by this outpouring, rather it embraces all, and as in a tremendous arc of emanation and redemption, everything including our souls yearns to flow back to the One.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cherry Gilchrist et Gila Zur, *Oracle de L'Arbre de Vie*, Paris: Editions Véga, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Michael von Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 300.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Plotinus believed that the source of happiness lay in the metaphysical as opposed to the physical. If the *Quartet* makes reference to Plotinus's philosophy, it is because Alexandrians have been unable to liberate themselves from the physical, as Plotinus advocated.

Gnosticism, Hermeticism and Neo-Platonism characterise the theosophical Alexandria of Durrell. All these traditions have one principle in common: reformation. Adherents seek to leave behind the material to embrace the spiritual. They look for emancipation and salvation from what is considered to be evil. They sacrifice everything worldly to reach complete harmony with the self. In summary, the presence of theosophical discipline in the *Quartet* plays a redemptive role, and is a way of reconciling with the self.

From another point of view, the presence of these theosophies is related to the city of Alexandria and its Western past, because it was Alexandria and the role it played in shaping Western thought which interested Durrell most. In Diboll's words, 'the *Quartet's* interest in speculative philosophy is rooted in the deep history of the city in which it is set'.<sup>19</sup> This idea becomes clear if we compare the *Quartet* to the *Trilogy*. Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism and Kabbalah are totally absent in the Cairo of Mahfouz. In this sense, it is as if Mahfouz and Durrell were writing about two different countries. Where the political side of religion is sharply criticised in the *Quartet*, and the Coptic religion is introduced more in the context of the city's Western past, how is religion used in *The Cairo Trilogy*?

## 5.2 Religion through Eastern lenses

### 5.2.1 Ignorance and the irrational use of religion in *The Cairo Trilogy*

In Egypt, the lack of education engendered by the two world wars contributed to a large extent to the spread of ignorance. Many people were used to having the Qur'an read for them. Consequently, they were unable to go beyond the surface meaning of the religious text. This problem preoccupied Mahfouz and dominated most of his works. In *The Cairo Trilogy*, the problem of religion is related to misunderstanding religious texts. The characters seem to let religion think for them, and have rejected any informed discussion.

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<sup>19</sup> Michael V. Diboll, *Lawrence Durrell's "Alexandria Quartet" in Its Egyptian Contexts*, Studies in British Literature, v.84, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004, p. 99.

Religion is omnipresent in the lives of Mahfouz's characters. Everything is explained in terms of paradise and hell. God is present in almost all of their discussions. Actions are preceded by religious thinking and the results are interpreted within a religious context. Good things are good because the principles of religion have been observed and the word of God has been respected. Bad things are bad because people have at some point deviated from the religious way. This cause and effect relationship leads to an irrational dependence on God. However, this dependence is not without danger, as the degree of intellect differs from one person to another. Using religion in daily life requires a deep knowledge of the Qur'anic text and the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Without this knowledge, it is easy to fall into the trap of misunderstanding the text.

Ignorance dominates the following conversation between Kamal and his mother. The young Kamal, who seeks to understand religion scientifically, finds no convincing answer to his questions:

**Kamal:** I asked the shaykh if the Muslims among them [the Jinn] would enter paradise. He said, 'Yes.' I also asked him how they could, if their bodies are made of fire. He replied sharply that God can do anything.

**The mother:** May His might be exalted.

**Kamal:** If we meet them in paradise, won't their fire burn us?

**The mother:** There is no harm or fear there.

**Kamal:** Will we see God in the next world with our eyes?

**The mother:** This is true. There can be no doubt of it.

**Kamal:** Is my father afraid of God?

**The mother:** What a strange question! Son, your father is a pious man, a believer who fears his Lord.

**Kamal:** I can't imagine my father being afraid of anything. (*Trilogy* 72-73)

When Kamal asks the shaykh (a religious teacher) if Muslim Jinn will enter paradise, the shaykh answers, 'Yes'. However, when Kamal develops his questioning further and asks for an explanation for the way a body made of fire can enter paradise, the teacher is vexed and replies sharply that 'God can do anything.' Kamal refuses ready-made ideas about religion. He wants to understand it in a logical context. For him, religion and logic must go together. The shaykh distances religion from scientific

understanding. He is regurgitating what he has been taught, without any attempt to investigate it. The lesson he is giving is about the 'Jinn'. The Jinn are mentioned frequently in the Qur'an, where they are said to be invisible, and made of smoke and fire. Like humans, they can be good or evil, and they will be judged on the Day of Judgement. If their deeds are good, they will be sent to Paradise, but if they are not, they will deserve to be sent to Hell.

If the shaykh replies 'sharply', it is because he has no scientific answer to the question. He is vexed because he is not used to such reactions. His methods of teaching religion are based on intimidation, and lack any means of explanation or communication. Kamal does not need to hear from the shaykh that 'God can do anything'. This incident represents the passiveness of people who rely blindly on God to solve all mysteries of the undiscovered and the unknown.

In his pursuit of meaning, Kamal continues to ask provocative questions. Continuing his investigation of the Jinn, he asks his mother how humans and the Jinn can coexist, knowing that they are made of two different types of matter which cannot mix. Kamal's question is at the same time innocent and logical. It reveals his inclination to make the divine scientific. Islam states that humans are made of clay, and the Jinn are made of fire. To ask how these two elements can exist together without any consequences is a very logical question. The answer given by Amina is no better than that of the shaykh. 'There is no fear there' shows her total dependence on God. Neither the shaykh nor Amina makes an effort to understand and answer Kamal's questions. They break off the discussion abruptly because they consider that these are matters for God alone.

Kamal does not argue about the existence of Paradise and Hell. Instead, he looks for a scientific explanation of what will happen there. He asks, 'Will we see God in the next world with our eyes?' The word 'see' suggests the physical as opposed to the metaphysical. The meaning of the question would have been the same if it had stopped at the word 'world'. He adds 'with our eyes' intentionally, to emphasise his youthful will to understand. Kamal wants to make a physical entity out of the God his mother, his teacher and his culture trust. He has no problem believing what he sees because it is compatible with the logic through which he is trying to make sense of his world. In addition, Kamal's early introduction to God is in a

context of fear. God must be feared instead of loved. When he asks if his father is afraid of God, he implicitly compares his father to God. His father gives orders, punishes and transforms the household into a form of hell if he is not obeyed. He is a symbol of cruelty and ruthlessness. He cannot be afraid of God.

The conflict between the traditional and the modern, between the past and the present, is a recurrent theme in the *Trilogy* of Mahfouz. The question is examined through mother and son. Amina stands for the past and the traditional, while Kamal symbolises the present and the future. It is Kamal who brings new ideas home to confront his mother's beliefs, and this confrontation is not always easy for Amina, who feels destabilised when her beliefs are shaken.

She frequently disapproved of things the boys were told in school. She was upset either because of the explanations provided or because young minds were allowed to learn such things. Fortunately, she did not detect a difference worth mentioning between what the boy was told in school about religion and her own knowledge of it. Since the school lesson consisted of little more than recitation of Qur'an suras along with commentaries on them and the first principles of religion, she had found it allowed her scope to narrate the legends she knew and believed to be an inseparable part of the reality and essence of religion. She may even have seen in them an eternal element of religion. Most recounted miracles of the Prophet and prodigies of the Prophet's companions and the saints, along with various spells for defense against the jinn, reptiles, and diseases. (*Trilogy* 70)

In this passage, Mahfouz identifies the source of most of the problems related to religion in Egyptian society. He describes the difference between religion as taught and understood in schools, and religion as part of popular culture where religious texts merge with legends. Religion has always been related to miracles. In order to prove that they were real messengers of God, the Prophets had to transcend the laws of nature and produce the unexpected. However, the way these miracles have been reported has deteriorated with the passing of time, allowing fictitious miracles to be reported. For those who were present and witnessed these divine interventions, it

was easy to believe because they had the original version of the facts. But those who came after them had to rely on oral history mixed with fantasy.

People with few educational opportunities are very receptive to legends which stem from true stories, but which have been modified by oral tradition. For this reason, the majority of people in Arab countries confuse myths and legends with science and religion. However, it is difficult for individuals in the Arab world, even educated ones, to reject customs and traditions which prevail in the social environment and which frame its concepts and ideas. Resistance is strong because people are afraid of change. On the other hand, poverty exerts pressure which results in an intense fear of the future. This fear pushes individuals to seek refuge in legends and myths to make their lives bearable.

The continued co-existence of religion and legends in the Arab world, despite the spread of education, confirms that education alone is not enough to reduce the influence of these legends. Only changes in people's economic, social and cultural circumstances can change thinking and ideas. Amina has never been to school, and all her knowledge is based on what she has learnt either from her neighbours or from her relatives. She has never even been outside her house. She has therefore had no opportunity to hear different ideas from other people, or to choose ideas for herself. She can only rely on what her husband tells her or discussions with her female visitors, who are no more educated than she is.

Through the debates between Kamal, who represents science because he goes to school, and his mother who symbolises ignorance, Mahfouz is suggesting a conflict between legends, which he considers 'false religion', and science, which he sees as 'true religion':

On subjects outside religion, their disputes were not infrequent. For example, they differed once about whether the earth rotates on its own axis in space or stands on the head of an ox. When she found the boy insistent, she backed down and pretended to give in. All the same, she slipped off to Fahmy's room to ask him about the truth of the ox supporting the earth, and whether it still did. The young man thought he should be gentle with her and answer in language she would like. He told her that the earth is held up by the power and wisdom of God. His

mother left content with this answer, which pleased her, and the large ox was not erased from her imagination. (*Trilogy* 70-71)

To avoid shocking her, Fahmy prefers not to correct his mother. Any criticism of the idea that the earth stands on the head of an ox will upset Amina. To maintain good relations with people in Egyptian society, it is important to tell them what they want to hear and not how things should be. Any criticism of someone's cultural heritage will lead to rejection. Fahmy's attitude embodies what Gordon Haim calls a 'flight from confrontation'.<sup>20</sup>

The technique of confronting people and their ideas to open a debate and develop criticism is absent in Durrell's *Quartet*, where characters prefer writing to talking and discussing. Mahfouz uses dialogue to introduce controversial issues about religion. Moreover, the presence of different generations enriches discussions and makes confrontation possible. In this sense, the theme of religion in the *Trilogy* has been developed in a more traditional way than in the *Quartet*, where characters do not confront each other and where ideas are very personal. In the *Quartet*, no character reminds another of his religious duties, no one talks about Heaven and Hell and no one fears God. Whereas Mahfouz is concerned with questioning the interpretation of some religious texts, Durrell avoids any religious content.

The other significant dialogue which embodies nearly all the problems surrounding religion takes place in *Palace Walk* between al-Sayyid Ahmad and Shaykh Mutawalli:

**The shaykh:** What do you have to say as a devout Muslim concerning your lust for women?

**The proprietor:** How can you fault me for that? Didn't the Messenger of God (the blessing and peace of God upon him) speak of his love for perfume and women?

**The shaykh:** Licit acts are not the same as forbidden ones, you son of Abd al-Jawad. Marriage is not the same as chasing after hussies.

**The proprietor:** I have never allowed myself to offend against honor or dignity at all. Praise God for that.

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<sup>20</sup> Haim Gordon, *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in his Writings*, Contributions to the Study of World Literature, no 38, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990, p. 43.

**The shaykh:** A weak excuse fit only for a weak person. Immorality is damnable even if it is with a debauched woman. Your father, may God have mercy on him, was crazy about women. He married twenty times. Why don't you follow his path and shun the sinner's?

**The proprietor:** Are you one of God's saints or a nuptial official? My father was almost sterile; so he married many times. Even though I was his only child, his property was split up between me and his last four wives, not to mention what he lost during his lifetime in divorce settlements. Now I'm the father of three males and two females. It wouldn't be proper for me to slip into more marriages and have to divide the wealth that God has bestowed on us. Don't forget, Shaykh Mutawalli, that the professional women entertainers of today are the slave girls of yesterday, whose purchase and sale God made legal. More than anything else, God is forgiving and merciful.

**The shaykh:** How adept you are, you sons of Adam, in embellishing evil. By God, you son of Abd al-Jawad, were it not for my love of you, I would not suffer you to speak to me, you fornicator.

**The proprietor:** God grant ...

**The shaykh:** If it weren't for your jokes, you'd be the most perfect of men."...“Perfection is God's alone.

**The shaykh:** Let's put this aside."...“And wine? What do you say about that?"...“Isn't it forbidden? No one would succumb to it who strives to obey and love God.

**The proprietor:** I certainly strive to obey and love Him.

**The shaykh:** By word or deed?

**The proprietor:** By word and deed both. By prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. By remembering God whether I am standing or sitting. Why is it wrong for me, after that, to refresh myself with a little fun, harming no one, or for me to overlook one rule? Is nothing forbidden save these two things?

**The shaykh:** “What a perverse defense!”

**The proprietor:** “God is clement and merciful, Shaykh Abd al-Samad. I don't picture Him, may He be high and exalted, being in any way spiteful or sullen. Even His vengeance is mercy in disguise. I offer Him love,

obedience, reverence, and a good deed is worth ten ...” (*Trilogy* 45-46-47-48-49)

Shaykh Mutwalli, the old man who dedicates his life to religious spirituality, is another example of the crisis of religion. Morality and immorality reveal themselves through him. The Egypt of Mutwalli is a multicultural Egypt. Neither the presence of the British nor the modern technology brought by war has succeeded in influencing the shaykh. His insistence on seeing life from a single angle condemns him to live alone in a world different from that of the real Egypt. He uses religion in all aspects of life because he has elected himself the religious conscience of Egypt. Moreover, he knows everyone’s stories in exact detail. He talks knowledgably about the life of al-Sayyid’s father, as if he were one of his relatives. Shaykh Mutwalli spends all his time observing others. Al-Sayyid’s other life outside his house belongs to him alone. He is extremely prudent about his sexual adventures and his nightly entertainments because he cares greatly about his reputation. The old man knows all about him, however, and instead of participating in the social and political life of his country, he prefers spying on people and using religion to extort goods and money from them.

During his conversation with al-Sayyid, Mutawalli is very expressive. Mahfouz represents this with phrases such as ‘gestured at him’, ‘asked him threateningly’, ‘assault’, ‘frowned’, ‘looked even grimmer’, ‘struck his hands on his knees’, ‘moaned’, ‘snorted in annoyance and yelled’. All these suggest a strategy which puts pressure on al-Sayyid. The shaykh becomes emotional when he attempts to use his religion as a form of power. He is almost violent in demonstrating his great love for Islam and ensuring his credibility, because religion helps him to earn his living. People are generous with those who claim to be ‘God’s saints’. The intense use of the word ‘God’ is meant to show his commitment to religion, and his rejection of worldly matters. Al-Sayyid is a man who is very much respected because of his business dealings and his wealth. People address him with great respect. Mutawalli, the poor old man, adopts the opposite strategy and tries to distinguish himself from others by building an image of a devout person. He tries to portray himself as a person who has been given strength by God, and whose commitment has brought him so near to God that he can act as a mediator between God and everyone else.

The proprietor's definition of morality had been altered to suit his entertainments. He is right in saying he avoids any contact with married women, but morality does not only apply to affairs with married women. It also includes any form of infidelity to his wife. To be unfaithful to his wife is to be immoral under Islam. A husband's fidelity is a religious precept. When the shaykh asks him whether he obeys God by 'word or by deed', al-Sayyid only mentions the religious duties he performs and not the rules he overlooks. Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are three of the five pillars. It is true that he is complying with these three, but this does not free him from the other precepts of Islam. Adultery and wine are not permitted in Islam but have become pillars of al-Sayyid's life. It is worth noting that mentioning God as much as possible is seen by the patriarch as an act of worship that brings him closer to God. In the original conversation between Mutwalli and al-Sayyid Ahmad, the word 'God' is repeated 27 times.

The passive attitude resulting from this heavy and irrational dependence on God and religion is seen as damaging:

Tell Fahmy that Shaykh Mutawalli counsels him to stay away from danger. Tell him, 'Surrender to God your Lord. He alone is capable of devastating the English as He has devastated those who disobeyed Him in the past.' (*Trilogy* 503)

By mentioning 'those who disobeyed Him', Shaykh Mutwalli is referring to stories where Allah punishes sinners directly. These stories are cited in the Qur'an and serve, even today, as lessons for future generations. The main idea in these stories is that God first sent Prophets to deliver His messages, but when the people refused to obey his orders and hurt the prophets, Allah intervened directly and imposed punishment. Examples of these stories can be found in the biographies of Noah, Hud, Saleh and Lut.

The first story involves The Deluge and Noah's Ark. When the people of Noah refused to stop worshipping idols, Allah sent a flood which destroyed all those who disobeyed his orders. Mutwalli's words make reference to the following Qur'anic verse:

And it was said: “O earth! Swallow up your water, and O sky! Withhold (your rain).” And the water was made to subside and the Decree (of Allah) was fulfilled (i.e. the destruction of the people of Nuh (Noah)). And it (the ship) rested on (Mount) Judi, and it was said: “Away with the people who are *Zalimun* (polytheists and wrong-doing)!” (Qur’an 11:44)

Another story of this kind involves the Prophet Hud and the people of Ad, who were punished by Allah because they insisted on worshipping idols and denying the existence of Allah. They were destroyed in a large storm from which only Hud and his disciples were saved. A third story involves Saleh and the Arab tribe Thamud. Because they slaughtered a sacred camel, Allah asked Saleh to leave his people, and the Thamud were subjected to a thunderous sound that destroyed them. The fourth story involves the people of Lut, who indulged in sins such as homosexuality. When Lut preached the religion of God, and exhorted them to abandon their sins, they ridiculed him and threatened to expel him from the tribe. One day, three angels disguised as handsome young boys came to the prophet Lut with a message from God. He was ordered to take his followers and leave, because a punishment was about to descend on his people. The people asked Lut to deliver the three visitors to them. When all hope of discouraging their behaviour was lost, a violent earthquake threw rocks into the air and destroyed all the sinners.

Most Muslims are aware of these stories, which are evoked whenever weak nations are subjected to the tyranny of strong ones. Shaykh Mutawalli is awaiting an intervention of this kind from God. For him, only a miracle is capable of driving out the British. Mutawalli represents men without drive who seek answers to their country’s freedom in religion. Instead of seeking weapons to face the occupiers, he expects supernatural factors to come to his aid. Mahfouz implies that religion can be an obstacle to progress if it is applied blindly to all aspects of life. Al-Sayyid Ahmad is as cowardly as the old shaykh. His political convictions are dictated by ‘his superficial fundamentalist understanding of Islam’.<sup>21</sup> Al-Sayyid’s political behaviour is the result of blind reliance on God. He hides behind religion to escape from his national responsibility. He considers it God’s responsibility and not the responsibility of his sons to free Egypt. He even forces Fahmy, the most nationalistic of his children, to swear on the Qur’an to stop his political activities immediately.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

The *Trilogy* makes clear reference to events in the Qur'an. In other words, the text of the *Trilogy* is characterised by its reciprocal relationship with Qur'anic texts. In contrast, though the *Quartet* focuses on the Coptic religion, there is no direct relationship between the text of the novel and Christian texts. In addition, the *Trilogy* clearly illustrates the extent to which Mahfouz knows his religion and is involved in writing about it. In the tetralogy, on the other hand, Durrell slightly distances himself from religion in his writing, not because he is ignorant about it but because he is interested in it simply as part of the Alexandrian landscape.

### 5.2.2 Science as a religion of the future

The way characters use religion in *The Cairo Trilogy* reveals two major issues. The first involves the way religion appears to conflict with science. The second concerns the relationship between religion and fanaticism or extremism. The educated, as well as the ignorant, misuse religion and God. In giving birth to Na'ima, Aisha experiences complications to the point where the intervention of a doctor is strongly recommended. The child has serious health problems and Khalil, the father, asks the doctor for more information. The doctor mentions the word 'God' twice in his answer:

Lives are in God's hands. I found that her heart's weak. It's likely she'll die before morning. If she makes it safely through the night, she'll be out of immediate danger, but I think she won't live long. In my judgement, she won't live past her twenties. But who knows? Only God controls our lives. (*Trilogy* 510)

This once again highlights the importance of 'God' in the lives of Egyptians. Even educated people like the doctor rely on God to reassure themselves and others. God intervenes here to bring hope. Na'ima's problem is beyond human intervention. The doctor, Khalil and the whole family need an answer like this because fleeing from confrontation is easier than the feeling of powerlessness. This situation would never be found in *The Alexandria Quartet*. Even when Clea's right hand is pierced and nailed to the wreck by the steel arrow shot by Balthazar, Clea never suggests that God will intervene to help her. She might have drowned if Darley had not intervened, but instead of waiting for a miracle from God, Darley takes the logical decision to hack her hand free.

In addition, the fact that a doctor, a ‘stranger’, visits Aisha is a transgression in the eyes of al-Sayyid Ahmad, who tells his son-in-law:

It’s true that fear makes men do foolish things, but shouldn’t you have thought a little before rushing off to bring an outsider to take such a searching look at your wife? (*Trilogy* 511)

Khalil and al-Sayyid Ahmad represent two opposing currents. Khalil believes that only a doctor, a symbol of science, is capable of healing his wife and saving his future child, whereas his father-in-law considers tradition to be stronger than science. ‘An outsider’, even if he can save lives, is not allowed to have contact with a woman. Al-Sayyid Ahmad qualifies Khalil’s act as ‘foolish’. His daughter is suffering and may die, but tradition must always be respected.

The conflict between science and religion has always been, and still is a controversial issue. During the nineteenth century, science and religion underwent important changes. At first they were seen to be in agreement, the one used to support the other. Scientists generally tried to interpret scientific discoveries in terms of religion, and to understand religion in terms of scientific discoveries without prejudice to faith. However, a gap soon began to develop, and discrepancies had appeared by the 1860s. Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) can be considered the turning point in the situation. It introduced the idea of evolution, a concept which challenged religious statements about creation, and caused many to renounce their faith. This point is taken up in the *Trilogy* through Kamal’s article in *al-Sabah* magazine. When his father learns about Kamal’s defence of Darwin’s theory he becomes furious and asks Kamal:

**The father:** Is this what they claim is science nowadays? God’s curse on science and scientists.

**The father:** What do you say about this theory? I noticed some strange phrases that seem to imply that man is descended from animals, or something along those lines. Is this true?

**Kamal:** That’s what the theory states.

**The father:** And Adam, the father of mankind, whom God created from clay, blowing His spirit into him – what does this scientific theory say about him?

**Kamal:** Darwin, the author of this theory, did not mention our master Adam ...

**The father:** Then Darwin's certainly an atheist trapped by Satan's snares. If man's origin was an ape or any other animal, Adam was not the father of mankind. This is nothing but blatant atheism. It's an outrageous attack on the exalted status of God. I know Coptic Christians and Jews in the Goldsmiths Bazaar. They believe in Adam. All religions believe in Adam. What sect does this Darwin belong to? He's an atheist, his words are blasphemous, and reporting this theory's a reckless act. Tell me: Is he one of your professors at the college?

**Kamal:** Darwin was an English scientist who lived a long time ago. (*Trilogy* 890-891)

Kamal's fear of his father prevents him from confronting him and expressing his ideas openly. Revolutionary ideas require courage, which Egyptians often lack. Al-Sayyid represents traditionalism and ignorance. His reaction reflects the reaction of Egyptians to new ideas. Instead of engaging in an intellectual discussion, he becomes ruthlessly defensive, intimidating his son and criticising him sharply. In this dialogue, it is only the father who speaks. Kamal can only muse and soliloquise. Even on scientific issues about which he understands nothing, the patriarch shouts, corrects and imposes his views.

The conflict between religion and science experienced by Kamal drives him to reject religion and adopt Western philosophy. Kamal no longer prays, and informs his friends that he also intends to stop fasting:

How beautiful it would be if man could devote his life to truth, goodness, and beauty. (*Trilogy* 900)

The three qualities for which Isma'il 'whistled three times' constitute Kamal's new philosophy. Kamal seeks truth. He wants to understand the origin of mankind. Only truth is capable of giving his life meaning. Philosophy is going to be Kamal's new religion. When he says, 'I no longer pray. I won't fast' (*Trilogy* 901), Kamal is rejecting two of the most important pillars of Islam. The five pillars of Islam are the five duties incumbent on anyone who wishes to be a Muslim. Rejecting any one of the five is to renounce religion, and is therefore considered to be apostasy.

Kamal knows that his renunciation of religion could offend a whole society, so he prefers silence and hypocrisy to confrontation. In a society like Egypt where culture, traditions and religion are one, for a person to admit they have rejected religion is tantamount to committing suicide: 'Addressing readers is one thing; telling parents you're not fasting is something else.' (*Trilogy* 901) However, Kamal never abandons his pursuit of truth. He becomes more and more convinced that religion is not the solution to the problems of Egyptian society, and this belief persists until the end of the story. In one of his interior monologues he claims:

I won't hide my impatience with legends. In the immense raging wave, I discovered a three-sided rock, which from now on I'll call the rock of knowledge, philosophy, and idealism. Don't say that philosophy, like religion, has a mythical character. It rests on solid, scientific foundations and advances systematically toward its objectives. [...] There's nothing to prevent a sensible person from admiring Sa'd Zaghlul as much as Copernicus, the chemist Ostwald, or the physicist Mach; for an effort to link Egypt with the advance of human progress is noble and humane. Patriotism's a virtue, if it's not tainted by xenophobia. Of course, hating England is a form of self-defense. That kind of nationalism is nothing more than a local manifestation of a concern for human rights. (*Trilogy* 945-946)

Kamal sees a difference between the way philosophy and religion approach issues. He relates religion to myth, and philosophy to 'scientific foundations'. Science is a reliable bridge that unites, whereas religion separates. Mahfouz even normalises nationalism by suggesting that the nationalist movement of Egypt should not allow religion to determine its conduct. We can admire both Sa'd Zaghlul, the most famous Egyptian nationalist, and Copernicus, the Western scientist. People should be judged on the grounds of science and not according to their religion.

It is not only Islam, but religion in general that interests Mahfouz in his *Trilogy*. For example, Riyad, the writer, rejects Coptic Christianity:

I'm both a freethinker and a Copt. Indeed I'm both a Copt and a man without any religion. I frequently feel that Christianity is my community, not my faith. (*Trilogy* 1129)

Riyad chooses to be a 'freethinker', an atheist. He makes a clear distinction between belonging to a religion and having faith in this religion. For Riyad, the self is nullified, or at least negated by religion. It is religion that dictates how the individual must behave towards himself and towards others. In addition, religion is related to stagnation; it cannot cope with the evolution of science, economy and society. Religion is also against new ideas such as socialism, communism and Marxism. It is only a set of orders which must be applied throughout the life of believers. This is why Riyad and Kamal reject their religions. They both want to be free thinkers instead of letting religion think for them.

The second problem with religion is that religious ignorance and isolation can lead to fanaticism. Blind and irrational use of religion inevitably leads to extremism. In *Sugar Street*, the conversation between Shaykh Ali al-Manufi, Head of al-Husayn Primary School, and Abd al-Muni'm provides an illustration of extremist thought.

**Ali al-Manufi:** [...] Our founder, Hasan al-Banna, encountered many skeptics who today are some of his sincerest disciples. When God wants to guide a people, Satan has no power over them. We are God's soldiers, spreading His light and combating His enemies [...].

**Participant 1:** But the kingdom of Satan is large.

**Ali al-Manufi:** [...] What other soldiers on earth enjoy your power? What weapon is more effective than yours? The English, French, Germans, and Italians rely primarily on their material culture, but you rely on true belief. [...]

**Participant 2:** We believe, but we're a weak nation.

**The shaykh:** If you feel weak, then your faith has decreased [...]. How did the Prophet conquer the whole Arabian peninsula? How did the Arabs conquer the entire world?

**Abd al-Muni'm:** Faith and belief.

**Participant 3:** But how can the English be so powerful? They're not Believers.

**The shaykh:** Anyone strong believes in something. They believe in their nation and in 'progress.' But faith in God is superior to any other kind of belief [...]. We need to revive Islam and to make it as good as new [...]. God blessed us with His Book, but we have ignored it. This has brought

down humiliation upon us. So let us return to the Book. This is our motto: a return to the Qur'an [...]. (*Trilogy* 1063-1064)

The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 by Shaykh Hassan al-Banna, the social and political reformer, to apply Sharia (Islamic law), to preach a return to the Qur'an and to strengthen opposition to British imperial rule. The movement quickly became the largest Islamic political group and the most controversial organisation. In this passage, Shaykh Ali al-Manufi is speaking about Ahmad, the brother of Abd al-Muni'm, who, like his uncle Kamal, does not see the solution to Egypt's problems in religion. He is one of the sceptics the shaykh is speaking about. The Muslim Brotherhood movement sees religion as the only force capable of driving the English away. Religion is a strong weapon when faith and belief in God's power are strong. It is a source of energy available to every Muslim who sticks to the rules of Islam and to 'faith and belief'.

Al-Manufi makes a distinction between believers in God and materialists, those who believe in the 'physical world'. In the period between the two wars, contact with the English, French and Germans favoured the importation of many Western ideas and philosophical trends. The movement ultimately established and redefined the relationship with religion as the main constituent of Egyptian life. The shaykh's discourse represents the gap between religious thinking and a scientific approach. Whereas the English are armed with technology and modern weapons, al-Manufi speaks of a return to religion. In this sense, al-Manufi is like Mutwalli. Despite their different intellectual backgrounds, they react in the same way by relying on religion to free their nation from the British. In other words, both the intellectual and the ignorant abuse religion when they respond in this way.

In another conversation, in which Mahfouz challenges the ideas of communists as well as fanatics, the issue of religion and religious movements is raised again, but this time in the context of the very controversial subject of stoning. Ahmad is present, along with his brother Abd al-Muni'm and other students:

**Abd al-Muni'm:** We're not merely an organization dedicated to teaching and preaching. We attempt to understand Islam as God intended it to be: a religion, a way of life, a code of law, and a political system.

**Student:** Is talk like this appropriate for the twentieth century?

**Abd al-Muni'm:** And for the hundred and twentieth century too.

**Student:** Confronted by democracy, Fascism, and Communism, we're dumbfounded. Then there's this new calamity.

**Ahmad:** But it's a godly calamity!

**Ridwan Yasin:** Calamity' isn't the right word.

**Student:** Do you stone people who disagree with you?

**Abd al-Muni'm:** Young people are given to deviant views and dissolute behavior. They deserve far worse than stoning, but we don't stone anyone. Instead we provide guidance and direction through moral suasion and example. There is a fine illustration in my own household, for I have a brother who is ripe for stoning. Here he is laughing about it in front of you and showing disrespect to his Creator, may He be glorified. (*Trilogy* 1113)

Mahfouz relates the principles of the Muslim Brotherhood to fanaticism and extremism. The confrontation between Abd al-Muni'm Shawkat and his brother Ahmad is a conflict between religious social structure and the new social structures suggested by socialism and communism. When a student asks Abd al-Muni'm if the Muslim Brothers 'stone' people who disagree with them, the very controversial issue of stoning is introduced. Again, Mahfouz provokes debate and discussion by mentioning these matters. 'Stoning' is a word that links Islam to violence and intolerance. This punishment was and still is the subject of much debate, but Mahfouz takes no clear position on the issue. He neither acknowledges nor refutes it. Instead, he alternates between attacking it and defending it. The construction 'they deserve ... but' shows he is both reluctant and wary, because the issue is very sensitive and is unlikely to be the subject of compromise. Abd al-Muni'm's response to stoning, however, takes other points of view into consideration in an apparent attempt to lighten the image of the Muslim Brothers and the Islam they defend. However, his words betray him when he speaks judgementally of the 'deviant views and dissolute behavior' of others. Here, Mahfouz is warning that the reactions of young people who join radical Islamic movements are usually based on emotions and impulsiveness rather than reason and rationality.

The problem with Abd al-Muni'm and with extremists in general is that they are incapable of explaining Islamic rules. It is either because they accept them blindly and ask others to do the same, or because they simply do not understand them. Abd al-Muni'm is a believer who wants to influence his brother, but he has a serious problem with communication. The questions his brother and the other students ask show their lack of knowledge about Islam. Moreover, he has no strong arguments on which to build convincing answers. When Ahmad asks him to give proof that religions are true, Abd al-Muni'm raises his voice, a symbol of failure and lack of control. Abd al-Muni'm knows at this point why his brother has rejected religion and chosen 'science, humanity and the future.' (*Trilogy* 1116) The triad is modelled on the one his uncle chooses when he reveals that he has abandoned religion for truth, goodness and beauty.

In summary, in the *Trilogy*, religion is seen to have a strong impact on characters and on events. Because it is the primary reference for each action, it slows down character development, and progress towards action becomes an illusion. To quote Gordon Haim:

[...] most of the characters portrayed in the *Trilogy* fervently believe in God and evoke His name in their everyday discussions. For these Egyptians it seems that there is no area of human concern in which one can mention God's name in vain. With repeated reading, however, we begin to understand that the mentioning of God often reflects a person's lack of courage more than a fervent belief in Allah's omnipresence, or omnipotency, or omniscience, or merciful grace. When Ahmad Abed El Juad and members of his family repeatedly refer to God while discussing their mundane existence, it is almost always a way to get themselves off the hook, so to speak, of evading personal responsibility.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike the *Quartet*, where characters show no remorse for their sinful lives, characters in the *Trilogy*, especially the first generation, immediately relate misfortunes to religion. Their relationship to religion is based on fear, where religion is simply reduced to a set of prohibitions and where remorse usually intervenes to change the course of their lives. As a result, characters move in a four-stage cycle: sin, remorse,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

fear and repentance. They begin with a chaste life, but immediately fall into sin, which leads to the other stages. In later life, pilgrimage signals the end of sinful conduct and the start of a moral and spiritual path.

On the other hand, although it depicts a strong conservative society and the rise of religious fundamentalism, the *Trilogy* presents us with an approach to religion which is not usual in Arabic literature of the day. Religion is used to criticise extremists and their way of understanding Islam. The influence of Western philosophy manifests itself in the principles of the third generation and their attitude towards religion. In the tradition of Western writers, Mahfouz calls for science to reshape the Egyptian personality. A heavy dependence on religion is shown to be the major obstacle to development. In other words, *The Cairo Trilogy* presents us with a new definition of religion, one where it co-exists with science and philosophy in order to build a modern society. Religion should be a connector and not a divider. Whether a person is Muslim, Jew, Christian or pagan, their religion remains something personal. Humanity needs a scientific approach to life where all cultural differences are forgotten.

To conclude, Mahfouz was known for his defence of freedom of speech and democratic values. On many occasions, he defended ideas which were considered to betray the Muslim-Arab world, as in the case of Salman Rushdie:

In the recent Salman Rushdie affair he explicitly denounced Khomeini's death warrant which called upon Muslims to murder the author of *The Satanic Verses*. (Over the years some of Mahfouz's books were also banned in Egypt because of demands made by the sheikhs and imams of Al Azhar, which is Islam's most important religious university, and is based in Cairo. Even the story "Zaabalawi" was censured and has not been published in Egypt. Mahfouz mentioned that he thinks the main reason it has been banned is in that the story the holy Sheikh Zaabalawi sits in a bar.)<sup>23</sup>

Mahfouz's courage in approaching the subject of religion in his works cost him a great deal. Accused of apostasy and atheism, he was the victim of a murder attempt

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

in October 1994. Mahfouz was stabbed in the neck, and as a consequence his right hand was paralysed. He had to dictate his later works.

### 5.3 Conclusions

Everything in *The Alexandria Quartet* is Western, even religion. To illustrate, the *Quartet* is about Alexandria and Egypt between the two world wars. Since Egypt converted to Islam after the Arab conquest in the seventh century, the tetralogy should reflect life in a Muslim country, but this is not the case. In other words, Islam would dominate the story if Durrell were interested in Alexandria as a city belonging to the East, but the way religion is treated shows that he was more interested in it as a city belonging to the West. As a consequence, even though the story is set in the 1930s, the Alexandria of the *Quartet* transcends time to echo the Alexandria of ancient times.

The *Alexandria Quartet* is, in fact, about the Copts and the Coptic religion. Islam, the official religion of the city, is not the focus, not because Durrell denies this aspect of the city but because he wanted a story about Alexandria as the ‘Capital of Memory’. Copts have always considered themselves direct descendants of the pharaohs, and remnants of ancient Egyptian civilisation. Their religion is also related to ancient Egypt and can therefore be seen as an element of the rich cultural heritage of the city. To address the issue of religion from this perspective is to address the city as part of Western culture.

From another angle, the way the events of the Coptic intrigue are constructed reflects a Western approach to literature. First of all, the Coptic plot favours layered narration. In addition, crime, mystery and espionage are depicted in an atmosphere of suspense and excitement which was not usual in the Orient at the time the *Quartet* was written. For instance, Pursewarden’s message left on the mirror for Nessim in the hotel would be unusual in Egyptian intrigue set in Alexandria. Also, the suicide of Pursewarden remains Western in its conception. Moreover, Nessim is a native Egyptian, and even though he is a Christian who has been educated in Europe, his relationship with Justine is more credible in Western culture than in an Eastern one. In other words, action in the *Quartet* is westernised.

As for the metaphysical world of Alexandria, Darley says at the beginning of *Balthazar*:

The city, half-imagined (yet wholly real), begins and ends in us, roots lodged in our memory. (*Quartet* 209)

The roots, as Michael Haag has stated, refer to Western civilisation.<sup>24</sup> It is this aspect which interested Durrell when he was writing about Alexandria. Most of the ideas in the *Quartet* have to be understood by bearing in mind that Alexandria is not a real Egyptian city, but one drawn from a point of view of Western civilisation. Religion and mysticism must also be understood within the European context of the city, which 'was once the centre of the Hellenistic world, the resort of artists, poets and scholars from all over the Mediterranean, attracted by the royal patronage of the Ptolemies and a lively cosmopolitan milieu of Greeks and Hellenised Jews and Egyptians.'<sup>25</sup>

Where Mahfouz is concerned, a major concern in his work was to find a bridge between tradition and modernity. Studying philosophy gave him an obsessive fascination with ideological opposites: the physical and the metaphysical, the religious and the pagan, the materialist and the spiritual. However, Mahfouz's religious background did not prevent him from criticising religious discourse. In the *Trilogy*, he makes a clear distinction between religion and religious discourse. The latter can be right or wrong, as it is a human attempt to understand religion. Therefore, no one can proclaim himself to be the voice of Islam. Moreover, a prevailing idea in the *Trilogy* is that religion should embody values of beauty, tolerance and justice. Religion is greater and more extensive than a set of commands and prohibitions. Its real role is to serve the human condition by building bridges between people regardless of their origins. In the *Trilogy*, Mahfouz is not concerned with religion itself but with its impact on people, and with the way people respond to religious instructions.

Unlike the *Quartet*, where religion and mysticism are used to commemorate the rich past of Western civilisation and to celebrate the origins of Western culture, the *Trilogy* deals with religion from an oriental perspective. In the *Trilogy*, it is the misuse of religion the author is condemning. Egypt and the Orient in general suffer

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<sup>24</sup> Michael von Haag, *Alexandria: City of Memory*, New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2004, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

from the way in which religion is understood. The boundaries between truth and legend are non-existent, while science and philosophy are understood as transgressions. The daily presence of religion in Egyptian homes and in the streets serves to create the image of an Orient confined within a shell of religious misinterpretation, an Orient incapable of competing with the Occident in terms of science and one where people, instead of taking matters into their own hands to change their social condition, rely irrationally on God to do it for them.

In terms of comparison, in *The Alexandria Quartet* religion operates very much behind the scenes. It is the catalyst for action in that it encourages plots and conspiracy. Religion is behind the shipment of arms and behind the Coptic plot against the British. It is also behind the many assassinations. God may be mentioned on one or two occasions, but religion generally works discreetly behind the scenes to topple the government. In contrast, it dominates the *Trilogy*, but is not a source of action against the British occupation. Those who claim to be religious wait passively for God to intervene against the British. Whereas religion motivates action in the tetralogy, in the *Trilogy* it freezes it.

In conclusion, the two novels in this study focus on Egypt during the British occupation. Although the context is the same, religion is approached quite differently in each work, and this is significant and revealing. Without comparing the texts of Durrell and Mahfouz, religion in *The Alexandria Quartet* would appear to have little importance. However, *The Cairo Trilogy* helps us understand that Durrell wanted his tetralogy to be an examination of the religious and metaphysical heritage of Western culture. Nowhere is it stated in the *Quartet* that religion has been used as a 'telescope' for the examination of Western culture, as Durrell put it. It is the *Trilogy* of Mahfouz which helps us understand this idea. In other words, reading *The Alexandria Quartet* alone will suggest that religion is a theme of minor importance, but comparing it with *The Cairo Trilogy* will link religion to the central theme of the book, the city and its spirit.

## Chapter 6

### Writing: between East and West

#### A modern palimpsest versus a modern family saga

In their book about literary terms and criticism, John Peck and Martin Coyle make the following comment about realism:

Readers who are just beginning to study novels often feel most comfortable with realistic novels because they appear relatively straightforward. The realistic novel can seem like a clear window on the world – and as readers we can become fully involved with the characters and events – while non-realistic novels seem to look at the world through a distorting mirror, with the result that we are forced to consider the relationship between the work of art itself and life.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the quote illustrates characteristics which were relevant to a large proportion of Mahfouz's target audience during the British occupation. It should be noted here that Arab readers were very advanced in terms of poetry, and were capable of understanding works with very sophisticated techniques, works where the Arabic language attained its greatest perfection. Nevertheless, in colonial Egypt, readers also needed works which addressed the issues of the day in a straightforward manner. In other words, during the period between the two wars, Egyptian readers were in need of a writer who represented them, a writer who recreated the psychological and social tensions most Egyptians felt, and one who examined the very real difficulties people were experiencing. As colonial subjects, people felt humiliated, and needed literary works which were sensitive to their feelings and sufferings.

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<sup>1</sup> John Peck and Martin Coyle, *Literary Terms and Criticism*, 3. ed., Palgrave Study Guides, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002, p. 127.

In terms of an audience with these characteristics, *The Alexandria Quartet* can in no way be regarded as a work written for Egyptians. It is very clearly a modernist work addressed mainly to a Western audience as opposed to an Eastern one. In this sense, Durrell remained faithful to Western traditions of writing, and did not consider oriental responses to his work. In other words, a novel with so many distortions and such sophisticated narrative techniques was far from appropriate to the Eastern context, where readers were not yet accustomed to this kind of writing.

On the other hand, Mahfouz's work was more adapted to the Egyptian context because he remained decidedly Eastern in his approach. Mahfouz knew well the Egyptian personality and the subtleties of the Egyptian mind. He also knew how to reach his audience because he was aware of their suffering. If his *Trilogy* involves social realism, it is not because Mahfouz was a traditionalist but because this was appropriate for the issues he wished to raise. Mahfouz explains:

As for the history of my style, it is related to my personal experience. I choose my style, or my style chooses me, according to the particular situation. . . . I remember that I wrote *Midaq Alley* [Zuqaq al-Midaqq, 1947] the way I wrote it, though I had read Joyce, Kafka and Proust. Criticism was directed at me by Professors Badr al-Dib and Yusuf al-Sharidni, that I was writing in the style of the Nineteenth Century, but I found the courage to write *The Trilogy* in the same style because I felt that it was the style appropriate to the experience I was presenting.<sup>2</sup>

It is worth noting here that, even though he adapted his style to his audience, Mahfouz did not remain a pure traditionalist. He maintained a successful balance between the traditional and the modern, to permit, on the one hand, Egyptians and Arabs to identify with his story, and to take, on the other hand, the Arabic novel a step forward.

Mahfouz was successful as a writer in the West as well as throughout the Arab-speaking world. He has been widely read in translation and his works continue to be praised by Western readers. Moreover, most of his novels have been successfully adapted for Egyptian cinema and television. This is not the case with

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 5.

Durrell, however. In spite of the fact that the *Quartet* has been translated into Arabic, the novel has not attracted a wide audience in the East. This is not because of the quality of the work but because it was not adapted for an Arabic readership. His novel *Justine* was also adapted for the cinema, this time in Europe, but without much success. Put simply, *The Alexandria Quartet* could meet with success only in the West where the novel as a genre had already gone through different stages of evolution. The storyline of the *Trilogy*, on the other hand, was appreciated both by Western readers who were already acquainted with realism, and Eastern readers for whom the novel was still a nascent form.

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle note the following about narratives:

But narratives also invariably involve what the narratologist Gérard Genette has called anachronisms – flashbacks, jumps forward (or prolepses), the slowing down and speeding up of events and other distortions of the linear time-sequence (Genette, 1986).<sup>3</sup>

So to what extent does this definition apply to Durrell's novels? How are the volumes tied together in the *Quartet*? Is there any interdependency between the four volumes? What is the function of sub-texts within the main text? Can we trust the reliability of the narrators? For what reasons are whole passages repeated in the novel? Do distortions affect suspense in the story? How is the reader invited to read the *Alexandria Quartet*? These questions will be answered in the first part of this chapter, where I shall examine Durrell's *Quartet* as a modern palimpsest.

On the other hand, in his *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster defines the 'story' with the following words:

It is a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence – dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on. Qua story, it can only have one merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next. And conversely it can only have one fault: that of making the audience not want to know what happens next.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 3rd ed., Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2004, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Morgan Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Reprinted, Penguin Classics, London: Penguin, 2005, p. 42.

Why did Mahfouz opt for a saga form for his *Trilogy*? Does the story have characteristics that make us want to know what happens next? What about endings? Is marriage a final step that brings closure and satisfaction? What impact do age and death have on characters? What is Mahfouz's philosophy of time? Finally, what are the modernist features of the *Trilogy*? Did Mahfouz imitate the Western novel blindly or did he adapt it to the context? These questions will be addressed in the second part of this chapter, where I shall investigate *The Cairo Trilogy* as a modern family saga.

## 6.1 *The Alexandria Quartet: a modern palimpsest*

In his article "Late Victorian to Modernist", Bernard Bergonzi describes modernism as follows:

As an attempt to describe some salient characteristics of modernism in fiction and poetry, one can suggest the following: nothing can be taken for granted in literary form; there must be no unthinking reproduction of what is already familiar; conscious aesthetic attention is essential; our perceptions of reality are necessarily uncertain and provisional; the unparalleled complexity of modern urban life must be reflected in literary form; supposedly primitive myths can help us to grasp and order the chaos of twentieth-century experience; the intense but isolated 'image' or 'moment' or 'epiphany' provides our truest sense of the nature of things; the unconscious life of the mind is as important as the conscious; 'personality' is precarious and fragmentary rather than substantial and unchanging; contradictions in experience can be accommodated in literature by the techniques of ironic juxtaposition or superimposition; literary works can never be given a final or absolute interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

Some, but not all of these characteristics are to be found in Durrell's *Quartet*. For instance, although time is crucial to a narrative, in the *Alexandria Quartet* there is a remarkable absence of temporal order in what happens. Durrell's text dislodges our sense of temporal sequence. The order of the telling differs from the real order of

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<sup>5</sup> Pat Rogers, ed., *An Outline of English Literature*, 2nd ed. Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 371-372.

the told, and the story is characterised by distortions and digressions, making connections between events quite difficult. In the *Quartet*, there is no omniscient narrator, only characters who tell the same story from their own point of view. Within this context, I shall examine the following three points: 1) sub-narratives within the main narrative, 2) fragmentation and unreliable narrators, 3) repetition and its functions.

### 6.1.1 Sub-narratives within the main narrative

Telling a story using different narrators was a complex task which forced Durrell to insert sub-narratives into the main narrative. If characters in the *Quartet* are shown to have more than one profile at once, it is because most of them are writers in addition to their main profession. Darley is an English teacher and a writer; Balthazar is a doctor and a writer; Clea is a painter and a skilled letter writer; Pursewarden is active in politics and a successful writer; Leila is devoted to the Coptic cause, and writing letters is absolutely essential to her life; Melissa is a dancer who writes letters; Mountolive is an ambassador who records everything in his writings. They all take refuge in writing, and all of them agree with Justine's question: 'Why should not people show more than one profile at a time?' (*Quartet* 28) The fact that there are several writers in the story is sometimes confusing. Darley's narrative contains not only the voice of Darley himself as narrator, but also other voices which appear either to correct or to mislead and confuse. In analysing this polyphony, Chiara Briganti notes in her article 'Lawrence Durrell and the Vanishing Author':

More important, all these voices somehow merge into each other; we are not really allowed to single out which voice is Durrell's, Darley's, Pursewarden's, Cavafy's. The intended artistic blurring in Arnauti's *Moeurs* between Claude and Justine is meant to suggest that, in spite of their singularity, all characters are one essential character and all voices are one essential voice. They are all compressed into the voice of the aspiring author, and they are all busy putting pieces together, while Alexandria, the "mythical city" from which they are to draw their

nourishment, resists encapsulation and appropriation and offers them only fragments, [...].<sup>6</sup>

For Darley, writing is related to discovery. He seeks to piece together the fragments of his past by rewriting his experiences, believing that ‘only *there*, in the silences of the painter or the writer can reality be reordered, reworked and made to show its significant side.’ (*Quartet* 20) However, this writing must take place on a small Greek island far from the city, which is a symbol of confusion, and where it is impossible to reconcile and recreate. ‘I have had to come so far away from it in order to understand it all!’ (*Quartet* 17) Writing is the only way for Darley to heal himself. Recalling past events, though painful, is necessary to his development. At one point, Darley is tempted to destroy his manuscript notes because he hates the ‘incomplete, the fragmentary’ (*Quartet* 154), but his ‘sudden realization’ (*Quartet* 154) that the man he has met in the booth was Mnejmian and not Narouz changes the course of events. Darley decides to ‘disinter’ (*Quartet* 155) the notes and to add to them this new element. Through writing, he seeks ‘to combine, resolve and harmonize the tensions so far created.’ (*Quartet* 380)

In Upper Egypt, letters from Melissa, Clea and Scobie are for Darley ‘a lifeline attaching [him] to an existence in which the greater part of [himself] was no longer engaged.’ (*Quartet* 186) Letters also serve to distort reality. Fragmented parts of the story are completed in letters. When Balthazar gives Darley back the manuscript ‘seared and starred by a massive Interlinear of sentences, paragraphs, and question-marks’ (*Quartet* 213), Clea sends Darley a letter from Syria in which she admits she never dared tell him all the things she knows about Justine: ‘How could I tell you what I knew of Justine?’ (*Quartet* 379) Clea attributes her silence to the duties of friendship. She even disapproves of Balthazar’s ‘troublesome new information’ (*Quartet* 378), and advises Darley either ‘to ignore the data’ or to ‘rework reality’ (*Quartet* 379). When Clea says: ‘There is nothing I can do to help you now’ (*Quartet* 379), she implicitly acknowledges that she knows more than what has been ‘wickedly supplied’ (*Quartet* 379) by Balthazar in the Interlinear.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael H. Begnal, ed., *On Miracle Ground: Essays on the Fiction of Lawrence Durrell*, Lewisburg: London ; Cranbury, NJ: Bucknell University Press : Associated University Presses, 1990, p. 48.

Leila, whose letters have ‘become her very life’ (*Quartet* 260), recognises the importance of them when she writes to Mountolive: ‘I feel somehow nearer to you today, on paper, than I did before we parted.’ (*Quartet* 431) Leila’s disease and the beginning of her decline are announced through her written words to Mountolive. The latter also speaks more easily about his private life in letters than he does in conversations. It is in a letter that Mountolive is ‘scrupulously honest’ (*Quartet* 432) with Leila when he tells her, speaking of his love affair with Grishkin, that ‘[i]t is true that I even considered at one time marrying her. I was certainly very much in love.’ (*Quartet* 432) Moreover, though he hates writing letters, Pursewarden feels the need to write one in order to divulge important information about conspiracy and espionage. When Mountolive is appointed Ambassador in Egypt, Pursewarden writes an astonishingly long letter to him. Pursewarden tells Mountolive that this is because ‘there is much you should know about the state of affairs here which I could not address to you formally as Ambassador Designate’ (*Quartet* 471). New details about Nessim’s Coptic plot are discovered in this letter. We learn that Maskelyne has left a document with the title: ‘*Nessim Hosnani, A conspiracy Among the Copts*’ on Pursewarden’s desk. No one has ever previously spoken of this document. The conversation which could have happened and which could have informed us about the existence of this document has been omitted, as Maskelyne has decided not to give the document to Pursewarden personally (*Quartet* 476).

Letters, diaries and novels often create doubt about the facts as they have been told. Their function in the story is to show that the same event could have different interpretations, and that truth is relative. Thus, the narrative becomes twisted, forcing the reader to exert the same effort as Darley in understanding the meaning of events. Moreover, there is little dialogue in the story. Interpretations emerge through the characters’ writing. Darley’s manuscript, Balthazar’s Interlinear, Justine’s presumed diaries, Arnauti’s *Moeurs* and the letters exchanged between different characters serve to break the rules of the conventional narrative. In this sense, Durrell is like Pursewarden who, according to Balthazar, wants to ‘escape from the absurd dictates of the narrative form in prose: “He said”, “She said”, “He cocked an eye, shot a cuff, lifted a lazy head, etc.”’ (*Quartet* 286). These writings bring with them corrections and misleading information, creating confusion and stimulating questions in the reader similar to the one Darley asks: ‘What am I to

believe?’ (*Quartet* 339), or the question asked by Balthazar: ‘What on earth, after all, is one to make of life with its grotesque twists and turns?’ (*Quartet* 333)

The presence of British intelligence and the French ‘*Deuxième*’, the secret activities of Nessim, the mission of Mountolive and the espionage of Memlik all demand silence and vigilance. In an enigmatic world like Alexandria, the narrator discovers things at the same time as the reader. The latter cannot wait comfortably for an omniscient narrator to explain everything. In contrast, the reader has to bear in mind everything characters say and do, in order to discover who they really are and who they are pretending to be. Like Darley, the reader has to cease being naïve if he wishes to understand. In other words, the reader is invited to share with Darley frustrations, deceptions, impatience and regret. In summary, because letters and other writings allow us to write more easily what we dare not say, and because we are reluctant to accept a narrator giving us information he is not supposed to have, the insertion of sub-narratives within the main narrative minimises the role of the narrator and allows the story to develop more naturally than it could in conversations.

By way of comparison, where Durrell uses several narrators to build a story in layers, Mahfouz uses a single narrator to tell a straightforward story. In addition, Mahfouz’s characters are ordinary people whose primary concern is to earn a living. Unlike the characters in the *Quartet*, they do not have different profiles. They are not artists, painters or professional novelists. Even the activity of writing has a different function. Where writing for Darley is a therapy by which he intends to heal himself, for Kamal it maintains its traditional function, i.e. it is a means of expressing his ideas and criticising his society. Moreover, where the characters in the tetralogy communicate through letters, the *Trilogy*’s characters wait to meet each other to discuss the matters of the day.

### 6.1.2 Fragmentation and unreliable narrators

Pursewarden is the famous writer of the *Quartet*. His approach to literature reveals Durrell’s own approach. Justine says of him: ‘the beast is up to all sorts of tricks, even in his books.’ (*Quartet* 307) She is making reference to an asterisk which refers back to ‘a page in the text which is *mysteriously* blank’ (*Quartet* 307) in one of his

books. Many readers have taken this to be a printing error, but Pursewarden himself suggests otherwise:

I refer the reader to a blank page in order to throw him back upon his own resources – which is where every reader ultimately belongs. (*Quartet* 307)

Pursewarden's words invite readers to change the way they normally read books when they read the *Quartet*. He intimates that no single, reliable narrator will explain everything to them. The reader will have to link information in order to make sense of an event, and will need to build the meaning himself, because the truth will be hidden between the lines of the story.

Moreover, when Darley says in *Justine* that what '[he] most need[s] to do is to record experiences, not in the order in which they took place – for that is history – but in the order in which they first became significant for [him]' (*Quartet* 97), he is establishing the principles of a narrative which will challenge chronological order. The events will not be arranged chronologically but 'associatively'<sup>7</sup>. In fact, the second volume of the *Quartet* is developed through this absence of chronology. *Balthazar* is composed of 14 chapters where logical connections between events are lacking. Because each chapter brings new information, the chapters are independent. They can be taken out and placed elsewhere in the novel without affecting the overall meaning. Because important parts of the story are missing, and because the meaning is distorted, there is no unity. Darley offers the reader no links because he is in the same situation, and because fragmentation is a characteristic of real-life stories.

Before leaving Alexandria, Nessim gives Darley 'the three volumes in which Justine kept her diary, as well as the folio which records Nessim's madness.' (*Quartet* 19) Nessim tells Darley:

Take these, yes, read them. There is much about us all in them. They should help you to support the idea of Justine without flinching, as I have had to do. (*Quartet* 19)

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<sup>7</sup> Donald P. Kaczvinsky, *Lawrence Durrell's Major Novels, Or, The Kingdom of the Imagination*, Selinsgrove: London: Susquehanna University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1997, p. 51.

The account of events in *Justine* seems credible. The story can be followed without suspecting anything untoward, and the logic of the narrative raises no doubts. However, in a letter to Darley on the island, Balthazar writes:

I think often and not without a certain grim humour. You have retired to your island, with, as you think, all the data about us and our lives.  
(*Quartet* 210-211)

The phrase ‘as you think’ suggests that, for Darley, things are not quite as they seem to be. In fact, Balthazar knows about the fallacy of these documents but has made no comment. In the same letter Balthazar adds:

I picture you, wise one, poring over *Moeurs*, the diaries of Justine, Nessim, etc., imagining that the truth is to be found in them. Wrong! Wrong! A diary is the last place to go if you wish to seek the truth about a person. Nobody dares to make the final confession to themselves on paper. (*Quartet* 211)

Such statements are destabilising for both Darley and the reader. Darley has written a great deal based on Nessim’s documents without suspecting that the rich banker could have considered misleading him. He believes Nessim has been trying to help him understand Justine and the inhabitants of Alexandria. The diary and folio should theoretically reveal the truth about people, but Nessim cleverly uses them to disorientate Darley. After he has read the letter, Darley’s only answer is to send Balthazar ‘the huge bundle of paper which had grown up so stiffly under [his] slow pen and to which [he] had loosely given her name as a title’ (*Quartet* 211).

Balthazar comes to see Darley on the island to give him back ‘the immense bundle of manuscript’ Darley has already sent him. The ‘new’ manuscript is described as ‘papers now seared and starred by a massive Interlinear of sentences, paragraphs and question-marks.’ (*Quartet* 213) Darley’s interpretations seem to have serious problems of validity. The ‘massive’ corrections show that most of what Darley has written about his experiences in the city is false. Darley’s credibility is weakened with the appearance of Balthazar.

Balthazar's silence facilitates the superimposition of a new layer of reality on the existing version. This creates a sort of palimpsest which sheds further doubt on all previous accounts and interpretations. Without this silence, the Interlinear could not exist. Nessim misleads the reader as well as Darley. Now Darley has 'to work backwards, through the great Interlinear which Balthazar has constructed around [his] manuscript' (*Quartet* 238).

Kaczvinsky is quite correct when he notes that, if *Justine* presents us with 'psychic fragmentation', *Balthazar* is concerned with 'social fragmentation'<sup>8</sup>. In *Balthazar*, Darley has to make an effort to collect the missing parts of the puzzle to make sense of Balthazar's declarations, and to understand the complex elements of the intrigue in which he has unwittingly become involved. Darley's stories in *Balthazar* are fragmented. The visit of the old doctor to the island distorts what Darley has written in *Justine*, and allows a new volume to be produced, with new elements involving a layered narrative. In fact, Durrell had already used this technique in *The Black Book*:

In order to structure and organize this work, Durrell adopts the technique he used (to some effect) in *The Black Book* and adapts it for his present purposes. In *The Black Book*, the narrators, Lawrence Lucifer and Death Gregory, wrote about their particular experiences while living in the Regina Hotel. Each narrator wrote in a different colored ink, and passages by the two narrators alternated throughout the novel. The problem with the layering technique in *The Black Book*, however, was that the two narrators offered essentially the same understanding of reality. But in the *Quartet*, Darley will present two different views of his experience in Alexandria – the private and the public – each complementing and completing the other. The alternating stripes of *The Black Book* have become in the *Quartet* separate layers of a "palimpsest," as Balthazar himself suggests, superimposed one on top of another, giving a complex vision of reality.<sup>9</sup>

Kaczvinsky's comment is borne out in a letter Darley receives in *Balthazar*:

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51.

I suppose (writes Balthazar) that if you wished somehow to incorporate all I am telling you into your own *Justine* manuscript now, you would find yourself with a curious sort of book – the story would be told, so to speak, in layers. Unwittingly I may have supplied you with a form, something out of the way! Not unlike Pursewarden’s idea of a series of novels with “sliding panels” as he called them. Or else, perhaps, like some medieval palimpsest where different sorts of truth are thrown down one upon the other, the one obliterating or perhaps supplementing another. (*Quartet* 338)

It is clear that the Interlinear is used to correct what has been said in *Justine*, but is the Interlinear reliable? Can we trust its content and consider the accounts to be final versions and accurate interpretations of events in the city? *Mountolive* offers a clear answer to these questions, since it corrects some of the misinterpretations by Darley in *Balthazar*. Again ‘Darley’s aesthetic principles had been faulty.’<sup>10</sup> The fragmented stories of *Balthazar* reappear with a certain development, but this time from the point of view of a third person. However, nothing is spared in terms of deliberately misleading Darley and creating confusion.

The subsequent events are fragmentary and prove to have more than one interpretation. The reader is invited to be careful, as he has to assemble the parts of the puzzle without the help of a narrator. During the duck-shoot on Lake Mareotis, Da Capo is declared to have been killed accidentally. The scene as it is described leaves no room for doubt. There are no noticeable contradictions or imperfections. No one can suspect that it is a fabricated story. However, one detail does not make sense at this point in the tale. The significance of the moment when ‘they lifted it [the body] to get it into the hydroplane’ and ‘the false teeth slipped out of the mouth and crashed on to the floor-boards, frightening them all’ (*Quartet* 176) is only revealed in Balthazar’s version of the event. In his Interlinear, Balthazar says:

Your account of Capodistria’s death on the lake is the version which we all of us accepted at the time as likely to be true: in our minds, of course. But in the Police depositions, everyone concerned mentioned one particular thing – namely that when they raised his body from the lake in

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Pine, *The Mindscape*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994, p. 194.

which it was floating, with the black patch beside it in the water, his false teeth fell into the boat with a clatter, and startled them all. Now listen to this: three months later I was having dinner with Pierre Balbz who was his dentist. He assured me that Da Capo had an almost perfect set of teeth and certainly no false teeth which could possibly have fallen out. Who then was it? I don't know. And if Da Capo simply disappeared and arranged for some decoy to take his place, he had every reason: leaving behind him debts of over two million. Do you see what I mean? (*Quartet* 278)

Capodistria's death reappears in the narrative to cast doubt on everything which has previously been said. Revelations like this deepen Darley's disgust and reopen his wounds. Darley has been fooled, and so has the reader. However, Balthazar does not reveal the motive for this play-acting. What is behind Nessim building the scenario around Capodistria's death? The question remains unanswered until the third volume, when Nessim tells Justine:

The only one who concerns us at the moment is Da Capo. He must be apparently killed, or must disappear, for he is very much compromised. I have not worked out the details properly. He wants me to claim his insurance, anyway, as he is completely in debt, ruined, so his disappearance would fit in. We will speak of this later. (*Quartet* 563)

Nothing has been said about the arrangement between Nessim and Da Capo, and no indications are given as to where he might be now. It is only in *Clea* that Capodistria appears to be living in a 'handsomely converted Martello tower, dividing his time between studying black magic and working on certain schemes of Nessim's' (*Quartet* 709).

Justine also proves to be unreliable when she informs Darley that she is thinking about leaving the city. The scene contains all the elements of a sad scene of separation.

She stops in front of a lighted shop-window and takes my arms so that I face her, looking into my eyes: 'I am thinking about going away' she says in a quiet puzzled voice. 'Something is happening to Nessim and I don't

know what it is as yet.' Then suddenly the tears come into her eyes and she says: 'For the first time I am afraid, and I don't know why.' (*Quartet* 120)

Her argument about the change in Nessim is so strong that everyone feels compassion for her. Justine's relationship with Darley and her infidelity to her husband give credibility to her tears and her fear. The fear of a jealous husband is a rational feeling which is commensurate with everyday life. Darley must now be afraid of what will happen. Fear freezes his mental capacities, and Darley cannot think about other possible scenarios. He cannot analyse or establish links between events. The reader is caught between the two. We are worried about Darley's situation and impatient to know what will become of the lovers.

When Justine leaves, Nessim's 'suffering is apparent to everyone.' (*Quartet* 179) Nessim is playing the role of the sad husband who has lost his wife, and his behaviour after her departure adds to the seriousness of the situation. We have no difficulty feeling sorry for him. Justine's unknown destiny, Darley's situation and Nessim's suffering constitute the elements of a sad love story not unlike those in everyday life. However, the whole scenario is destabilised with passages like the following in *Mountolive*, which give rise to deception and regret:

By the autumn, when everything is ready, we shall have to take up new dispositions. It may mean a separation of perhaps a year, Justine. I want you to go there and stay there while it all happens. Leila must go to the farm in Kenya. [...] The only one who concerns us at the moment is Da Capo. He must be apparently killed, or must disappear, for he is very much compromised. I have not worked out the details properly. He wants me to claim his insurance, anyway, as he is completely in debt, ruined, so his disappearance would fit in. We will speak of this later. (*Quartet* 563)

We cannot blame Darley, because in these fragmentary situations he is merely a tool. Darley knows nothing about the secret plan of Nessim and Justine but, at the same time, he has to become an unwilling participant in it. Darley is acting without really being an actor. In this sense, the boundary is removed between reality and fiction.

I began to see too that the real ‘fiction’ lay neither in Arnauti’s pages nor Pursewarden’s – nor even my own. It was life itself that was a fiction – we were all saying it in our different ways, each understanding it according to his nature and gift. (*Quartet* 792)

Another situation where the reader is required to be vigilant is described in the following episode:

Nessim was away in Cairo where he was supposed to make a radio broadcast on behalf of some charity or other. [...] Nessim’s quiet voice came to us from the little black radio by the bed, [...] Suddenly, while the voice was still talking and while we listened to it, there came the light youthful patter of footsteps on the iron staircase outside the bathroom: a step unmistakably that of Nessim [...] The figure paused with outstretched hand upon the knob of the door. [...] For a long time the figure stood there, as if in deep thought, perhaps listening. Then it shook its head once, slowly, and after a moment turned away with an air of perplexity to dissolve slowly on the glass. [...] Nessim still flowed with uninterrupted urbanity and gentleness. It seemed impossible that he could be in two places at once. It was only when the announcer informed us that the speech had been recorded that we understood. Why did he not open the door? (*Quartet* 122-123)

The reader is introduced to an exciting situation with all the characteristics of everyday infidelity. Fear and anxiety are unavoidable in reading this passage. The elements of the story are constructed skilfully. It starts by distancing Nessim from Alexandria to give Darley a chance to visit Justine in Nessim’s house and share her bed. Nessim is in Cairo for a radio broadcast, which is extremely important to how the event unfolds. It allows Nessim’s presence to be controlled.

Darley is reassured to hear Nessim’s voice. The word ‘suddenly’ is alarming, however. Something bad will happen. According to Darley, the ‘youthful patter of footsteps’ belongs ‘unmistakably’ to Nessim. Suspense grows with the inaction of the character. The text anticipates the reader’s logical questions and answers them. It is true that Nessim cannot be in two places at the same time, but when we learn that the speech has been recorded, we are, like Darley, certain it is Nessim who has come

to surprise them. Darley presumes he has understood. He has no doubt about his conclusions. On the other hand, Nessim does not open the door. Why? Darley is obsessed with the answer to this question rather than verifying the identity of the man behind the door. The reader naively follows suit. Not until the third volume does Selim tell Maskelyne that ‘all the real information on Nessim is kept in a little wall-safe at the house and not in the office’ (*Quartet* 481), and at this point the reader begins to ask the right question: “Who was behind the door?” The answer will come from Pursewarden’s long letter to Mountolive:

[...] Maskelyne himself decided to examine it at close range [...] Selim let him in and he climbed the back stairs - and nearly ran into Darley, our ciccisbeo, and Justine in the bedroom! He just heard their voices in time.  
(*Quartet* 481)

Darley informs us that he has borrowed money from Justine to send Melissa to a clinic in Palestine to have an X-ray. There is no reason to suspect Darley’s information. Unlike situations where he has seen or been told things, Darley has chosen here to ask Justine for money to help Melissa. This heroic act will be seen in a different light in *Mountolive* when we find out that arrangements have been made by Nessim and Justine to build this scenario:

‘Then if you feared her, why did you not get her removed somehow?’  
[...] ‘I am working now to get her sent away - by Darley himself. Amaril says that she is really seriously ill and has already recommended that she go to Jerusalem for special treatment. I have offered Darley the money.’  
(*Quartet* 561)

There is no doubt that Darley is ignorant of Justine’s plan, but this does not exonerate him from his unreliability.

In the Interlinear, Balthazar corrects Darley:

‘Some Fallacies and Misapprehensions’ where he said coldly: ‘Number 4. That Justine “loved” you. She “loved”, if anyone, Pursewarden. “What does that mean”? She was forced to use you as a decoy in order to protect him from the jealousy of Nessim whom she had married.

Pursewarden himself did not care for her at all – supreme logic of love!

(*Quartet* 216)

Now for the first time, Darley learns that Justine's love for him has been a huge lie. 'What does that mean?' This question is shared by both Darley and the reader. The answer shocks and wounds at the same time. Darley inspires pity and sympathy in the reader, while Justine's character begins to be unveiled to us.

This new information awakens Darley, and certain events start to have meaning for him, such as when Justine pretends not to be able to come to see him, claiming that Nessim wants her to stay at home. In fact, Justine has arranged a meeting with Pursewarden in the desert. Only now can Darley interpret her tears in the Café El Bab:

'You are a good man, really a good man. And I am so sorry.' For what? For her tears? I had been speaking about Goethe. Fool! Imbecile! I thought I had perhaps moved her by the sensibility with which I expressed myself. (*Quartet* 244)

However, Darley proves naïve in blindly trusting Balthazar's account in the Interlinear. Darley's lack of experience permits him to think that Justine must have been 'bitterly ashamed of the trick she was playing on [him] and the danger into which she put [him].' (*Quartet* 244) *Mountolive*, however, reveals new factors which show the situation in a different light:

[...] the telephone by the bed rang. Nessim picked up the receiver, listened for a second, and then passed it to her without a word. Smiling, she raised her eyebrows in interrogation and her husband nodded. 'Hullo' the hoarse voice counterfeited sleepiness, as if she had been woken from her bed. 'Yes, my darling. Of course. No, I was awake. Yes, I am alone.' [...] 'It was poor Darley' she said, picking up her cards. (*Quartet* 560)

Justine's infidelity is part of the game. Nessim knows what is happening between her and Darley. Justine tells Nessim that she has tried to 'sound him in every way. He

knows nothing' (*Quartet* 560). Even Pursewarden, whom Balthazar thinks is Justine's only true lover, appears to be something else when Justine says of him:

He [Pursewarden] is somehow cold and clever and self-centred. Completely amoral - like an Egyptian! He would not deeply care if we died tomorrow. I simply cannot reach him. But potentially he is an enemy worth reckoning with. (*Quartet* 562)

Justine's explanation of all these fragments becomes clear in *Clea* when she confesses to Darley:

Look, even that first, that very first afternoon when I came to you - remember? You told me once how momentous it was. When you were ill in bed with sunburn, remember? Well, I had just been kicked out of his hotel-room against my will and was quite beside myself with fury. Strange to think that every word I then addressed to you was spoken mentally to him, to Pursewarden! In your bed it was he I embraced and subjugated in my mind. And yet again, in another dimension, *everything* I felt and did then was really for Nessim. At the bottom of my rubbish heap of heart there was really Nessim, and the plan. My innermost life was rooted in this crazy adventure. (*Quartet* 697)

Where the story of the rape is concerned, which Justine exploits to the maximum to mask her actions, we learn from Arnauti's *Moeurs* that:

She had (and there was no mistaking the force of this confession for it was accompanied by floods of tears, and I have never seen her weep like that before or since) - she had been raped by one of her relations. (*Quartet* 69)

Suspense grows as this situation fails to develop. At this stage, Justine sees no need to reveal the name of her rapist. It is difficult to see what she means when she says: 'He has completely forgotten these incidents.' (*Quartet* 70) How is it possible for her to know that he has forgotten 'these incidents' unless she is in contact with him? How is a relationship possible between a rapist and the person he has raped? Who

can this man be? The only opportunity to reveal his identity is lost in the heavy Cairo traffic:

Then once, in the heart of Cairo, during a traffic jam, in the breathless heat of a midsummer night, a taxi drew up beside ours and something in Justine's expression drew my gaze in the direction of hers. In that palpitant moist heat, dense from the rising damp of the river and aching with the stink of rotten fruit, jasmine and sweating black bodies, I caught sight of the very ordinary man in the taxi next to us. Apart from the black patch over one eye there was nothing to distinguish him from the thousand other warped and seedy business men of this horrible city. His hair was thinning, his profile sharp, his eye beady: he was wearing a grey summer suit. Justine's expression of suspense and anguish was so marked however that involuntarily I cried: "What is it?"; and as the traffic block lifted and the cab moved off she replied with a queer flushed light in her eye, an air almost of drunken daring: "The man you have all been hunting for." But before the words were out of her mouth I had understood and as if in a bad dream stopped our own taxi and leaped out into the road. I saw the red tail light of his taxi turning into Sulieman Pacha, too far away for me even to be able to distinguish its colour or number. To give chase was impossible for the traffic behind us was dense once more. (*Quartet* 71)

The story of the rape remains fragmentary because of the traffic jam. All Arnauti has noticed is that the man has a 'black patch over one eye', and when Magnani asks Justine to tell him his name, she finds refuge in "I cannot remember. I cannot remember". However, Justine remembers his name well, and in *Balthazar*, she reveals his identity to Pursewarden: "Da Capo." (*Quartet* 308) At the same time, we learn that Justine and Da Capo 'had been friends for years - with never of course a reference to this event.' (*Quartet* 308)

To increase this sense of uncertainty, several pages are devoted to Justine's kidnapped child. Something vague is mentioned about a child at the beginning of *Justine* but the story is not developed:

On a rotting sofa in one corner of the room, magnetically lit by the warm shadow reflected from the walls, lay one of the children horribly shrunk up in its nightshirt in an attitude which suggested death. (*Quartet* 42)

The child will remain unidentified until the end of the novel:

I found it [the child], of course. Or rather Mnemjian did. In a brothel. It died from something, perhaps meningitis. Darley and Nessim came and dragged me away. [...] Of course neither Nessim nor Darley noticed anything. Men are stupid, they never do. (*Quartet* 765)

Justine always chooses to fragment her stories. She gives details only when they are important for the context in which she finds herself. She comes back to give additional information about a fragmented event only when this proves to be relevant to her.

Darley is struck by a 'sudden realization that the man [he] had seen in the little booth had been Mnemjian.' (*Quartet* 154) This cannot be verified since Darley had been alone in the booth and was the only one to see the back of the man. Later, Darley changes this version and says:

[...] for now as I refashion these scenes in the light of the Interlinear, my memory revives something which it had forgotten; memories of a dirty booth with a man and woman lying together in a bed and myself looking down at them, half-drunk, waiting my turn. I have described the whole scene in another place - only then I took the man to be Mnemjian. I now wonder if it was Narouz. (*Quartet* 326)

As to Clea's virginity, although Clea shares the same bed as Darley, she chooses not to reveal the name of the person with whom she had a coup de foudre, and by whom she became pregnant: 'Shall I tell you?' In fact she is not ready to tell him at this point, and prefers to replace his name with 'he' or 'him' (*Quartet* 737). Before Darley's departure to the island to work at a new relay station, Clea invites Darley and Balthazar to bathe, and her hand is accidentally nailed to the wreck by Balthazar. Only in the hospital does Darley understand that the man was Amaril.

Clea confirms this conclusion, thinking that Darley has identified Amaril in her 'Syrian episode' (*Quartet* 855).

The story of Amaril and Semira has already been mentioned in the Interlinear, but only to add obscurity and increase Darley's discomfort. Amaril is attracted by a woman who insists on remaining unidentified, refusing to 'raise her hood' (*Quartet* 344). The hood adds perplexity to the story and makes the reader curious. Only part of the story is given, and Darley will have to remember it in order to link it to the other part, as Balthazar warns:

Yet years later, in another book, in another context, he will happen upon her again, almost by accident, but not here, not in these pages too tangled already by the record of ill-starred love.' (*Quartet* 344)

The fragmented character of Balthazar's account is highlighted by the phrase 'in another book'. This other book, in which the story will be completed, is in fact *Mountolive*. If Semira had been hoodless during the carnival, she would never have been noticed by Amaril. Perhaps she would have inspired some curiosity but nothing more. The hood excites Amaril to the point of obsession, an obsession which will push him to ask for her hand in marriage. However, the hood is a narrative technique in itself, bringing twists and turns to the story.

In approaching the issue of Pursewarden's suicide when he plays chess with Mountolive, Balthazar expresses his annoyance at not knowing the whole truth, 'I feel I had somehow missed the point.' (*Quartet* 581) The circumstances of Pursewarden's suicide are far from clear. Balthazar seeks additional information from Mountolive, but the latter has to keep some events secret. Mountolive asks Balthazar to wait for Lisa, Pursewarden's sister, who may or may not give further details, depending on her brother's wishes. Again, there are many interpretations of the suicide, encapsulated in Balthazar's very apt words about truth: 'we always see her as she seems, never as she is. Each man has his own interpretations.' (*Quartet* 581)

Events in the *Quartet* are often incomplete. Some characters prefer to reveal just part of the story because the other part must be kept secret, while other characters are told things to mislead them. Fragmentation is related to the city. In the city of Alexandria it is dangerous to reveal everything. This sense of complexity is

promoted by the presence of British intelligence, the French secret services, Muslims, Copts, Jews and other ethnic groups. In a city with '[five] races, five languages, a dozen creeds' (*Quartet* 17), discordance is inevitable. It is impossible for all these groups to coexist in harmony as their interests are different, but interdependent. For instance, Copts seek equality with Muslims in Egypt, but Muslims retain their position of superiority. On the other hand, Jews, represented by Justine, are seeking a state in Palestine. These political and religious activities involve conspiracy, plots and arms. Secrecy remains crucial to plans, and of course secrecy is synonymous with fragmentation. No message should be delivered completely. Misleading information remains an effective weapon.

Events in the tetralogy are told and retold in order to be corrected or to be completed. No version can be considered the only true one. Suspicion grows the more we read. We have to remember all the details to match them with information given later on. Fragmentation is also achieved through external forces which prevent characters from continuing their discussions, as in the case of Mnemjian during his visit to Darley on the island. Mnemjian 'would perhaps have designed to explain but at that minute a ship's siren rang out' (*Quartet* 664), preventing him from telling the story of Capodistria. In another case, Pombal, wishing to speak of Fosca, acknowledges to Darley that there is 'much to tell [him]', but he says nothing because 'the chauffeur softly sounded the horn' (*Quartet* 678). The narrative returns to old versions of stories through phrases like, 'Shall I give you yet another example from another quarter?', or 'Now listen to this' (*Quartet* 278), or 'Somewhere I once wrote down these words.' (*Quartet* 371) Some advice Balthazar gives Darley in the Interlinear helps summarise how the *Quartet* should be approached:

Here again in judging him you trust too much to what your subjects say about themselves - the accounts they give of their own actions and their meaning. You would never make a good doctor. Patients have to be found out - for they *always* lie. (*Quartet* 311)

Unlike the *Quartet*, which has occasionally generated theories about narrative techniques and suggestions on how to read the work itself, there is no key to reading the *Trilogy*. The order of events goes hand in hand with our expectations. On the other hand, like Darley, Kamal is shocked to discover the other side of characters.

When Yasin tells him that his father is ‘a master of jests, music, and love’ (*Trilogy* 920), Kamal is destabilised, though readers are not because they already know about al-Sayyid’s ambivalent personality. So unlike the *Quartet*, moments of emotional shock in the *Trilogy* are not simultaneously shared between the reader and the characters. Lastly, if the unreliability of Durrell’s narrators changes the way we respond as readers, and makes us more suspicious about everything we are told, with Mahfouz we feel more confident and follow the story more comfortably.

### 6.1.3 Repetition and rebuilding the story

Darley’s struggle with truth pushes him to rework events, to verify his information and to revise his interpretations constantly. Revision leads to reconstruction. To correct what has been said about an event, the words as well as the content of the event need to be reconsidered. The following passage, taken from *Balthazar*, is about Nessim’s proposal of marriage to Justine:

They met more than once, formally, like business partners, in the lounge of the Cecil Hotel to discuss the matter of this marriage with the detachment of Alexandrian brokers planning a cotton merger. This is the way of the city. (*Quartet* 245)

Nearly the same passage appears in *Mountolive*

They had met more than once, formally, almost like business partners to discuss the matter of this marriage with the detachment of Alexandrian brokers planning a cotton merger. But this is the way of the city. (*Quartet* 551)

In the first sentence, the past perfect tense is used. This means that there had been other meetings before this. The word ‘almost’ in the second extract suggests that the relationship between Nessim and Justine involves other forms of intimacy which are not found in normal relationships. In addition, in the first extract, the lounge of the Cecil Hotel is given as the only place for their meetings. It is a public place, which adds to the normality of their relationship, but in the second passage no specific place is mentioned. This suggests that the primary subject of their meetings is not merely marriage but involves an activity which must be kept secret. The word ‘but’ added to ‘this is the way of the city’ in the correction adds the sense that in the

city things are never clear. Each event has many interpretations and one can never trust only one version.

Moreover, though some sentences are repeated verbatim, the 'layers' remain, with little difference in their form but with important differences in the content. In the same context of marriage, Nessim tells Justine:

'And lest an inequality of fortune should make your decision difficult' said Nessim, flushing and lowering his head, 'I propose to make you a birthday present which will enable you to think of yourself as a wholly independent person - simply as a woman, Justine. This hateful stuff which creeps into everyone's thoughts in the city, poisoning everything! Let us be free of it before deciding anything.' [...] He kissed her lightly on the mouth as he stood up. 'I must go first and get the permission of my mother, and tell my brother. [...]' (*Quartet* 245-246-247-248)

The reasons behind their marriage are not given in the passage which appears in *Balthazar*. However, the following appears in *Mountolive*:

Lest an inequality of fortune may make your decision difficult, I propose to make you a birthday present which will enable you to think of yourself as a wholly independent person - simply as a woman, Justine. This hateful stuff which creeps into everyone's thoughts in the city, poisoning everything! Let us be free of it before deciding anything. [...] I want to ask you to become part of a dangerous. . . . (*Quartet* 551-552)

The reasons behind the marriage are only given at this point. 'I want to ask you to become part of a dangerous' has been omitted in the first extract, but its addition reveals the reasons behind this marriage. Whereas in *Balthazar*, the proposal involves a normal situation in which someone in love proposes marriage to someone else, in *Mountolive*, it takes the form of an affair, a 'dangerous' adventure. This layer ultimately covers the old layer to produce what Balthazar has called 'palimpsest'.

Corrections continue to destabilise our previous understanding of events, as in the following extract which describes what happens when Nessim and Justin leave the Cecil Hotel:

They went out to the car together and Justine suddenly felt very weak, as if she had been carried far out of her depth and abandoned in mid-ocean. ‘I don't know what more to say.’

‘Nothing. You must start living’ he said as the car began to draw away, and she felt as if she had received a smack across the mouth. She went into the nearest coffee-shop and ordered a cup of hot chocolate which she drank with trembling hands. [...] After a long moment of thought he picked up the polished telephone and dialled Capodistria’s number. ‘Da Capo’ he said quietly. ‘You remember my plans for marrying Justine? All is well.’ He replaced the receiver slowly, as if it weighed a ton, and sat staring at his own reflection in the polished desk. (*Quartet* 248)

In another place, the same event is retold in the following way:

They went out to the car together and Justine suddenly felt very weak, as if she had been carried far out of her depth and abandoned in mid-ocean. ‘I don't know what more to say.’

‘Nothing. You must start living.’ The paradoxes of true love are endless. She felt as if she had received a smack across the face. She went into the nearest coffee-shop and ordered a cup of hot chocolate. She drank it with trembling hands. [...] ‘Da Capo’ he said quietly, ‘you remember my plans for marrying Justine? All is well. We have a new ally. I want you to be the first to announce it to the committee. I think now they will show no more reservation about my not being a Jew – since I am to be married to one. What do you say?’ [...] Now he replaced the receiver slowly, as if it weighed a ton, and sat staring at his own reflection in the polished desk. (*Quartet* 555)

The words from ‘they went out’ to ‘you must start living’ are repeated verbatim. However, the phrase ‘she felt as if she had received a smack across the mouth’ comes in the first extract as a result of the phrase ‘you must start living’, whereas in the second extract it is a result of ‘the paradoxes of true love are endless’. Moreover, the second layer completely changes the information provided. ‘We have a new ally’ does not appear in *Balthazar*, but it remains of crucial importance to the understanding of

Justine and Nessim, as well as other characters. The word 'committee' highlights the presence of a secret organisation, and it is only 'now' that Nessim replaces the receiver.

In addition, the story of what happened to Darley in the booth is corrected, this time by Darley himself. He is not commenting on someone else's actions, but is correcting his own version of the event he experienced in the booth.

They lay there like the victims of some terrible accident, clumsily engaged, as if in some incoherent experimental fashion they were the first partners in the history of the human race to think out this peculiar means of communication. (*Quartet* 152)

He starts his correction explicitly and says: 'I have described the whole scene in another place' (*Quartet* 326).

[...] only then I took the man to be Mnemjian. I now wonder if it was Narouz. 'They lay there like the victims of some terrible accident, clumsily engaged, as if in some incoherent experimental fashion they were the first partners in the history of the human race to think out this peculiar means of communication.' (*Quartet* 326)

Repetition in the *Trilogy* has an additional function. Some examples will help understand why certain parts of the text are repeated. At the very beginning of the story, we are told about Zanuba that she is:

Zubayda's foster daughter. She played the lute and was a gleaming star in the troupe. (*Trilogy* 78)

Some pages later, Zanuba is introduced once again, in almost the same words, as though this is the first time she has appeared in the story.

Zubayda sat crossed-legged on the divan. At her right was Zanuba, the lute player, her foster daughter. (*Trilogy* 106)

Other repetition involves the introduction of Zaynab's maid. She is described twice as the lady who is 'black and is in her forties'. When Fahmy's participation in the

demonstrations is revealed to his father, Fahmy refuses to swear that he will stop his political activities. His refusal is mentioned on two occasions in the story. However, this repetition cannot be unintentional. In fact, Mahfouz tells us his story in the same way someone in the Egyptian streets would have told it. Arabs usually repeat, consciously and unconsciously, details which seem to be of importance to them. For example, in beginning a conversation about someone, the speaker will often start by providing a context in addition to the person's name. Anecdotes are also told to the same people more than once. Jokes are told and retold if the context allows it. Put simply, repetition in the work of Mahfouz should be understood in relation to realism.

## 6.2 *The Cairo Trilogy: a modern family saga*

The starting point for examining the realities of the period between the two wars is to define a suitable genre to depict these realities. The story of *The Cairo Trilogy* covers the period from 1917 to 1944, an artistic challenge for a realistic novel. Moreover, this period is known as a highly turbulent one for Egypt, which adds a further complication to the task of writing. This was a great challenge for Mahfouz. Experimenting with the saga form was not a simple task, as it was something new to him and to Arabic literature in general. It was therefore essential for Mahfouz to take into consideration the experience of Western predecessors in order to meet this challenge. John Galsworthy was among the writers Mahfouz read to initiate himself into the realistic novel and the saga form. Mahfouz acknowledged in one of his interviews that:

I got to know realism through contemporary writers like Galsworthy, Aldous Huxley and D.H. Lawrence. After these I was no longer able to read Dickens. Nor was I able to read Balzac having already read Flaubert and Stendhal.<sup>11</sup>

The *Cairo Trilogy* consists of three volumes connected in time. The story posits a succession of generations in which the actions of the second and third generations are the consequences of the actions of the first and second. The saga form allows the novel to move in a way that approximates the rhythm of life. Emotional and sexual relationships are treated in detail. Characters think, speak and

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<sup>11</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 17.

interact as if their lives were real. Ideas are expressed in the same way one would express them in real life. The saga form also facilitates the management of events to provide the novel with a certain linearity. Events are interrelated, and causality is emphasised by an omniscient narrator who builds the links between the story's details from beginning to end without excluding the role of the reader or losing the atmosphere of suspense.

*The Cairo Trilogy* reminds us of *The Forsyte Saga*. There are clear parallels between the two sets of novels. Galsworthy's trilogy is also made up of three novels: *The Man of Property* (1906), *In Chancery* (1920), and *To Let* (1921). Moreover, like *The Forsyte Saga*, Mahfouz's *Trilogy* is rooted in autobiography. Kamal resembles his creator. To illustrate this, the relationship between Kamal and Aïda draws on an experience Mahfouz had at a very early age. Al-Ghitani says about this experience:

When I ask him about 'Ayda, whom he fell in love with in real life, his features relax and become more tender. He seems immersed in memories – distant memories, for more than fifty years have elapsed since this love that shook him at the beginning of his adult life. It was perhaps the ultimate love experience of his whole life. "This relationship has affected me profoundly, to the extent that in my twenties I tried to emulate and relive the events of this earlier love story. Love for love's sake, with no hope of a happy ending."<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, in the same way as Galsworthy the *Trilogy* explores the transmutation of the social world over a definite period of time. Mahfouz's story is also about a conflict of values. It juxtaposes morality with human instincts of love and sex. It also juxtaposes the personal with the historical. All this is achieved by centring the novel on a family, through which a whole culture is assessed and criticised. The family also provides a medium for historical facts to surface, contributing towards the image of a country in transition towards a new era. Nevertheless, Mahfouz was not simply imitating blindly when he adopted the saga. *The Forsyte Saga* may have inspired him, but his *Trilogy* is written within a modernist context.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Beard and Adnan Haydar, eds., *Naguib Mahfouz: From Regional Fame to Global Recognition*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Mohamed El-Hindi Series on Arab and Islamic Civilization, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1993, p. 47.

### 6.2.1 Storytelling: a modern way of dealing with marriage

Unlike novels which are characterised by their ‘idiotic use of marriage as a finale’<sup>13</sup>, the events of the *Trilogy* do not simply use marriage to announce the ending. On the contrary, the question of ‘what is next?’ remains throughout the novel. The stories of Kamal, Yasin, Khadija and Aisha show how Mahfouz’s endings differ from our expectations. At the beginning of *Palace of Desire*, Kamal earns his baccalaureate and is in love with Aida. However, Kamal will remain tongue-tied until the end of the second volume, where he tells her, ‘[i]t’s been my fate to love you with all the force of my being.’ (*Trilogy* 802) This declaration does not appear until several pages later, but the narrator makes the delay acceptable. We understand Kamal’s hesitation in confronting Aida with his feelings because of his youth on the one hand, and because it is his first experience of love on the other. We even sympathise with him and tolerate his silence. We identify with Kamal, as a first experience of love is usually characterised by silence and a lack of courage. The narrator therefore uses the reader’s own experience to involve the reader in the narrative. We cannot leave the story without knowing what will become of Kamal and Aida. Kamal’s love is approached in such a way that the reader feels it is a real-life situation. The language used to describe his feelings perfectly complements his early experience of love, and the images used mirror the personality of a young, romantic lover with a lively imagination.

When Husayn Shaddad tells Kamal and Isma’il of Aida’s engagement to their friend Hasan, we feel sympathetic towards Kamal.

Be firm, my soul. I promise we’ll return to all this later. We’ll suffer together until we perish. We’ll think through everything until we go insane. It will be a satisfying moment in the still of the night, with no eye to observe or ear to eavesdrop, when pain, delirium, and tears are unveiled ... far from any critic or scold. Then there’s the old well. I’ll remove the cover, scream down it to the resident demons, and confide my woes to the tears collected in the belly of the earth there from sad people everywhere. Don’t capitulate. Beware, for the world seems as fiery red to you now as the pit of hell. (*Trilogy* 808)

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Morgan Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Reprinted, Penguin Classics, London: Penguin, 2005, p. 50.

The announcement of Aïda's betrothal leads the reader to believe that Kamal's role in this story based on marriage is at an end, but the use of the future tense and the phrase 'we'll return to all this later' offers another dimension to Kamal's evolution in the story. Aïda's marriage, in fact, signals Kamal's rebirth. Aïda leaves with Hasan for Brussels the day after their marriage. With her departure, the role of the Shaddad family in the novel should theoretically be expected to end. However, Aïda will reappear in Kamal's life in the third volume, this time in a different way.

The reappearance of Aïda in her new circumstances in the story is destabilising. A relationship with Kamal can logically be expected. We are naively driven to think that the narrator has been preparing the context for their encounter. Thus, Aïda's return conditions our reading. We begin to suspect a meeting with Kamal on every page, and even encourage it in our minds, as this would make a satisfying ending. But Kamal will never meet Aïda again. Aïda has come back alone to Egypt to stay with her mother. After a month, she marries Anwar Bey Zaki, the chief inspector for English-language instruction. Two months after her marriage, she falls ill and dies in the Coptic Hospital. When we learn that Kamal has been at her funeral without knowing that the deceased woman was Aïda, we are disappointed. We feel we have been tricked by the narrator because the end was neither expected nor suspected. However, as the story of Aïda comes to an end, we turn our attention and curiosity to the way in which Kamal's life will develop, and what the future has in store for him.

In the third volume, Kamal is attracted to Budur, Aïda's younger sister, but makes no move towards her. Even though the girl is 'responsive and receptive' (*Trilogy* 1239), 'his tongue refused to cooperate.' (*Trilogy* 1257) Kamal's abortive romance prevents us asking further questions about his attitude to marriage. When he says 'I love her but hate marriage' (*Trilogy* 1255), he confirms his decision to dedicate himself to philosophy and science. Kamal retires from the story by refusing to cooperate with our expectations. His rejection of marriage corresponds to the narrator's refusal to introduce marriage as a happy ending to the novel.

The second son, Yasin, dominates the final part of the narrative. He enters the story at the age of 21 as a clerk at the al-Nahhasin School. Yasin has spent the first nine years of his life with his mother, and has had limited contact with his

father. His transfer to the custody of his father transports him from a world where everything is permitted to a world where everything is prohibited. His mother's world with her lovers has cultivated in him a paradoxical feeling towards women. He hates them but sees life as impossible without them.

Yasin's marriage to Zaynab lasts no longer than a year. He decides to marry Maryam but divorces her soon afterwards. Each of his marriages ends with a scandal. The first divorce happens when his wife surprises him in the room with Nur the maid. The second is the result of his relationship with Zanuba. In other words, Yasin's behaviour throughout the story makes it clear that marriage will not provide him with a happy ending.

My first wife was chosen by my father, who imposed her on me. My second wouldn't let me touch her unless I married her. So I did. But no one imposed you on me. You didn't lock me out before we got married.  
(*Trilogy* 935)

This statement comes at the end of *Palace of Desire*, and reveals a completely different attitude towards marriage. Yasin wants to marry Zanuba because she gives him a feeling of being free. However, he is not ready to abandon his habits with women. In *Sugar Street* he will flirt with the new tenant in his building, but this time, unlike with Zaynab and Maryam, Zanuba will be sensible enough not to destroy her marriage.

In a society where the place of women is with their husbands, we expect marriage to be the final event in a story. In the family of al-Sayyid, two girls are awaiting marriage, and their mother is preparing them for the day when they will have to leave their father's house. Khadija's major preoccupation is her nose. When she touches the tip of her nose with her finger, she immediately thinks about marriage: 'Doesn't this stand in the way of marriage?' (*Trilogy* 35) However, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she believes that: 'only God can save [her].' (*Trilogy* 154) Khadija is 20, but believes the time is more than right for her marriage, especially when she considers that her mother married before she was 14.

When the narrator tells us that 'the features of her face were noticeably out of proportion with each other' (*Trilogy* 21), he is referring indirectly to the concept that marriage is the ultimate goal of female characters, and brings their story to a close.

Khadija is so desperate to be married that she develops a form of jealousy towards her beautiful sister Aisha, who has already received two proposals. Of course, Aisha cannot marry before her elder sister because of the codes of Egyptian society. The whole family is embarrassed by this situation, but Khadija feels sorry that she is obstructing her little sister. Aisha can do nothing with the opportunities her beauty offers her. Their father has to refuse perfectly good proposals in order to protect Khadija's feelings, but at the same time he regrets how this affects Aisha. Their mother is caught between the three and can only pray to God for a solution.

When marriage is given such importance in the narrative, we suspect that it will resolve the question of 'what is next?' In spite of her nose, Khadija receives a proposal of marriage from Ibrahim Shawkat, whose wife has died along with their two children. This marriage releases everyone from their dilemma, but the story of Khadija does not end here. Although marriage is so important in the lives of the characters, it does not have a decisive impact on the story. The reader remains curious about how Khadija's life will evolve, and the continuity of the narrative is ultimately guaranteed through Khadija's sons.

One of her sons, Abd al-Mun'im is a law student who decides to join the movement of the Muslim Brothers under the guidance of Shaykh Ali al-Manufi. After a flirtation with a girl of 14, he decides to marry at the age of 18 to protect himself from falling once again into the trap of adultery. Abd al-Mun'im turns to fundamentalist Islam and lets his beard grow. He offers his apartment to members of the Brethren as a meeting place. The other son, Ahmad, is the opposite of his brother. He decides to abandon his religious duties to devote himself to communism. 'We marry and bury according to the precepts of our former religion, but we live according to the Marxist faith.' (*Trilogy* 1252) Ahmad also offers his apartment for meetings. Khadija's family becomes subject to police investigations, and her two sons are seen as a threat to the stability of Egypt. When the two brothers are arrested, we continue to be curious about what will happen next. Although Khadija's marriage takes place in the first volume, her role continues in the second and third. The narrator presents one event after the other, keeping the ending elusive so that, even in the last volume, we are obsessed with what will happen to Khadija and her two sons.

As for Aisha, we learn from the very beginning that she is ‘the very picture of beauty.’ (*Trilogy* 31) Her first experience of love is with Hasan Ibrahim, a young police officer at the Gamaliya police station. When her father refuses to allow her to marry him, Aisha is saddened, and the narrator describes her as follows:

In truth, she resembled nothing so much as a chicken with its head cut off, darting about without spread wings, bursting with vitality and energy at the very moment blood flowed from its neck, draining away the last drops of life. (*Trilogy* 170)

This passage shows the extent to which marriage is seen as a logical end for the characters. While Aisha tries to hide her distress at missing out on the engagement, the omniscient narrator unveils her feelings through the comparison with the dying chicken. We expect a narrator who devotes such significant space to feelings about marriage to end his story with a happy union.

Aisha’s marriage to Khalil comes three months after her father’s refusal of Hasan Ibrahim. We share the happiness of the beautiful blonde, and at the same time feel the suspense has been lifted. However, this happiness will not last long. Aisha’s life after marriage is nothing but a series of misfortunes. She experiences serious complications during the birth of her first child, and the reader is shocked by the doctor’s words at the birth:

I found that her heart’s weak. It’s likely she’ll die before morning. If she makes it safely through the night, she’ll be out of immediate danger, but I think she won’t live long. In my judgement, she won’t live past her twenties. (*Trilogy* 510)

The fact that the baby girl will die in the next 20 years provides an extension to the narrative. Will Na’ima really die? What will become of Aisha after this? How will the family continue living in the shadow of this prediction? The situation raises a series of questions, and we are obliged to remain engaged with the narrative and await the answers.

Like her mother, Na’ima suffers complications during childbirth, but unlike her mother, she dies. The doctor’s prophecy in *Palace Walk* comes to fruition in *Sugar*

*Street*, and the narrator has proved reliable. Before Na'ima's death, in *Palace of Desire* Aisha has already lost her husband and two sons, Muhammad and Uthman, to typhoid. Now she is alone and wants us to leave her alone:

“Don't any of you touch me. Leave me alone. Leave me. . . .” Glancing around at them, she said, “Please leave. Don't say a word. Is there anything you could say? Words won't help me. Na'ima's dead, as you can see. She was all I had left. There is nothing for me in the world now. Please go away.” (*Trilogy* 1139)

This is how the story of Aisha really ends. “There is nothing for me in the world now” concludes her story and closes it forever. It is as though the narrator wishes to inform us that Aisha will soon be leaving his narrative and that we can now stop asking the question, ‘what is next?’

Where marriage is so important in the *Trilogy*, it has no real role in the *Quartet*. The only marriage with any relevance to the plot is that of Nessim and Justine. However, this remains an unusual marriage, not based on the human need to unite with the opposite sex but on an obsessive wish to serve a political and religious cause. Moreover, marriage is not an end in itself. The notion of sex that stimulates marriages in the *Trilogy* is totally absent in the tetralogy because in the latter, characters can simply have sex outside marriage. As an example, Amaril and Semira marry not because Amaril loves Semira, but because he wishes to experiment with the magical side of the sensual Orient.

### **6.2.2 Time and its mutations: dealing with time in a modern way**

The *Cairo Trilogy* is a multi-generational story of a fictional Egyptian family in which, like in most family sagas, children grow into adults. Time is a major concern in the story but, unlike most sagas, the *Trilogy* explores other facets of the relationship between man and time in a modernist way. Referring to time and the novel, E.M. Forster says:

What about *War and Peace*? That is certainly great, that likewise emphasizes the effects of time and the waxing and waning of a generation. Tolstoy, like Bennett, has the courage to show us people

getting old.<sup>14</sup>

Like *War and Peace*, *The Cairo Trilogy* is a novel where children grow into adults. The narrative involves a process of maturing, which clearly reflects the age of characters at each stage of their development. This obsession with age manifests itself at the very beginning of *Palace of Desire* when al-Sayyid is presented as a man whose hair 'had been assailed by gray' (*Trilogy* 538) at the temples. Immediately after this, we are told of Amina, that time 'had changed her' (*Trilogy* 538), implying that the death of Fahmy had accelerated the process of ageing. Amina is now thin with hollow cheeks, and the 'locks of hair that [escape] from her scarf [are] turning gray and [make] her seem older than she [is].' (*Trilogy* 538)

Al-Sayyid Ahmad has stopped drinking since the death of his son. He has also abandoned Maryam's mother and given up his nightly entertainment. His justification is that a man of 55 is 'no youngster.' (*Trilogy* 546) Age and behaviour exist in parallel within a pattern determined by society. Death and the fear of death recall this pattern. However, the impact of this feeling gradually disappears after the shock which created it recedes, and this is exactly what happens to al-Sayyid. Fahmy's sudden death awakens in him the feeling that death could surprise him at any time, and that he has to prepare himself for the afterlife. In other words, the fear of death transforms a man who enjoyed wine and women into one living in a state of self-denial. After five years of abstinence, however, he begins drinking again.

God knows my grief has lasted a long time. When Fahmy passed away, a great part of me died. My best hope in this world vanished. Who can blame me if I'm able to achieve some peace of mind and consolation? Even if it laughs, my heart's still wounded. I wonder what the women are like now? How have five years, five long years, changed them?  
(*Trilogy* 548)

The answers to these questions appear when al-Sayyid is with his friends in the houseboat. The change he has noticed in them is directly related to age. Al-Sayyid is so shocked by the effect of time on the women that he starts worrying about himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

He asks Jalila a ridiculous question, “How do you find me?” in order to reassess himself in the light of the frightening and haunting ‘process of aging.’ (*Trilogy* 619)

In *Palace of Desire*, there is a reference to the shift in time when the novel opens with al-Sayyid extracting ‘the gold watch from his caftan’ (*Trilogy* 537). By the end of the second volume, the patriarch appears to be fading. His increasing blood pressure symbolises his loss of power. Amina becomes more emancipated and starts going out. Kamal discovers the other side of the patriarch and loses the respect he had for him. He decides from now on to reject authority and to ‘open [his] eyes and be courageous.’ (*Trilogy* 944) Yasin, the sensual one, leaves the house of the patriarch and also rejects his authority.

In *Sugar Street*, al-Sayyid, now over 60, is presented as a man the years have not treated well. He is ill, thin and dependent on his family. His stick, which was once a symbol of authority and virility, is now a necessity. Age has even reversed his role in the family. He is no longer a man with authority over his wife and children, and can only leave his house once a week with the assistance of Kamal. Amina is rarely at home now that her husband’s health has deteriorated. The tyrannical father of *Palace Walk* is distressed by his family’s rejection:

Amina no longer stays home. Our roles have been reversed. I’m confined to the latticed balcony while she roams around Cairo, going from mosque to mosque. (*Trilogy* 1151)

This indicates the extent to which society has evolved over the course of the *Trilogy*. In the first volume, it is Amina who is ‘filled with contentment as she stood in the balcony peering through the openings toward Palace Walk’ (*Trilogy* 9), while al-Sayyid Ahmad stayed out until midnight. Now, ironically, the tables have been turned.

However, time not only affects the social life of the characters but also helps free them from the chains of their parents. To illustrate this, Kamal only feels secure when he is 17. We also learn that, for Yasin:

[...] it was a question of his twenty-eight years, which had bestowed on him some of the distinctions of manhood and served to protect him from abusive insults and miserable attacks. (*Trilogy* 557)

The struggle with time in the *Trilogy* reaches a peak in the following passage involving Yasin's thoughts:

How old are you, sweetheart? Your family used to claim you were the same age as Khadija, but according to Khadija you're years and years older. My stepmother declares nowadays that you're in your thirties, on the basis of old memories of the type: 'When I was pregnant with Khadija, Maryam was a girl of five,' and so on. What difference does age make? (*Trilogy* 598)

Age is an obsession for most of the characters. Sometimes, and quite deliberately, the exact age of a character is not defined, as in the case of Maryam. Such uncertainty about age was common at the time of the story. In a country torn by war and political instability, not all births were recorded at the right time. Even when age is not recorded, however, there are attempts to include it in the story indirectly. In this passage, Yasin insists on knowing Maryam's age in order to categorise her. Maryam is in her thirties, but the question still obsesses Amina, who sees in Maryam a rival to her daughter. By emphasising that Maryam is five years older than Khadija, Amina thinks she is offering her daughter greater advantages. In other words, age is related to the social position of the individual. When Yasin pretends that age makes no difference, it is not because he is interested in Maryam, but in what he can get from her. Yasin will discard Maryam after their marriage, once his sexual desires are satisfied.

Another character whose age is only suggested in a vague way is Shaykh Mutawalli Abd al-Samad. In *Palace Walk*, he is said to be 'over seventy-five.' (*Trilogy* 43) At the beginning of *Palace of Desire*, we are told that he is in his eighties. In the last volume, the shaykh is 100 and is in a miserable situation. Time has wrought on him what most people fear: 'the infirmities of old age.' (*Trilogy* 1105) The image of the shaykh in the courtyard of al-Sayyid's house in *Sugar Street* shows how humiliating the effects of time can be:

The old man's legs were stretched out, and he had removed his sandals. Wearing a discolored white shirt that went down to his ankles and a white skullcap, he leaned against the wall as if sleeping off his meal.

Kamal noticed water flowing down the man's legs and realized that he was incontinent. Resounding like a whistle, the man's breathing was clearly audible. Kamal stared at him with a mixture of disdain and disgust. Then a thought made him smile in spite of himself. He reflected, "Perhaps in 1830 he was a pampered child." (*Trilogy* 1105)

When he hears of the death of al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad as the funeral cortege is making its way to the cemetery, the old man seems to be suffering from amnesia.

In addition, we are reminded of the characters' age or their relationship with age everywhere in the story. Even the age of minor characters is given, such as Jamil al-Hamzawi, the proprietor's assistant, who is 57. We learn that, for Adli Karim, the editor of *al-Insane al-Jadid* (The New Man), age 'had left its mark on his visage.' (*Trilogy* 1069) Abd al-Rahim Pasha Isa, the homosexual, goes on a pilgrimage purely because age has forced him to 'think about preparing for his forthcoming encounter with his Lord.' (*Trilogy* 1281) Jalila, the famous singer who was once very proud of her voice and her enormous body, also suffers the ravages of age. In *Sugar Street* we are told by Ali Abd al-Rahim that 'age has eaten away at her and relieved itself all over her.' (*Trilogy* 1026)

Zubayda, the singer, also an enormous woman, is at the peak of her career in *Palace Walk*. She can still be proud of her attractiveness in her fifties when she is in the houseboat in *Palace of Desire*, but becomes addicted to alcohol and cocaine. In *Sugar Street*, the Sultana is ruined. She is in her seventh decade and lives in a room in the roof. When she approaches Kamal and his friends, she is 'skinny and barefoot' (*Trilogy* 1225), and her front teeth are missing.

As Yasin approaches his forties in *Sugar Street*, his words elicit a depressive mood. His fortieth year is described as an uninvited and unwelcome guest:

What an alarming fact! White hairs at my temples! I've told the barber repeatedly to deal with it. He says one white hair is nothing to be concerned about, but they keep popping up. Down with both of them – the barber and white hair! He prescribed a reliable dye, but I'll never resort to that. (*Trilogy* 1038)

White hair is directly related to old age. People can hide their real age but can do nothing about white hair. If birth records are missing, white hair is accepted as evidence of age in Egyptian society. Usually, as a character moves towards the end of his or her life, there is some mention of white hair. The emphasis on white hair and a grey moustache highlights a fear of ageing in *The Cairo Trilogy*. It is a fear of being rejected by society. Fortunately, however, Yasin finds solace in other things:

Nothing makes a person so miserable as an increase in age or a decrease in wealth. But drinking provides considerable relief. It pours forth gentle sociability and attractive solace, making every mishap seem trivial. So say, 'How happy I am.' The lost real estate will never return nor will my vanished youth. But alcohol can be an excellent lifetime companion. (*Trilogy* 1041)

Such a preoccupation with time is undoubtedly stimulated by the fear of death and also, from a religious point of view, by the afterlife. Mahfouz's characters are very conscious that they are heading towards death. They follow the effects of time on their bodies obsessively. If life can be seen as a continuum from birth to death, Mahfouz is always looking to situate his characters physically and precisely on this line. In an interview, Mahfouz, whose philosophy of time had been influenced by Henri Bergson and by modernist writers like Proust and Joyce, said:

My contemplation of time and death has taught me to regard them with the eye of collective man and not [that of] the individual. To the individual they are calamitous, but to collective man a mere illusion. . . . What can death do to human society? Nothing. At any moment you will find society bustling with millions [of lives].<sup>15</sup>

For example, what effect did the death of the nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghlul have on the nationalist cause in Egypt? His death certainly shook all nationalists, but at the same time Zaghlul lived on in the collective memory of all Egyptians as the 'hero of the exile, the revolution, the liberation, and the constitution' (*Trilogy* 982). The leader of the Wafd party died, but left behind him a party which continued the struggle against the British and which finally restored Egypt to full independence. Thus,

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<sup>15</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 71.

Zaghlul's death was a tragedy on an individual basis, but it had little impact on society. Sa'd Zaghlul was ultimately elevated to the ranks of those whose actions have influenced history.

There's nothing to prevent a sensible person from admiring Sa'd Zaghlul as much as Copernicus, the chemist Ostwald, or the physicist Mach; for an effort to link Egypt with the advance of human progress is noble and humane. (*Trilogy* 945-946)

Moreover, all the following characters die in the story: al-Sayyid Ahmad's three friends: Muhammad Iffat, Ali Abd al-Rahim and Ibrahim al-Far; Muhammad Ridwan; Haniya; Maryam's mother; Aisha's husband and her children: Uthman, Muhammad and Na'ima; Aida; al-Sayyid Ahmad; Amina and Fahmy. On the other hand, the omnipresence of death does not prevent the story from developing. In other words, death is not an end, but is seen as a tragedy only for characters who think and live individually. For those who live for society and for the nation, death is seen as trivial. Fahmy is one of the characters who is not afraid of death. His revolutionary spirit and his fight against colonialism reduce the seriousness of death in his eyes. Even though he dies in the first volume, he retains his role as martyr until the end of the story. His name is not only synonymous with strikes and demonstrations, but with all courageous nationalists and all martyrs after him. Unlike Fahmy, who thought collectively, when the individualist Khalil dies, he leaves no trace of himself in the collective memory.

Finally, where Mahfouz's characters are obsessed with age and with the effect of time on their bodies, Durrell's tetralogy challenges time. Not a single character is preoccupied with grey hair, for instance. No one talks about the ageing of his body, as if bodies were not subject to time. Any mutations in the story are not a result of time but a consequence of the place, the city of Alexandria. Fear of death, on the other hand, plays a major role in shaping the personality of Mahfouz's characters. In the *Quartet*, even though there are several deaths, death remains outside the scope of religion and the afterlife.

### 6.2.3 Modernist influences in a realistic phase

Speaking of Mahfouz as an author, Haim Gordon comments:

Yet I must admit that at times in this work Mahfouz seems to explain too much; he does not always let the story speak for itself.<sup>16</sup>

It is true that Mahfouz sometimes has a tendency to tell all and explain everything, but Gordon seems to have missed the point that Mahfouz was writing about Egypt and for Egyptians. Mahfouz communicates things the way an Egyptian would have done in a real situation. The rhythm of telling is different from one culture to another. For example, what can be expressed in a word or a sentence in a Western context might take a whole paragraph in the East. Moreover, the period covered by the novel was known for its political agitation. Social degradation and British colonisation imposed on Egyptians a life in which they had considerable time at their disposal. People took time to talk about an issue. The fact that they spent the whole day in coffeehouses or drinking tea in shops gave people time to develop a subject in all its aspects, even trivial matters.

When Mahfouz started writing the *Trilogy*, he had ‘already read Proust, Joyce, Lawrence, and other contemporary modernists.’<sup>17</sup> Mahfouz’s style and narrative techniques cannot simply be related to a lack of experience in writing novels. Instead, what he tried to achieve in his work was to give readers the opportunity to know and see everything about each character. On the other hand, a novel centred around three generations, with vast scope and a large cast of characters, involves a variety of interactions. Without the guiding hand of the narrator, such a novel would have failed because the Egyptian audience was not yet accustomed to the novel as a literary genre. Its variety of characters also means that the narrator has to use different voices: he has to write in the voice of the intellectual, the ignorant, the repressed woman, the tyrannical father, the lustful man, the prostitute and the homosexual. Using these voices gives characters depth and complexity.

If the narrator insists on telling us everything, it is because the Egyptian is satisfied only when he tells everything and when he is told everything. As an

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 18.

example, when the three matchmakers visit Amina to ask for Aisha's hand, a long passage is dedicated to describing the meeting:

Umm Hanafi replied in a tone that had a happy, triumphant ring to it, "Yes, my lady. They knocked on the door and I opened it. They asked me, 'Isn't this the home of al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd-al Jawad?' I said, 'Yes, indeed.' They said, 'Are the ladies in?' I replied, 'Yes.' They said, 'We would like to have the honor of calling on them.' I asked them, 'Shall I say who the visitors are?' One of them told me with a laugh, 'Leave that to us. All the messenger needs to do is carry the message.' So I flew to you, my lady. I've been saying to myself, 'May our Lord make our dreams come true.' " (*Trilogy* 153)

The rhythm of action here is slow because Umm Hanafi is an ignorant maid. She spends her days in the kitchen of al-Sayyid's house. Umm Hanafi has neither friends nor family, and of her relatives we know nothing. She is alone most of the time and has no connection with the outside world. A woman with a life like this cannot express herself in a sophisticated way with full sentences or a select vocabulary. In addition, a maid in an Arab context has to repeat to her master or mistress every word she has been told and has to inform him or her of everything she has heard or seen. Otherwise, she may be charged with unfaithfulness and may be dismissed from her job. This is exactly what Umm Hanafi is doing in the above passage.

Moreover, the narrator describes Umm Hanafi as follows:

Umm Hanafi was a stout woman who was shapeless and formless. The single goal governing her ample increase in flesh had been corpulence. Considerations of beauty had been ignored. She was totally satisfied, for she reckoned corpulence to be beauty of the finest sort. No wonder, then, that all her household chores seemed almost secondary to her in comparison with her primary duty, which was to fatten up the family, or more specifically the females, with miraculous remedies that were not only charms to produce beauty but its secret essence. (*Trilogy* 19)

The information given about Umm Hanafi in this passage explains the way she speaks. If she reports facts stupidly, it is because of her ignorance. Mahfouz is not

humiliating Egyptian women here but instead presenting a sharp criticism of their situation. His sarcasm is a way of calling for women's emancipation. Women have to be granted the right to education in order to learn how to talk about things and how to defend themselves.

However, the adaptation of his style and his narrative mode to the oriental context was not his only focus. Mahfouz was also a great admirer of Western culture, especially Western literature. *The Cairo Trilogy* is not merely an imitation of Western family sagas. It is a novel where borrowed techniques have been adapted to the context and to the purposes of the writer. In other words, even as a realistic novel, *The Cairo Trilogy* betrays modernist influences, especially in terms of Joyce's approach. The influence of Joyce manifests itself in both form and content. Like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the *Trilogy* examines the family, and the political and religious structures into which Kamal is born. The *Trilogy* also presents us with a portrait of Kamal from youth to adulthood, together with the transformations he undergoes. In this sense, Kamal and Stephen Dedalus, the hero of Joyce's *Portrait*, share many characteristics, as if Kamal were modelled on Joyce's character.

The first transformation in the life of Stephen Dedalus takes place when he is transferred to the religious school, Clongowes Wood College. Because of the heavy debts of his father, Simon Dedalus, Stephen and his family have to move to Dublin. In Dublin, Stephen attends the prestigious Belvedere School, where he excels as a writer. Stephen's Irish nationality and Catholic faith play a crucial role in shaping his personality. In Dublin, he is tempted by the lure of a prostitute, and after this sexual experience, Stephen finds himself suspended between human desire and morality. Nevertheless, Stephen relativises and pursues the satisfaction of his human needs. He continues his visits to prostitutes and indulges in sin until the day he hears Father Arnall's speech about sin, judgement and hell. Deeply affected by what he learns, Stephen resolves to repent. In this way, he is transformed from a sinner back to a pious Christian. This time, he dedicates himself fully to religious duties, to the point where he is offered the opportunity to join the Jesuit order. However, Stephen rejects the priesthood because he realises that his human needs outweigh religious precepts. He also realises that religious devotion and love for beauty are incompatible. During a walk on the beach, Stephen observes a beautiful girl wading in the sea. He becomes more certain that his choice to reject the priesthood was the

right one, and decides to live his life to the full. He attends university, where he makes some friends, including Cranly, with whom he shares his thoughts and feelings. Stephen also meets Davin, Lynch, McCann and Temple. This phase is characterised by a number of conversations about art, religion and politics.

Like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the *Trilogy* follows Kamal through successive stages of life. Kamal is introduced in *Palace Walk* as a pupil at Khalil Agha Elementary School. Although he is still very young, he proves to be a boy with great imagination. Kamal shows great interest in the discussions of the family. He even considers that he should play a role in these discussions. However, in a society where permission to speak is granted according to a hierarchical order, it is difficult for a young boy to say anything, so he has to weave a powerful imaginary story.

“What an unforgettable sight I saw on my way home. I saw a boy jump on the steps of the Suarès omnibus. He slapped the conductor and then rushed off at top speed. But the man raced after him till he caught him. He kicked him in the stomach as hard as he could.” [...] “The boy fell down writhing with pain and people crowded around him. Then what do you know, he had departed from this life.” (*Trilogy* 58)

Kamal decides to fabricate this story to capture the attention of the family during the coffee hour. This foreshadows the strong personality of the hero. Kamal likes expressing his ideas and will sacrifice anything to gain this right.

However, Kamal, whose ‘father’s stick did more to his feet than tens of others would have’ (*Trilogy* 51), enjoys his mother’s protection and ‘would use every trick he knew to keep her beside him for the longest time possible’ (*Trilogy* 73). At school, despite the tyranny of the teacher, Kamal excels. He is capable of questioning the content of what he learns even though he is so young. Moreover, when Amina leaves the house, even though he knows that his intervention will lead to severe punishment from his father, he succeeds in overcoming his fears and confronting the patriarch: ‘Bring back Mama, God forgive you.’ (*Trilogy* 234) After taking his baccalaureate, Kamal decides to go to the teaching college instead of law school. The latter is a decent school which offers good career opportunities for its students.

Kamal grows up in a conservative family where religion has great importance and where religious duties are strictly observed. When Fuad announces to Kamal that he has arranged a meeting with Qamar and Narjis, the daughters of Abu Sari', with whom they have been flirting, Kamal refuses, arguing that '[he] can't meet God in [his] prayers when [his] underclothes are soiled.' (*Trilogy* 613) Kamal's religiosity also forbids him from drinking beer and eating ham with Aida and Husayn during a journey to the Pyramids: 'Let me eat the food I'm accustomed to and do me the honor of sharing it.' (*Trilogy* 740) But Kamal's inclinations to make sense of the world push him to question his inherited beliefs:

My primary goal is the truth. What is God? What is man? What is the spirit? What is matter? Philosophy gathers all these together into a single, luminous, logical synthesis – as I've recently learned. (*Trilogy* 747)

The day Kamal discovers his father's way of life, another transformation takes place in him. He loses confidence in everything:

But you're not the only one whose image has changed. God Himself's no longer the god I used to worship. I'm sifting His essential attributes to rid them of tyranny, despotism, dictatorship, compulsion, and similar human traits. (*Trilogy* 930)

Like Stephen Dedalus, not only does Kamal switch from deep religiosity to scepticism, he also undergoes a transformation to hedonism.

Yes, at last he had . . . after a long period of anxiety and apprehension, when he was torn between the ascetic skepticism of Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri and the more hedonistic version of Umar al-Khayyam. He was naturally inclined toward the former doctrine, although it preached a stern and sober life, because of its compatibility with the traditions in which he had been raised. But before he had known what was happening, he had found his soul longing for annihilation. A mysterious voice had whispered in his ear, "There's no religion, no Aida, and no hope. So let death come." (*Trilogy* 906)

Kamal's experience with the prostitute is like Stephen's experience with the Dublin prostitute. This first sexual experience unleashes a storm of guilt in Kamal. With his heart 'filled with sorrow' (*Trilogy* 915), Kamal sees sleeping with a prostitute as 'a painful decline' for which 'salvation was remote.' (*Trilogy* 915)

On the other hand, the intellectual conversations Kamal has with his friends remind us of Stephen's conversations with his friends at university. Mahfouz uses the same technique as Joyce to present his theories about literature, philosophy and religion. Thus, Kamal's development at the end of the *Trilogy* is similar to Stephen's. Both young men cast off religion and social tradition to live for art and literature.

If *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and the *Trilogy* appear to be straightforward novels in terms of content, since they are both about the development of a young man, modernist characteristics emerge where form is concerned. Interior monologue is an illustration of these characteristics. Joyce uses interior monologue for a number of reasons. He wishes to retain the emotional intensity of the experience, and to ensure the reader is 'acquainted with the principal characters not by being told about them, but by sharing their most intimate thoughts'<sup>18</sup>. Representing Stephen's thoughts as they go through his mind takes away the 'God-like omniscience'<sup>19</sup> of a narrator, eliminating the author's voice to establish a direct relationship between the reader and the character. Thus, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the writer is more concerned with the development of Stephen's mind than with external facts. In the *Trilogy*, Mahfouz also uses interior monologue but adapts it to the Egyptian context. Mahfouz himself notes:

The internal monologue is a method, a vision and a way of life; and even though I use it, you cannot say that I belong to its school as such. All that happens is that I sometimes encounter a Joycean moment in my hero's life, so I render it in Joyce's manner with some modification.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, Mahfouz uses the interior monologue technique to illustrate fear. The relationship of al-Sayyid to his family shapes the narrative of the first volume. Amina

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<sup>18</sup> David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts*, Penguin Books Literary Criticism. London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Rasheed El-Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*, London; New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 20.

and the children suffer the tyranny of the father who can be criticised only in thought, but never verbally.

Who has ever gone against your wishes? You marry me and divorce me.  
You give me life and take it away. I don't really exist. Khadija, Aisha,  
Fahmy, Yasin . . . all the same thing. We're nothing. You're everything.  
(*Trilogy* 439)

It is the patriarch who takes decisions in his house, and no one else. It is al-Sayyid Ahmad who has decided to marry Yasin to Zaynab, and now he is asking him to divorce her. This despotism is reflected in the narrative; he is 'everything' and controls everything. Fear is the primary reason why the children speak in short sentences. No conversations are allowed in the presence of the father. Each family member evolves alone and builds his/her own personality independently from the other members.

Because it is not always simple to externalise the inner states of mind of characters through relationships and conversations, Mahfouz uses interior monologues to show their development. In an atmosphere where fear reigns, it is not possible to talk about inner thoughts and beliefs. Fear is not only a weapon used by al-Sayyid but also by society. Yasin's opinion about his mother cannot be expressed through a conversation with a friend. It is a shame to have such a mother in such a society. Nor can Kamal's feelings in the house of prostitutes be externalised simply in a discussion. After Kamal's meeting with Yasin in Rose's brothel, Kamal's thoughts during the night cannot be expressed overtly.

Father! Let me tell you what's on my mind. I'm not angry about what I've learned of your character, because I like the newly discovered side better than the familiar one. I admire your charm, grace, impudence, rowdiness, and adventuresome spirit. That's your gentle side, the one all your acquaintances love. If it shows anything, it reveals your vitality and your enthusiasm for life and people. But I'd like to ask why you choose to show us this frightening and gruff mask? Don't appeal to the principles of child rearing, for you know less about that than anyone. The clearest proof is what you do and don't see of Yasin's conduct and mine. What have you done besides hurt and punish us with an ignorance

your good intentions do nothing to excuse? Don't be upset, for I still love and admire you. I'll always feel that way, sincerely. But my soul can't help blaming you for all the pain you've inflicted on me. We've never known you as a friend the way outsiders do. We've known you as a tyrannical dictator, a petulant despot. (*Trilogy* 930)

Kamal continues:

And you, Mother, don't stare at me with disapproval or ask me what I've done wrong when I've harmed no one. Ignorance is your crime, ignorance . . . ignorance . . . ignorance. My father's the manifestation of ignorant harshness and you of ignorant tenderness. As long as I live, I'll remain the victim of these two opposites. It's your ignorance, too, that filled my spirit with legends. You're my link to the Stone Age. How miserable I am now as I try to liberate myself from your influence. And I'll be just as miserable in the future when I free myself from my father. (*Trilogy* 931)

The two passages foreshadow Kamal's next rejection of all forms of authority. Kamal's discovery of the hidden face of the patriarch forces him to question everything around him. He blames his father for the fear he cultivated in them, while he sees his mother's submission as a result of her ignorance. His development would have been unrealistic without his interior monologues. In other words, the narrator uses the interior monologue device to show the personal development of his characters on the one hand, and to accelerate the rhythm of his story on the other.

Finally, the fear which gripped the characters in the first volumes disappears with the generation of the grandchildren in *Sugar Street*. The grandchildren have become mouthpieces for history and ideologies. Dialogue begins to dominate the narrative because the role of the parents has changed from commanding and forbidding to listening and advising. Unlike *Palace Walk* and *Palace of Desire*, *Sugar Street* is a fast-paced narrative covering a longer period.

### 6.3 Conclusions

The preface to the *Alexandria Quartet* notes that the link between the four volumes challenges the 'serial form of the conventional novel'. Interpretations of events change with further reading. New versions are superimposed on old ones, creating a palimpsest whose surface reveals old and new layers of the same story at the same time. Multiple narrators, and disturbances in the linearity of the text, help develop a role for the reader. In other words, the reader, the author and the text become inseparable. In *Balthazar*, the Interlinear questions the validity of Darley's narrative in *Justine*. In *Mountolive*, the Interlinear is no longer reliable. In *Clea*, the events of the whole story are shaped differently through Clea's letters. This suggests that the *Quartet* should be read as an open novel. The lack of closure is clear in the 'workpoints' at the end of *Clea*, with 'Hamid's story of Darley and Melissa' and 'Mountolive's child by the dancer Grishkin'. In a letter, Mountolive confides to Leila his love affair with Grishkin, and the problems he had with her pregnancy. The story ends, but nothing is said about this pregnancy or the child until they are mentioned in the 'workpoints'. There is also a reference to a duel involving Mountolive, resulting from his passion for an ambassador's mistress. This duel remains undeveloped until it is alluded to in the 'workpoints'. In this sense, Mahfouz's *Trilogy* can also be read as an open novel. We expect *Sugar Street* to close the story, but instead the author makes no attempt at closure. The end of the third volume could easily be the beginning of a new volume with a new generation of children.

In addition, the *Quartet* involves no denouement towards a climax, just events and interpretations. Each event is considered differently by individual characters. There are versions and corrections. The absence of any chronological order is intended to stress that events should not be considered in relation to time. Unlike the *Quartet*, the *Trilogy* relates events in the order in which they took place. The political history of Egypt between the two wars impregnates the events of the story. Each generation is presented in relation to history. Dates, names, parties, kings, sultans, leaders and treaties are all basic elements on which the narrative is built.

Finally, where characters in the *Trilogy* grow and move from childhood to adulthood, those in the *Quartet* do not move from one stage to another, so the reader is not taken through a process which results in a fully mature character at the end of the work. The characters only comment on events according to the context in which

they find themselves. We meet them either correcting other characters or amending their own accounts, but these corrections and amendments remain relative, as we cannot judge whether they are right or wrong. Justine expresses this idea succinctly when she tells Darley:

You know I never tell a story the same way twice. Does that mean that I am lying? (*Quartet* 72)

Rarely does Justine give a full account of an event. She limits herself to describing some elements as a first step and then waiting for a suitable moment to add other information. Justine is capable of hiding names, dates and details. She is even capable of hiding her emotions. When Nessim and Darley find her near her dead daughter, she proves to be very experienced in controlling her feelings:

I found it, of course. Or rather Mnemjian did. In a brothel. It died from something, perhaps meningitis. Darley and Nessim came and dragged me away. All of a sudden I realized that I could not bear to find it; all the time I hunted I lived on the hope of finding it. But this thing, once dead, seemed suddenly to deprive me of all purpose. I recognized it, but my inner mind kept crying out that it was not true, refusing to let me recognize it, even though I already had consciously done so! [...] Of course neither Nessim nor Darley noticed anything. Men are so stupid, they never do. (*Quartet* 765)

In fact, Justine does not lie outright. She only says what she wants to say.

In conclusion, *The Cairo Trilogy* tells the story of the family of al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad. It begins 25 years after the marriage of al-Sayyid and Amina. Only four children out of the five remain in the story until the end. The story advances and develops with the ageing of each character. Each volume is dedicated to a generation, and the three generations are linked interdependently. This means that the three volumes cannot be separated and that the full meaning is captured only if the *Trilogy* is read from beginning to end. The *Alexandria Quartet*, on the other hand, consists of four volumes which can be read individually. It is a set of novels where events are not subject to a logical succession in time. The four volumes tell the same story but from different points of view. No family relationships exist to link the

books together. Despite the passage of years, the story does not use generations to ensure continuity. Justine, Balthazar, Clea, Mountolive and Darley remain the main characters from beginning to end. Nothing is told of the second generation. We know nothing about Justine's daughter or about the child Mountolive has with Grishkin. There is no information about the development of Semira's pregnancy. Few details are given about Melissa's child, and these make no significant contribution. However, the unreliability of the narrators is where suspense is guaranteed. The absence of a definitive interpretation of what happens maintains our interest in the narrative. Like Darley, we look for truth to establish meaning.

In addition, in the *Alexandria Quartet* the reader is surprised to find passages repeated almost verbatim. Our curiosity intensifies when we discover that this repetition involves a slight change of one word or in the tense of a verb. Only then does it occur to us that these passages may have been repeated for a purpose. Rereading them with their minor changes transforms reality. In other words, by using repetition, Durrell creates a narrative in layers. In the *Trilogy* of Mahfouz, on the other hand, repetition is used to emphasise certain points and to remind us of details the narrator considers important. In other words, where repetition is used in the *Quartet* to destabilise us and to force us to establish links between events for ourselves, its purpose in *The Cairo Trilogy* is to bring the reader closer to the personality of Egyptians and to the Egyptian tradition of narrating events.

Furthermore, when Hasan Selim uses the words of Kamal to disturb his relationship with Aida, the narrator interferes to explain what is really happening. In the *Quartet*, the narrator would not have supported the reader in interpreting this type of event. Where the narrator of the *Trilogy* tells, shows and explains, the narrators in the *Quartet* disturb, distort and mislead. In addition, unlike Mahfouz's characters, Durrell's are not concerned about age. We do not know their exact age, and time seems to have no impact on them. If time is a hero in the *Trilogy*, the *Quartet* escapes time. Linearity, cohesion, continuity, causality and consistency of opinion are all characteristics used by Mahfouz to fabricate his realistic novel, whereas digression makes the *Quartet* a novel where the reader has to remain attentive to every word. Finally, *The Cairo Trilogy* presents us with a narrator who can be trusted implicitly, while the *Alexandria Quartet* leaves us with unreliable narrators who are capable of surprising us at any time.

Egypt forms the context of both *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy*, but the intended audiences for the two novels are different. Mahfouz presents his ideas by adopting Eastern narrative techniques to reach a wide readership from all over the world, while Durrell uses form and narrative techniques familiar to a Western readership. Arab readers cannot identify easily with the Egypt of Durrell because the story is in itself Western. Moreover, *The Alexandria Quartet* lacks elements of the Eastern story. For example, a reader acquainted with the way Arabs use suspense in telling their stories will easily conclude that the *Quartet* was written with a Western audience in mind.

## Conclusions and implications for further research

### I. Conclusions

This comparative study aims to render more explicit the examination of the East/West encounter in Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy* of Mahfouz. Applying Said's theories of Orientalism to the analysis of the *Quartet* leads to the conclusion that it is the work of an Orientalist. However, Said's theories do not take into account the Oriental point of view, a gap which, on close inspection, Mahfouz's *The Cairo Trilogy* may fill. In contrast to Durrell, Mahfouz seems to present a relatively balanced attitude towards both West and East. These two opposing views of the East have been studied from various standpoints.

From the viewpoint of their physical relation to the city, Durrell's Europeans simply observe how Egyptians live and behave, instead of becoming an organic part of the city. In the *Trilogy*, however, this distance is absent. Mahfouz's characters are part of Cairo and represent the life of the city in all its aspects. In terms of their perception of the city, instead of admiring its beautiful scenery, the characters in *The Alexandria Quartet* prefer to focus on the dirty and the odd. If their scars are still unhealed, it is the Orient which is responsible. Living in a place with such damaging power is destructive, and only fleeing to Europe will allow them to rescue what is left to be saved. In contrast, characters in the *Trilogy* are deeply attached to the city, with its streets, alleys and coffeehouses. Old houses, shops, souks and bazars are seen as a sort of sumptuous décor rather than a symbol of poverty and underdevelopment.

Where power relations between Westerner and Easterner are concerned, in *The Alexandria Quartet*, the characters consider themselves superior to all things Eastern, while Mahfouz emphasises the positive aspects of both worlds. In *The Alexandria Quartet*, the Oriental is always in need of the Occidental. It is the European who teaches the natives about standards of hygiene. It is the European who repairs mutilated bodies. The European is the doctor, the painter, the

photographer, the teacher, the novelist, the poet and the diplomat, while the Oriental is the illiterate, the servant, the maid and the beggar. In contrast, Mahfouz's depiction of East and West can be said to be relatively unbiased. In the *Trilogy*, unexpectedly, the West is praised, which was courageous given the sensitive colonial context. Mahfouz is an ardent defender of human rights and an anti-imperialist par excellence, but his admiration of the West is a form of patriotism. The love he manifests for Western science and philosophy is an invitation for Egyptians and Arabs to review their social and political systems by learning from European experience in these fields. Following in the footsteps of predecessors like Taha Hussein, Mahfouz also calls for women's emancipation in his *Trilogy*. In this sense, too, he demonstrates his admiration for Western women and the role they play in their society. Therefore, where the encounter of East and West in Durrell's *Quartet* is problematic in that Durrell's West assumes a superior role to the East, the encounter in Mahfouz's *Trilogy* appears to be relatively impartial.

In terms of their choice of city, both Durrell and Mahfouz regard Alexandria and Cairo respectively as major characters in their stories. Although the cities of the two authors bear similarities, however, an investigation based on the notion of East/West reveals considerable disparities. In the *Quartet*, Alexandria is examined as the capital of European memory. Durrell chooses it as the setting for his tetralogy because of its significance to European culture and to Western thought in general. The city thus becomes a metaphor that transcends time, where the present becomes past and the past becomes present. However, the Cairo of Mahfouz is no less significant than Durrell's Alexandria. In fact, Cairo inspired most of Mahfouz's novels. Egyptian culture reveals itself through its streets, its alleys, its souks, its shops and its coffeehouses. The city also serves to expose social problems, especially those related to the 'niggar'<sup>1</sup> situation of women and to the ambivalent life led by Egyptian men, predominantly triggered by religious restrictions. In other words, while Alexandria vacillates between the 'real' and the 'unreal', Cairo remains realistic throughout the story, though it retains the same charm and magnificence as Alexandria.

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<sup>1</sup> Haim Gordon, *Naguib Mahfouz's Egypt: Existential Themes in his Writings*, Contributions to the Study of World Literature, no 38, New York: Greenwood Press, 1990, p. 57.

Even the concept of love cannot evade the East/West dichotomy. While love in Durrell's world finds its full meaning in European literature and philosophy, love in the world of Mahfouz remains predominantly Eastern. The *Quartet* manifests Durrell's admiration of Elizabethan literature, especially Shakespeare. The references to Stendhal's *On Love*, Huysmans' *A Rebours*, the Marquis de Sade, Rabelais, Goethe, Freud and Plato establish love within the boundaries of Western culture. In contrast, the *Trilogy*, with its references to ancient Arabic poetry and folk epics, situates love within its Eastern confines. *The Thousand and One Nights*, *Antar and Abla*, *Layla and Majnoun*, are Eastern references through which Mahfouz easternises love.

Examinations of East and West also involve the subject of religion. Critics rarely mention the role of religion in *The Alexandria Quartet*, but a comparison with the *Trilogy* reveals a need to analyse this role. As Durrell chose Alexandria as a setting because of its significance to Western culture, and as religion is an indispensable element of culture, it also merits a place in the analysis. Alexandria was and still is known for its religious diversity. It was also once a centre of European mystical traditions. These two significant characteristics are used in the *Quartet* not to present religion as it is experienced, or its role in people's lives, but to reposition the city within its European origins. In contrast to the *Quartet*, the *Trilogy* approaches religion more conventionally. It shows how people rely heavily on religion to solve their problems in other areas of life, and to illustrate this Mahfouz highlights poor understanding and misinterpretation of religious texts, the conflict between religion and science, and the rise of extremism. In criticising the atrocities of extremism, Mahfouz seems to be calling for Egypt and the Orient at large to free themselves from the adverse effects extremism has on society.

As a final point, the writing style is also subject to this duality of East and West. *The Alexandria Quartet* displays a number of features which can reasonably be characterised as postmodern. Distortions, fragmentation, unreliability of narrators, lack of chronology and repetition are all characteristics of a story where Durrell invites his readers to abandon their conventional role and become part of the text, instead of being told everything by an omniscient narrator. Where the *Trilogy* is concerned, even though the story is told chronologically by an omniscient narrator, a modern aspect can be observed, mainly in terms of how marriage and the sense of time are portrayed. For Mahfouz, this was the most suitable approach for the ideas

he wished to express. However, these modernist features appear with a number of adaptations in the *Trilogy*, making Mahfouz an innovator instead of simply an imitator. He is, in fact, as innovative as Durrell, who is considered to have pre-empted postmodernism.

## II. Implications for further research: translations

It will also be useful to examine how translations have addressed the following issues: the fact that, in the *Quartet*, the city vacillates between the real and the unreal; the fact that the idea of the West in the *Quartet* is incomplete unless Western philosophy is taken into account; the fact that love in the *Quartet* will appear less westernised without an analysis of the relationship of Egyptian men to women and sex; the fact that religion and intrigue intertwine so that the narration appears in layers, and the fact that the story is told from different points of view with a disturbing absence of chronological order. On the other hand, to what extent have *The Trilogy's* translators managed to present the Western reader with a text faithful to the original, given that humour in the *Trilogy* is mainly Eastern, the full meaning is often simply alluded to in order to establish an intimate relationship with the reader or to escape censorship, and the Qur'an is an important intertext through which the untold is as powerful as the told?

In April 1961, the first translation of *Justine*, by Dr Salma Khadra Jayusi, was published by Dar al-Taliaa in Beirut.<sup>2</sup> In November 1962, the same editor published *Balthazar* in Arabic, by the same translator.<sup>3</sup> Thereafter the project was discontinued. In 1969, Dar al-Ma'arif, the famous Egyptian publishing house, published another translation of *Justine*, with Dr Fakhri Labib as translator.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not until 1992 that he translated the other volumes. As Arab readers were able to read only *Justine* and *Balthazar* in translation before 1992, they had no opportunity to appreciate the full meaning of the *Quartet*. In other words, the fact that the release of the final volumes was postponed for 23 years did the reputation of Durrell's tetralogy no favours.

Fakhri Labib's translation was greatly instrumental in introducing *The*

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, al-Safat: Dar Su'ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

*Alexandria Quartet* to Arabic literature. As the story and its twists are very complex, translating it into Arabic is a daunting task. In this version, Fakhri Labib has managed to find the right balance between the Arabic language and the European themes. The *Quartet* is a book of philosophies: the philosophies of time, place, religion and love, and the language used is a reflection of these philosophies. Durrell uses a special vocabulary for his descriptions. His syntax parallels the psychological state of his characters, and his sentences are broken to mirror the fact that Alexandria is under bombardment. Switching from prose to verse, some passages make use of strong, poetic language with remarkably few verbs or conjunctions. Moreover, *The Alexandria Quartet* is a psychological work centred on experience rather than action. Its pages are full of detailed descriptions of feelings. Thus, it is a considerable struggle to find words in Arabic to convey these meanings or bring us closer to them. Fakhri Labib nevertheless overcomes these obstacles successfully, and offers Arab readers a work which is interesting from an artistic point of view.

However, there remain some areas which require further work if readers are to be brought closer to Durrell's ideas. In the first volume, Darley, speaking about Justine, says:

Now she yawned and lit a cigarette; and sitting up in bed clasped her slim ankles with her hands; reciting slowly, wryly, those marvellous lines of the old Greek poet about a love-affair long since past — they are lost in English. (*Quartet* 28)

When *The Alexandria Quartet* was translated into Arabic, certain aspects underwent the same transformation as the lines of Cavafy when they were translated into English. To illustrate this point further, I shall examine how the Arabic version of the *Quartet* approaches some of Durrell's ideas and narrative techniques.

Firstly, in *The Alexandria Quartet* we learn how a place can become a character. In chapter 3, I discussed the city as a real place and the city as an idea. Alexandria, which is more than a setting for the main action, stimulates memory. In this city, linear time is disrupted; the present and the past exchange roles; the real and the unreal fuse together. The events challenge the linear timeline, and the meaning lies predominantly in the incomplete and the fragmentary. The role of the city as such is complex, and the task of translators is more complex still, because the translation of

everything the ‘romanticized’ and ‘mythicized’<sup>5</sup> city invokes defies conventional words, syntax and language. The Arabic version clearly takes great pains to transmit these meanings, but some inadequacies remain.

Durrell’s translation of C.P. Cavafy’s poem “The City” provides a key to understanding the role of the city in the tetralogy. “The City” does not appear in Labib’s Arabic translation, which means part of the city’s significance for Durrell’s world is lost. Also, without the translation of this poem, the role of Cavafy in the story loses its importance. In effect, this poem appears as a message to Darley, who leaves Alexandria for ‘some other land’ (*Quartet* 201) in search of himself. It is in the lines of this poem that we understand that the city is an idea: ‘no ship exists / To take you from yourself’ (*Quartet* 201). Cavafy’s poem summarises Darley’s experience with Alexandria. It also foreshadows the disappointment he feels when he says at the beginning of *Balthazar*. ‘Have I not said enough about Alexandria?’ (*Quartet* 209) If Durrell inserts this poem between *Justine* and *Balthazar*, it is because he has a reason for doing so. In fact, the poem is a transition between the two volumes. Balthazar’s words in the letter he sends Darley in the second volume echo Cavafy’s words. “The City” opens with: ‘You tell yourself: I’ll be gone / To some other land, some other sea’ (*Quartet* 201). Balthazar, who knows Cavafy, uses the same tone when he writes: ‘You have retired to your island, with, as you think, all the data about us and our lives.’ (*Quartet* 211)

In addition, a very precise choice of words is used whenever Durrell describes Darley’s relationship with Alexandria. I have explained in chapter 3 the subtleties contained in the following repetition:

A city becomes a world when one loves one of its inhabitants.’ (*Quartet* 57)

When you are in love with one of its inhabitants a city can become a world. (*Quartet* 832)

The Arabic word ‘*tosbiho*’<sup>6</sup> appears as a translation for ‘becomes’ in the first

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<sup>5</sup> Donald P. Kaczvinsky, ed., *Durrell and the City: Collected Essays on Place*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012, p. xii.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, al-Safat: Dar Su‘ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 67.

statement, while the phrase ‘can become’ is also translated as ‘*tosbiho*’<sup>7</sup>, ignoring the function of the verb ‘can’. Normally, the phrase ‘*qad tosbibo*’ would be used. Even the word ‘inhabitants’ is not repeated. In the first statement, Labib uses ‘*sokkan*’<sup>8</sup>, while in the second statement he uses ‘*mowateni*’<sup>9</sup> a synonym of ‘*sokkan*’. Although these synonyms are adequate translations for the word ‘inhabitants’, the idea behind the repetition is somehow lost. In fact, not only is the meaning disfigured, it also becomes harder to notice the repetition.

Since love is a major theme in the tetralogy, it is crucial to examine what the Arabic translation omits, and what could be added to fill the gap. Just after “The City” at the end of *Justine*, Durrell translates another of Cavafy’s poems: “The God Abandons Antony”. As we have seen in a previous chapter, there are strong similarities between the stories of Darley and Antony. In Labib’s translation, “The God Abandons Antony” does not appear as a supplement to the first volume. A translation of this poem could have helped the Arab reader understand Durrell’s investigation of love in the tetralogy. Once again, Cavafy loses his role as ‘part-author’<sup>10</sup> of the *Quartet*.

It is not only omissions which render the translations faulty but also some erroneous choices of word. On the balcony on a romantic summer’s night, Justine asks Arnauti: ‘Quick. *Engorge-moi*. From desire to revulsion – let’s get it over’ (*Quartet* 63). The Shakespearean concept of love behind the phrase is lost because the word ‘revulsion’ is translated as ‘*qimat al-ladda*’<sup>11</sup>, an Arabic expression meaning ‘the height of pleasure’, a far cry from what Durrell intended with this phrase.

As I have noted above, when Amaril says that ‘[b]efore [his] love has a chance to crystallize, it turns into a deep, a devouring *friendship*’ (*Quartet* 299), he is making reference to Stendhal’s process of crystallisation. In the Arabic translation, the word ‘*yatabhwar*’<sup>12</sup> is used to translate ‘crystallise’. Although this is the correct word for ‘crystallisation’, a footnote is required to specify that this is an allusion to Stendhal’s *De l’Amour*. Readers of the Arabic version will not easily recognise this,

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Clea*, al-Safat: Dar Su‘ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 288.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, al-Safat: Dar Su‘ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Clea*, al-Safat: Dar Su‘ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 288.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Pine, *The Mindscape*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994, p. 191.

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, al-Safat: Dar Su‘ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Balthazar*, al-Safat: Dar Su‘ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 136.

and as a result, will fail to infer Amaril's failures with women from the allusion. Moreover, this omission robs Amaril's words of meaning, as the verb 'to crystallise' in Arabic is not logically associated with love.

Another allusion which requires a footnote involves the passage referring to Huysmans' *A Rebours*. The title *A Rebours* is translated into Arabic using the word '*Bi al-Aaks*'<sup>13</sup>. This translation makes no reference to Huysmans. In fact, the state of Clea's mind and feelings after the departure of Justine can be understood only in relation to Huysmans' book. Here also, a footnote giving information about the book's original title and its author is strongly recommended. Otherwise, readers will make no association, and as a result, Durrell's notion of love and sexuality will be lost on them. In summary, the lack of footnotes in the Arabic version of the *Quartet*, which would add context to allusions in the original, prevents the reader from fully understanding some of Durrell's ideas, and seeing the extent to which Durrell has remained European in his approach to love in the tetralogy.

The metaphysical world of the tetralogy also suffers in translation, and some paragraphs appear awkward. The wording is correct but the meaning is lost. For example:

Broken from the divine harmony of herself she fell, says the tragic philosopher, and became the manifestation of matter; and the whole universe of her city, of the world, was formed out of her agony and remorse. The tragic seed from which her thoughts and actions grew was the seed of a pessimistic gnosticism. (*Quartet* 39)

In the Arabic translation, this paragraph does not make sense because it lacks a central idea. It is a paragraph which would make little sense in an Arabic literary work. As a result, though it is supposed to tell us about Justine and her relationship with the esoteric world of Alexandria, it fails to do so.

Furthermore, the surface meaning of Balthazar/Durrell's '*indulge but refine*' (*Quartet* 85) is kept in the Arabic translation of the phrase. Labib uses the Arabic words '*inghamis wa lakin intaqi*'<sup>14</sup>, which have the same literal meaning as the English

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<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, al-Safat: Dar Su'ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

ones. However, it is impossible for the reader to associate these words with the airgraph Durrell sent to Diana Gould, which I mentioned in chapter 5. Even though the Arabic phrase appears in brackets, a note is required to explain the context of these two words.

In chapter 6, I discussed repetitions and their function in the tetralogy. In the Arabic translation of the *Quartet*, some passages are not repeated in the same way as they are repeated in the English version. To illustrate this, in the following repeated passage in the *Quartet*, only the words in bold are added:

They met more than once, formally, like business partners, **in the lounge of the Cecil Hotel** to discuss the matter of this marriage with the detachment of Alexandrian brokers planning a cotton merger. This is the way of the city. (*Quartet* 245)

They **had** met more than once, formally, **almost** like business partners to discuss the matter of this marriage with the detachment of Alexandrian brokers planning a cotton merger. **But** this is the way of the city. (*Quartet* 551)

Apart from the phrase ‘in the lounge of the Cecil Hotel’, which does not appear in the second passage, only three words are added in repeating the passage. However, in the Arabic version this pattern is not respected. The meaning is kept but different words are used. Even the order of words is affected. If we try to translate the first passage from Arabic to English, the result will be approximately as follows:

They met more than once, formally, like business partners, in the lounge of the Cecil Hotel to discuss the matter of this marriage with the detachment of Alexandrian brokers planning to start cotton business operations. Yet, this is the procedure the city follows in dealing with its affairs.<sup>15</sup> (*My translation*)

The same exercise with the repeated passage will look like this:

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<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Balihazar*, al-Safat: Dar Su‘ad al-Sabah, 1992, pp. 61-62.

They met formally more than once as if they had been two business partners; they discussed the matter of this marriage with detachment, like the brokers of Alexandria when they are planning a cotton deal based on a merger. Yet, this was the way the city solved its problems.<sup>16</sup> (*My translation*)

The function of repetition is clearly lost. It is important to add here that in the first passage Labib uses '*iltaqaya*' as a translation for the verb 'to meet', while in the repeated passage he uses the word '*taqabala*', a synonym of '*iltaqaya*'. The same applies to the word 'merge'. In the second extract it is translated as '*damj*', which is a perfect translation, while '*al-ghaws fi amaliyat*' appears in the first extract to refer to the same activity.

These translation issues are not the only obstacles which stand between the Arab reader and the *Quartet* in translation; there are other issues which are related to the Arabic literary tradition. From a narrative point of view, it is not usual in Arabic literature to read a whole volume without knowing the identity of the narrator. Darley remains unidentified until the second volume. Nor is it usual to provide portraits of characters without establishing a relationship between them and the events of the story. At the beginning of *Balthazar*, Darley informs us:

My only answer was to send him the huge bundle of paper which had grown up so stiffly under my slow pen and to which I had loosely given her name as a title — though *Cahiers* would have done just as well.  
(*Quartet* 211)

*Justine* is a sort of folder with files. Each file is devoted to a character but no clear links are made between them to allow us to form a story. The anonymous narrator presents Melissa to us, along with some details about her life and her relationship with the old furrier. He introduces the wealthy Nessim and his wife Justine. Then information is given about Capodistria, but this is done in a more general sense. Apart from his wealth, his mental disorder and his sexual greed, no information of any significance is given. We are not informed about how Darley is in debt to Capodistria. We know only that Melissa has paid the debt. Mnemjian is then

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<sup>16</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Mountolive*, al-Safat: Dar Su'ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 248.

introduced, followed by Pursewarden. However, when Darley introduces Balthazar, he does not indicate his name. He describes his profession and his Hermeticism without stating his importance to the story and without specifying why he chooses to talk about him at that precise moment.

On the other hand, it comes as a surprise when *Justine* opens by suggesting that the city is behind the misfortunes of the Europeans residing in Alexandria, since it is the first time a city has been given a role of this type in Arabic literature. Darley accuses Alexandria of being behind the disturbing contradictions he is experiencing, but how has this transpired? The answer is not given, and the idea remains very abstract for Arab readers. In addition, lying beside Justine in a moment of intimacy, Darley anxiously raises questions about the future of their exhausted love affair. Justine immediately makes the city responsible for their circumstances:

We are not strong or evil enough to exercise choice. All this is part of an experiment arranged by something else, the city perhaps, or another part of ourselves. (*Quartet 28*)

The relationship between the city and the context of Justine and Darley's love affair is far from obvious. From the wording of the paragraph in Arabic, the reader can understand only one thing: 'the city has arranged the love-affaire'<sup>17</sup>. Justine and Darley did not choose to love each other. It is the choice of the city. This of course remains meaningless. Furthermore, how does this relate to Darley's subsequent reflection on Justine's words?

I remember her sitting before the multiple mirrors at the dress-maker's, being fitted for a shark-skin costume, and saying: 'Look! five different pictures of the same subject. Now if I wrote I would try for a multi-dimensional effect in character, a sort of prism-sightedness. Why should not people show more than one profile at a time?' (*Quartet 28*)

In addition, the first pages of the first volume contain no real story. Even the events lack any sort of connection. The reader is incapable of summarising the content of these pages. As though it were a poem, *Justine* is a composition designed to convey emotions and experiences through powerful language and sophisticated

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, al-Safat: Dar Su'ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 26.

poetic diction. *Justine* is also written with an intensity of imagination uncommon in prose. All these elements are alien to the Arabic novel. Readers who are accustomed to conventional stories therefore find themselves confronted with uncommon complexity.

On the other hand, the disorder with which Darley tells his story is a narrative technique which was also alien to Arabic literature at the time. The Arab reader was not yet prepared to understand stories with no logical succession of events. In other words, for some Arab readers, the *Quartet* may lack the quality of a good story, where events constantly encourage us to ask the question ‘what will happen next?’

Furthermore, Arab readers who are used to narrators who guide them through the story cannot expect to learn anything of Justine’s tale through *Moeurs*, the novel written by Arnauti. We are also surprised to find a narrator who ignores the lives of his characters, especially those with whom he has strong relationships. A love affair like the one between Justine and Darley is supposed to be a relationship in which the partners have developed a deep knowledge of each other. However, Darley discovers the details of Justine’s first marriage at the same time as the reader, whereas he could be expected to have known more than us about the private life of the woman he loves.

Finally, *The Alexandria Quartet* is written in lyrical, rather than ordinary prose. This type of work is not familiar to the Arab reader because few novelists have experimented with the genre. As he thinks of Melissa, Darley says:

To stand lightly there, our little fingers linked, drinking in the deep camphor-scented afternoon, a part of city. . . . (*Quartet* 19)

In the Arabic version, this sentence is translated using words which accurately represent the first part. However, the second part is translated using the phrase ‘*nachrabo jozʿaan mina al-madina*’<sup>18</sup>, which literally means: ‘we drink a part of the city’. This sentence has no real meaning in Arabic prose.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

In terms of reception, Halim Barakat, quoted by Roger Allen, says in his *Arabic Novels and Social Transformation*:

Contemporary Arab writers are preoccupied with themes of struggle, revolution, liberation, emancipation, rebellion, alienation. A writer could not be part of Arab society and yet not concern himself with change. To be oblivious to tyranny, injustice, poverty, deprivation, victimization, repression, is insensitively proper. I would even say that writing about Arab society without concerning oneself with change is a sort of *engagement* in irrelevances.<sup>19</sup>

A study of the *Trilogy* with regard to Arab readers' expectations will reveal that Naguib Mahfouz was preoccupied with the same themes. *The Cairo Trilogy* is a work par excellence about Egyptian society and about the struggle of Egyptians for political independence. In writing the *Trilogy*, Mahfouz corresponds perfectly to a profile of Arab writers with whom Arab readers can easily identify. As Halim Barakat points out, a work about the years between the wars which did not reflect the turbulence and the conflicts war and colonisation imposed on people risked rejection.

And this is exactly the case with *The Alexandria Quartet*. For Egyptians and Arab readers, the *Quartet* is not a work about Egypt and Egyptians. Therefore, it is not a work with which Egyptian readers can easily identify, even though it has been translated into Arabic. Among the consultants who supervised the translation of the *Quartet* into Arabic was the Egyptian novelist Youssef al-Qaeed. At the end of the Arabic version of *Justine* he writes:

I did not like in this novel the special attention given by the writer to foreigners. Foreigners are presented as brilliant while Egyptian citizens are given a marginal place in the narrative. The novelist failed to see Egypt in its broad sense and failed to go farther than the city of Alexandria. Moreover, in Alexandria he only saw its foreigners while true Alexandrians are given a secondary role. The novelist saw Alexandria

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<sup>19</sup> Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. Contemporary Issues in the Middle East, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 69.

with a tourist's eye, even though we cannot ignore or minimize his excellence as an artist.<sup>20</sup> (*My translation*)

Despite the presence of some real historical events, Egyptian names and real Alexandrian streets, *The Alexandria Quartet* remains for some Arab readers, especially Egyptian ones, an irrelevant work because war has not 'served as a predominant theme'<sup>21</sup> and because it does not focus on the British colonisation. This failure can also be detected in Mary Massoud's article "Historic or Comic? The Irishness of Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*", in which she states:

I should like to suggest that Durrell, the Anglo-Irish novelist, was primarily interested in producing a comedy which (whether consciously or not) is very much in "the Irish comic tradition" (to borrow Vivian Mercier's expression), and that the setting of *The Alexandria Quartet* is no more objectively real than, say, Brobdingnag or Lilliput in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.<sup>22</sup>

With her insistence on the 'Irishness' of Durrell's *Quartet*, Massoud's commentary implicitly suggests that the tetralogy fails as a work about Egypt and Egyptians. Another example can be found in Mahmoud Manzaloui's "Curate's Egg: An Alexandrian Opinion of Durrell's *Quartet*". In this article, published in 1962, Manzaloui denounces 'Durrell's distortion of objective details, in view of all the linguistic, topographical and historical inaccuracies it contains.'<sup>23</sup> In response to Manzaloui's vexation, Kaczvinsky adds in his introduction to *Durrell and the City: Collected Essays on Place* that 'as early as 1962, Mahmoud Manzaloui felt Durrell's depiction insulting, even dangerously irresponsible.'<sup>24</sup>

Mahfouz's *Trilogy* was translated into English by William Maynard Hutchins between 1990 and 1992. Hutchins' translation is relatively successful in bringing his readers closer to Egyptian culture. In the English language translation, we feel the

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, al-Safat: Dar Su'ad al-Sabah, 1992, p. 278.

<sup>21</sup> Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. Contemporary Issues in the Middle East, Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> Lynch, Patricia A., Joachim Fischer, and Brian Coates, eds., *Back to the Present, Forward to the Past: Irish Writing and History since 1798*, Vol. 2, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006, p. 378.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 377.

<sup>24</sup> Donald P. Kaczvinsky, ed., *Durrell and the City: Collected Essays on Place*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012, p. xii.

cordial environment of Cairo's coffee houses as it really exists. The atmosphere in the streets is depicted as if the text were being read in Arabic. The spirit of Cairo with its souks, its alleys, its mosques and its people is preserved in a masterly fashion to the point where Arab and non-Arab readers are equally engaged. Life inside the old houses is described meticulously, as a contrast with life outside. In fact, Hutchins describes the obsession of Egyptian men with the female body as if he were an Arab.

It is generally in conversations that the problems of translation become apparent. In *Palace of Desire*, when al-Sayyid Ahmad returns to his nightly entertainments after a five-year abstention, he is welcomed by his friends. The original text simply says that Muhammad Iffat welcomes his friend with the words '*talaâa al-badro âlayna*'<sup>25</sup>. The phrase needs no context because the song is famous and part of Islamic heritage. The English text, however, renders this as follows:

The first to reach him was Muhammad Iffat, who embraced him as he quoted from a popular song: "The beauty of the full moon is shining upon us." (*Trilogy* 617)

The phrase 'quoted from a popular song' was added by Hutchins to make reference to the Islamic song sung by the Ansar (citizens of Madinah who helped the Prophet Muhammad and his followers) to welcome the Prophet Muhammad when he arrived in Madinah. Hutchins also specifies that the phrase '[if] you are tempted, conceal yourselves' (*Trilogy* 618) is one of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings, while the Arabic version simply says '*wa ida boliytom fa statirou*',<sup>26</sup> which requires no additional comment. So unlike the Arabic translation of the *Quartet*, where allusions remain unclarified, the English translation of the *Trilogy* translates them by incorporating an explanation of the context.

However, if the latter translation is ingenious, the untold nevertheless remains a daunting challenge. In a society supervised by religion and traditions, writers are usually confronted with the obstacle of how to avoid censorship and rejection in terms of how they approach certain issues. Even conversations are subject to these rules. Issues concerning sexuality and religion, for example, have to use words which belong to everyday conversation but which incorporate a

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<sup>25</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, *Qasr al-Shanq*, Cairo: Dar Misr Liltibaha, 1957, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

secondary, hidden meaning through a form of complicity with the reader. In his *Trilogy*, Mahfouz switches between the overt and covert meanings of words, making his Arab reader an accomplice in sharing the power of the untold as well as the implicit humour. It is this complicity which seems to have been difficult to reproduce in translation.

In other words, the style of Mahfouz is a reflection of the realities of Cairo life. Unlike Durrell's work, where syntax is an expression of the relativity of truth, Mahfouz's syntax is simple, conventional and without distortions. However, it is these seemingly straightforward words which give rise to complex issues of translation. There is a vast difference between the literal meaning of certain words and expressions, and their connotations, which creates a discrepancy in how they are understood by Arab and Western readers, the latter remaining unaware of their full context in Arabic. The subject of homosexuality provides a good example. When Abd al-Rahim Pasha uses the term 'rapscallion' (*Trilogy* 1053) to translate the word '*Ifrit*'<sup>27</sup> in describing Hilmi, it carries no direct connotation of homosexual love. To illustrate this point further, I have selected a number of statements which provide a key to reading Mahfouz in translation. It should be emphasised here that there are many other statements which merit discussion, but including them all would be beyond the scope of this dissertation.

'Shaking her head gently' (*Trilogy* 5): these words are correctly translated but some additional clarification is required to convey the full meaning. In this context, the woman is shaking her head to express regret. Which words remain unspoken in terms of this shaking of the head? There are clearly questions which remain unanswered: Why me? Why should I wake up at midnight, the sweetest moment for rest, to wait for him? Why am I not allowed to contest and openly disapprove of his behaviour? The meanings of gestures differ from one culture to another, and translating words only, without giving additional information, renders these gestures meaningless.

Another example of where intertextuality is required involves the remark '[reciting] the opening prayer of the Qur'an and Sura one hundred and twelve from it, about the absolute supremacy of God' (*Trilogy* 7). Here there is a text within a text,

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<sup>27</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, *Al-Sukariyah*, Cairo: Dar Misr Liltibaha, 1957, p. 71.

which is accompanied by a footnote. The meaning is clearer when the reader bears in mind the two texts mentioned in this passage. These two Suras are cited when one needs help and when God remains the ultimate refuge. The woman is in a state of fear, and feels alone in facing this uncomfortable situation. For an English reader to grasp these meanings fully, a translated version of the Qur'an is required, or some notes about the meaning and use of these two Suras.

Yet another remark which evades translation is '[d]idn't you hear the answer? He said in that case I'd be riding you.' (*Trilogy* 11) The joke loses its effect in translation. Western readers cannot understand why the men in the vehicle 'exploded with laughter' at the first part of the joke, and why they 'burst out laughing' in response to the second part. The situation is likely to be amusing to readers with a knowledge of the Arabic language, but not to readers with a foreign background.

When al-Sayyid Ahmad thinks of moments of laughter, singing and drinking, he abandons himself to them and sighs 'God is most great.' (*Trilogy* 14) For English readers, there is no obvious role for God in this situation. The expression in Arabic has nothing in common with the individual meanings of the words. It is an idiomatic expression used to denote pleasure or excitement. In English, the phrase cannot be used in an idiomatic sense to express the feelings engendered by such memories.

Nor are greetings in Egyptian culture the same as in the West. Amina responds to the 'Good morning' of her son Fahmy by saying '[l]ight of my eyes, may your morning be bright.' (*Trilogy* 22) In the Arab world, the response must be richer than the greeting which opens the conversation. This principle appears among the Prophet's instructions to his fellows. It explains why Amina uses nine words to answer her son, who has only used two. In English, the two greetings are the same, and responding to a greeting with the same words is not considered impolite. A phrase like Amina's is therefore uncommon in English. A Western reader would hardly come across a greeting of this type in a work by Jane Austen, Balzac or Tolstoy.

A further instance of religious allusion emerges in the sentence, '[the] teacher at the Qur'an school of Palace Walk was the 'evilest of creation'' (*Trilogy* 32). The words 'evilest of creation' appear between quotation marks because they make reference to the second verse of Sura (113:2) Al-Falaq, which says:

1. Say: I seek refuge with (Allah), the Lord of the daybreak,
2. From the evil of what He has created,

This Sura is recited when someone meets a person with harmful intentions and evil schemes. Muslims recite this Sura because only God is capable of fending off the harm intended by this person. Even though Mahfouz gives no information about it, Hutchins inserts the number of the Sura (113:2) after the statement, for readers who wish to read it. On the other hand, the context in which this Sura is used is not developed. In fact, the Sura in the above quote is used in a humorous way, but the Western reader would require a translation of the Qur'an to appreciate the humour.

Another important aspect which merits examination concerns the religious register. Egyptians use religious terms frequently in their speech, and this use is not restricted to serious matters. Egyptians often use religious statements to connote irony. The discussion between al-Sayyid Ahmad and Zubayda in *Palace Walk* illustrates this idea:

**Zubayda:** In the name of God, the Compassionate, the merciful! ... You!

**Al-Sayyid:** In the name of God. God's will be done.

**Zubayda:** Your eye! God protect me from it.

**Al-Sayyid:** Are you afraid of an envious eye even when protected by this incense?

**Zubayda:** My incense is a boon and a blessing. It's a mixture of various kinds, some Arab and some Indian that I blend myself. It's capable of ridding the body of a thousand and one jinn.

**Al-Sayyid:** But not my body. My body has a jinni of a different sort. Incense doesn't do any good with him. The matter is more severe and dangerous. (*Trilogy* 100)

Most of the expressions used by al-Sayyid and Zubayda in the above citation are idiomatic, and should have been translated into English idioms bearing the same meaning. 'In the name of God. God's will be done' is in fact a colloquial exclamatory phrase expressing admiration, and should be translated into an idiom which conveys the same meaning for the reader. A reader who is very familiar with Arabic will be quite happy with these phrases, but the average Western reader, with no

understanding of the Arabic language, will not laugh at the phrases in translation because they sound more like a prayer than expressions of strong sexual desire.

When al-Sayyid takes advantage of Zubayda's absence to visit Zanuba, he is alone with her. However, he refers to himself using the plural personal pronoun 'we': 'Since we've allowed our feet to carry us here' (*Trilogy* 642). Zanuba does the same: 'We're at your service.' (*Trilogy* 642) This is a way of talking in contexts of courtship, especially when partners are getting to know each other. Talking about themselves in the plural sounds comical in Arabic, and this helps initiate the seduction process. This is not the case in English, however. For readers who are unaware of this nuance, the use of 'we' may be confusing.

Moreover, during the same encounter, once contact has been established, Zanuba begins to accuse al-Sayyid of never offering her his friendship: '[...] were you ever moved to provide me with a share of that friendship?' (*Trilogy* 643) The word 'friendship' is a translation of the word '*sadaqa*'<sup>28</sup>, and 'friendship' in this conversation is not friendship in a basic sense but a love relationship. Both al-Sayyid and Zanuba are playing with words, because on a first date it would be daring to speak directly of love and sex.

This becomes more subtle when al-Sayyid takes a step further and says to Zanuba: 'A hungry man wants something to eat, food that's tasty and appealing.' (*Trilogy* 644) The words in this statement correctly translate the Arabic words Mahfouz uses, but the real meaning lies elsewhere. In fact, by 'hungry' Mahfouz means 'sexually hungry'. The phrase 'something to eat' refers to 'the body of a woman'. Finally the word 'tasty' means 'beautiful', with reference to Zanuba. In Arabic, Mahfouz uses the term '*shabiye*', which is translated into English by the word 'tasty'.<sup>29</sup> In Arabic, the word is derived from 'shahwa', which is closely related to sexual desire. This word game requires explanation for the non-Arab reader if Mahfouz's use of language is to be fully understood.

As a last point concerning this meeting, the well-known popular proverb '*sakatna lou, dakhhal bi hmarou*'<sup>30</sup> loses its spirit in translation. Hutchins translates this

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<sup>28</sup> Naguib Mahfouz, *Qasr al-Shawq*, Cairo: Dar Misr Liltibaha, 1957, p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

proverb as follows: 'If we don't speak up, he'll try to bring in his donkey too.' (*Trilogy* 644) The rhyme in the Arab version is missing in the English version. In other words, the meaning is preserved but the non-Arabic reader will not normally understand the humour.

When expressions of sexual admiration have a religious resonance, they provoke laughter in Arabic.

My God, I testify that this beautiful creature is more delightful than the tunes of her lute. Her tongue's a whip, her love's an inferno, and her lover's a martyr. (*Trilogy* 646)

'God', 'inferno' and 'martyr' elevate the battle to win a woman's body to the status of a martyr offering his life for a religious cause. Al-Sayyid is metaphorically suggesting that he is ready to offer his life for sexual intercourse with Zanuba. Expressions such as this guarantee uproarious laughter. Using religious terminology to express strong sexual desire in this sense is not common in the Occident, at least not within Durrell's type of readership. As laughter is culturally bound, there is a risk that the Western reader will be unable to appreciate this essential aspect of Oriental humour.

Humour is also completely lost in the following translation. Complaining that men are only interested in sex, Zubayda says to Ibrahim al-Far:

I seek refuge with God from you men. All you want a woman for is sex.  
(*Trilogy* 620)

The meaning is perfectly translated, but Mahfouz does not use the word 'sex' in his statement. Instead, he uses a word with strong significance. It is at the same time a word with sexual connotations and one which sharply criticises the way men consider women in Egyptian society. This word is '*mateya*'<sup>31</sup>, which means something one rides, especially an animal. The notion of riding refers to male dominance in sexual intercourse, as in the case of animals. However, this meaning is completely lost in the word 'sex' which is used in the translation.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

Translation issues could therefore form the subject of further study. Nonetheless, as shown above, only an Arabic translation which takes the intertexts and intertextual relations into consideration can do full justice to the greatness of the *Quartet*. Intertexts would aid comprehension, making the interpretive possibilities offered by the source language text more accessible in the target-language version. However, it is important to remember that intertextuality itself is not without complications during the translation process, as creating an intertext involves first reading and understanding its counterpart in the original. These intertexts may also involve sub-intertexts which could require interpretation. In the *Quartet* for example, Huysmans' *A Rebours* and Stendhal's *De L'Amour* are intertexts, but their source language is French. Reading them in English prolongs the process of translation, but is nevertheless unavoidable.

If the translators of the *Trilogy* are seen to have produced an excellent translation of Mahfouz's book, it is because the intertext is included in most cases. When building the intertext proves difficult, references to the other texts are supplied to refer the reader to the source of information, thus guaranteeing the autonomy of the target text. In other words, reading *The Cairo Trilogy* in translation could provide a key to translating *The Alexandria Quartet* properly.

The chapters of this thesis could be used as a basis for reintroducing the *Alexandria Quartet* to an Arabic readership more successfully. If Alexandria were portrayed as an intersection where East and West meet, and if the spirit of the city were adequately conveyed, Durrell's techniques could be appreciated more fully, helping to improve the reception of the book by Arab readers. Similarly, if love were explained with reference to European writers and philosophers, and if Alexandrian theosophies and the religious diversity of Alexandria were presented as part of the glorious past of the city, the context of the *Quartet* could be clarified for non-Western readers. Finally, if the palimpsest technique were explained, and if the translation included all the elements of the *Quartet*, including poems and the 'Workpoints', Arabic readers would be more likely to appreciate the full impact of Durrell's style. At the same time, this thesis could help do justice to the work of Mahfouz, whose style is sometimes accused of being traditional and old-fashioned. If the experience he presents in his *Trilogy* were to be historically, politically, religiously and culturally

contextualised, as this study has done, his choices and motivation could be better understood.

In conclusion, this comparative study has helped illustrate a relationship between Arabic and English literature across time and space. It has also helped go beyond linguistic boundaries to highlight ideas, themes and connections which may not emerge where literature is studied only within its own national context. Moreover, because translation plays a role in cultural migration and in the exchange of literary genres from one literary tradition to another, comparing Durrell and Mahfouz has highlighted a conscious and unconscious transfer of style, form and method. In short, this comparison has proved that compartmentalising literary traditions and cultures prevents new meanings from emerging. In other words, comparing *The Alexandria Quartet* and *The Cairo Trilogy* has gone beyond East-West divisions to show that interpretation is usually the subject of a continuous process of evolution.

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