




THREE NOVELS OF ANCIENT EGYPT  
KHUFU'S WISDOM, RHADOPIIS  
OF NUBIA, THEBES AT WAR


NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

A KNOFF  BOOK



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OF ANCIENT  
EGYPT

KHUFU'S WISDOM  
RHADOPIS OF NUBIA  
THEBES AT WAR

TRANSLATED FROM THE ARABIC BY  
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WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY NADINE GORDIMER



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## INTRODUCTION

‘What matters in the historical novel is not the telling of great historical events, but the poet's awakening of people who figure in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical realities.’\*

Naguib Mahfouz adds another dimension to what matters. Reading back through his work written over seventy-six years and coming to this trilogy of earliest published novels brings the relevance of re-experience of Pharaonic times to our own. The historical novel is not a mummy brought to light; in Mah-fouz's hands it is alive in ourselves, our twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in the complex motivations with which we tackle the undreamt-of transformation of means and accompanying aleatory forces let loose upon us. Although these three fictions were written before the Second World War, before the atom bomb, there is a prescience - in the characters, not authorial statement - of what was to come. A prescience that the writer was going to explore in relation to the historical periods he himself would live through, in the forty novels which followed.

Milan Kundera has spoken for Mahfouz and all fiction writers, saying the novelist doesn't give answers, he asks questions. The very title of the first work in Mahfouz's trilogy, *Khufu's Wisdom*, looks like a statement but it isn't, it's a question probed absorbingly, rousingly, in the book. The Fourth-Dynasty Pharaoh, ageing Khufu, is in the first pages reclining on a gilded couch as he gazes into the distance at the thousands of labourers and slaves preparing the desert plateau for the pyramid he is building for his tomb, ‘eternal abode’. Hubris surely never matched. His glance sometimes turns to his other provision for immortality: his sons. And in those two images Mahfouz has already conceived the theme of his novel, the power of pride against the values perhaps to be defined as wisdom. King of all Egypt, North and South, Khufu extols the virtue of power. Of the enemies whom he has conquered, he declares: ‘... what cut out their tongues, and what chopped off their hands ... was nothing but power... And what made my word the law of the land... made it a sacred duty to obey me? Was it not power that did all this?’ His architect of the pyramid, Mirabu, adds: ‘And divinity, my lord.’ The gods are always claimed for one's side. If the Egyptians both thanked and blamed them for everything, in our new millennium warring powers each justify themselves with the claim, God is on their side.

Mahfouz even in his early work never created a two-dimensional symbol. For Khufu, contemplating the toilers at his pyramid site, there's an ‘inner whispering’ - ‘Was it right for so many worthy souls to be expended for the sake of his personal exaltation?’ He brushes away this self-accusation and accepts a princely son's arrangement for an entertainment he's told includes a surprise to please him.

There is that intermediary between divine and earthly powers, the sorcerer - representative of the other, anti-divinity, the devil? The surprise is Djedi, sorcerer ‘who knows the secrets of life and death’. After watching a feat of hypnotism, Khufu asks: ‘Can you tell me if one of my seed is destined to sit on the throne of Egypt's kings?’ The sorcerer pronounces: ‘Sire, after you, no one from your seed shall sit upon the throne of Egypt.’ Pharaoh Khufu is sophisticatedly sceptical: ‘simply tell me: do you know whom the gods have reserved to succeed them on the throne of Egypt?’ He is told this is an infant newly born that morning, son of the high priest of the Temple of Ra. Grown Prince Khafra, heir of the Pharaoh's seed, is aghast. But there's a glimpse of Khufu's wisdom, if rationalism is wisdom: ‘If Fate really was as people say... the nobility of man would be debased... No, Fate is a false belief to which the strong are not fashioned to submit.’ Khufu calls upon his entourage to accompany him so that he himself ‘may look upon this tiny offspring of the Fates’.

Swiftly takes off a narrative of epic and intimacy where Mahfouz makes of a youthful writer's tendency to melodrama, a genuine drama. The high priest Monra has told his wife that their infant son is divinely chosen to rule as successor to the god Ra-Atum. The wife's attendant, Sarga, overhears and flees to warn Pharaoh Khufu of the threat. Monra fears this means his divinely appointed son therefore will be killed. He hides mother and new-born with the attendant Zaya on a wagon loaded with wheat, for escape. On the way to the home of the high priest, Khufu's entourage encounters Sarga in flight from pursuit by Monra's men; so Khufu learns the facts of the sorcerer's malediction and in reward orders her to be escorted to her father's home.

When Khufu arrives to look upon the threat to his lineage he subjects the high priest to a cross-examination worthy of a formidable lawyer in court. 'You are ... advanced in both knowledge and in wisdom... tell me: why do the gods enthrone the pharaohs over Egypt?' 'They select them from among their [the pharaohs'] sons, endowing them with their divine spirit to make the nation prosper.' 'Thus, can you tell me what Pharaoh must do regarding his throne?' 'He must carry out his obligations, claim his proper rights.'

Monra knows what he's been led to admit. There follows a scene of horror raising the moral doubt, intellectual powerlessness that makes such over-the-top scenes undeniably credible in Mahfouz's early work. Obey the god Ra or the secular power Khufu? There comes to Monra 'a fiendish idea of which a priest ought to be totally innocent'. He takes Khufu to a room where another of his wife's handmaidens has given birth to a boy, implying this is his son in the care of a nurse. With the twists of desperate human cunning Mahfouz knows so instinctively, the situation is raised another decibel.

Monra is expected to eliminate his issue. 'Sire, I have no weapon with which to kill.' Khafra, Pharaoh's seed, shoves his dagger into Monra's hand. In revulsion against himself the high priest thrusts it into his own heart. Khafra with a cold will (to remind oneself of, much later) has no hesitation in ensuring the succession. He beheads the infant and the woman.

There is another encounter, on the journey back to Pharaoh's palace, another terrified woman, apparently pursued by a Bedouin band. Once more compassionate, Khufu orders that the poor creature with her baby be taken to safety

- she says she was on her way to join her husband, a worker on the pyramid construction. Mahfouz like a master detective-fiction writer, lets us in on something vitally portentous his central character, Khufu, does not know; and that would change the entire narrative if he did. The woman is Zaya. She has saved the baby from a Bedouin attack on the wheat wagon.

Mahfouz's marvellous evocation, with the mid-twentieth-century setting of his Cairo trilogy,<sup>\*</sup> of the depth of the relationship between rich and aristocratic family men and courtesans, pimps, concurrent with lineal negotiations with marriage brokers, exemplifies an ignored class interdependency. His socialist convictions that were to oppose, in all his work, the posit that class values, which regard the lives of the 'common people' as less representative of the grand complex mystery the writer deciphers in human existence, begins in this other, early trilogy. The encounter with Zaya moves his story from those who believe themselves to be the representatives of the gods, to the crowd-scene protagonists in life. The servant Zaya's desolation when she learns her husband has died under the brutal conditions of pyramid labour, and the pragmatic courage of her subsequent life devotedly caring for baby Djedef, whom she must present as her own son, opens a whole society both coexistent with and completely remote from the awareness of the Pharaoh, whose desire for immortality has brought it about. The families of his pyramid workers have made in the wretched quarter granted them outside the mammoth worksite Pharaoh gazed on, 'a burgeoning, low-priced bazaar'. There Djedef grows to manhood.

Zaya, one of Mahfouz's many varieties of female beauty, has caught the eye of the inspector of the pyramid, Bisharu, and does not fail to see survival for herself and the child in getting him to marry her. Mahfouz's conception of beauty includes intelligence, he may be claimed to be a feminist, particularly when, in later novels he is depicting a Muslim society where women's place is male-decreed. This is a bold position in twentieth-century Egypt, though

nothing as dangerous as his criticism, through the lives of his characters, of aspects of Islamic religious orthodoxy that brought him accusations of blasphemy and a near-fatal attack by a fanatic. Djedef chooses a military career; his 'mother' proudly sees him as a future officer of the Pharaoh's charioteers. While his putative father asks himself whether he should continue to claim this progeniture or proclaim the truth? Pharaoh Khufu has been out of the action and the reader's sight; almost seems the author has abandoned the subject of Khufu's wisdom. But attention about-turns momentarily.

As Djedef rises from rank to rank in his military training, Pharaoh has the news from his architect: the pyramid is completed, 'for eternity... it will be the temple within whose expanse beat the hearts of millions of your worshippers'. Fulfilment of Khufu's hubris? Always the unforeseen, from Mahfouz. Khufu has gone through a change. He does not rejoice and when Mirabu asks 'What so clearly preoccupies the mind of my lord?', comes the reply, 'Has history ever known a king whose mind was carefree? ... Is it right for a person to exult over the construction of his grave?' As for the hubris of immortality: 'Do not forget... the fact that immortality is itself a death for our dear, ephemeral lives... What have I done for the sake of Egypt? ... what the people have done for me is double that which I have done for them.' Khufu has decided to write 'a great book', 'guiding their souls and protecting their bodies' with knowledge. The place where he will write it is the burial chamber in his pyramid.

Mahfouz puts Khufu's wisdom to what surely is the final test: attempted parricide when Khafra's professed love for his father is shown to mask an impatience to inherit the throne. This horror is foiled only by another: Djedef killing Khufu's own seed, Khafra. What irony in tragedy conveyed by vivid scenes of paradox: it is the sorcerer's pronouncement that is fulfilled, not the hubris of an eternal abode. Djedef of divine prophecy is declared future pharaoh, after a moving declaration by a father who has seen his own life saved - only by the death of his son. He calls for papyrus: 'that I may conclude my book of wisdom with the gravest lesson that I have learned in my life'. Then he throws the pen away. With it goes the vanity of human attempt at immortality; Khufu's wisdom attained.

\*

The second novel of the trilogy opens in Hollywood if not Bollywood flamboyance with the festival of the flooding of the Nile. The story has as scaffold a politico-religious power conflict within which is an exotic exploration of that other power, the sexual drive.

This is an erotic novel. A difficult feat for a writer; nothing to do with pornography, closer to the representation of exalted states of being captured in poetry. The yearly flooding of the Nile is the source of Egypt's fertility, fecundity, source of life, as is sexual attraction between male and female.

There are two distractions during the public celebrations before the Pharaoh; omens. A voice in the throng yells 'Long live His Excellency Khnumhotep' and the young Pharaoh is startled and intrigued by a woman's golden sandal dropped into his lap by a falcon. The shout is no innocent drunken burst of enthusiasm for the prime minister. It is a cry of treason. The sandal isn't just some bauble that has caught the bird of prey's eye, it belongs to Rhadopis.

The Pharaoh, 'headstrong... enjoys extravagance and luxury, and is as rash and impetuous as a raging storm', intends to take from the great establishment of the priesthood, representative of the gods who divinely appoint pharaohs, the lands and temples whose profits will enable him to construct palaces. His courtiers are troubled: 'It is truly regrettable that the king should begin his reign in confrontation.' 'Let us pray that the gods will grant men wisdom... and forethought.' His subjects in the crowd are excitedly speculating about him. 'How handsome he is!' His ancestors of the Sixth Dynasty 'in their day, how those pharaohs filled the eyes and hearts of their people'. 'I wonder what legacy he will bequeath?'

A beautiful boat is coming down the Nile from the island of Biga. 'It is like the sun rising over the eastern horizon.' Aboard is 'Rhadopis the enchantress and seductress... She lives over there in her enchanting white palace ... where her lovers and admirers head to compete for her affections.'



No wonder Mahfouz later wrote successful film scripts; already he knew the art, the flourish, of the cut. Rhadopis of Nubia is the original *femme fatale*. The ravishing template. Not even descriptions of Cleopatra can compare. The people gossip: enthralled, appalled, 'Do you not know that her lovers are the cream of the kingdom?'; spiteful, 'She's nothing but a dancer ... brought up in a pit of depravity... she has given herself over to wantonness and seduction'; infatuated, 'Her wondrous beauty is not the only wealth the gods have endowed her with ... Thoth [god of wisdom] has not been mean with wisdom and knowledge'; sardonic, 'To love her is an obligation upon the notables of the upper classes, as though it were a patriotic duty.'

Mahfouz is the least didactic of writers. He's always had nimble mastery of art's firm injunction: don't tell, show. Overhearing the talk one's curiosity is exhilaratingly aroused as if one were there among the crowd, even while unnoticingly being informed of themes that are going to carry the narrative.

Prime minister Khnumhotep favours, against the Pharaoh's intent, the priests' campaign to claim their lands and temples as inalienable right. The bold challenge of calling out his minister's name on a grand public occasion has hurt and angered the Pharaoh; his chamberlain Sofkhatep and Tahu, commander of the guards, are concerned. There's juxtaposed another kind of eavesdrop, on an exchange between these two which goes deeper than its immediate significance, dispute over the priests' possessions. Tahu urges Pharaoh, 'Force, my lord... Do not procrastinate ... strike hard.' Sofkhatep, 'My lord... the priesthood is dispersed throughout the kingdom as blood through the body... Their authority over the people is blessed by divine sanction... A forceful strike might bring undesired consequences.' Pharaoh chillingly responds, 'Do not trouble yourselves... I have already shot my arrow.' He has had brought to him the man who cried out, told him his act was despicable, awed him with the magnanimity of not ordering him punished, declaring it 'simple-minded to think that such a cry would distract me from the course I have set upon ... I had decided irrevocably ... that from today onward nothing would be left to the temples save the land and offerings they need.'

Something that does distract the young Pharaoh from problems of his reign is the fall from the blue - the gold sandal. Sofkhatep remarks that the people believe the falcon courts beautiful women, whisks them away. Pharaoh is amazed: the token dropped in his lap is as if the bird 'knows my love for beautiful women'. The gold sandal is Rhadopis's, recognized by Sofkhatep. Tahu seems perturbed when Pharaoh asks who she is; a hint dropped of a certain circumstance that will give him an identity rather different from official one of general. He informs that she is the woman on whose door distinguished men knock. Sofkhatep adds, 'In her reception hall, my lord, thinkers, artists, and politicians gather ... The philosopher Hof ... has remarked... the most dangerous thing a man can do in his life is to set eyes upon the face of Rhadopis.'

Pharaoh is intrigued and will set his upon that face. Of course he cannot join the men, however highborn, who knock on the Biga island palace door. It seems odd and amusing that there is no rivalry for her bed and favours shown. Is Mahfouz slyly exposing another side of that noble quality, brotherhood - decadence? They share her. There is music and witty exchange, she may dance or sing for them if the mood takes her and there's informed political debate in this salon-cum-brothel before she indicates which distinguished guest she will allow to her bed at the end of the entertainment.

If kingly rank had not proscribed Pharaoh from joining the brotherhood he might have gained political insight to the issues facing his kingdom. Aside from the priests' demands, there is a rebellion of the Maasayu tribes, and from the courtiers comes the familiar justification of colonialism which is to be exposed with such subtlety and conviction in Mahfouz's future fiction. One of Rhadopis's admirers questions, 'Why are the Maasayu always in revolt?' when 'Those lands under Egyptian rule enjoy peace and prosperity. We do not oppose the creeds of others.' The more politically astute supporter of the imperial-colonial system: 'The truth... is that the Maasayu question has nothing to do with politics or religion... They are threatened by starvation... and at the same time they possess treasure [natural resources] of gold and silver... and when the Egyptians undertake to put it to good use, they attack

them.' There's argument, for and against, over the priests' demands and Pharaoh's intransigence. 'The theocrats now own a third of all the agricultural land in the kingdom.' 'Surely there are causes more deserving of money than temples?'

The ironic dynamism of the story is that it is to be how the 'cause' of young Pharaoh's desire to build palaces and acquire a woman whose extravagance matches his - political power and erotic power clasped together - contests the place of 'more deserving'.

Yes it's Milan Kundera's maxim - the novelist is asking questions, not supplying answers - that makes this novel as challenging and entertaining as the conversation in Rhadopis's salon. House of fame, house of shame? As she becomes Pharaoh's mistress and obsession, is she the cause of his downfall, his people turning against him, their worshipped representative of the gods, because of his squandering of the nation's wealth on a courtesan? Or is Pharaoh a figure of the fatality of inherent human weakness? Is it not in our stars - fall from the sky of a gold sandal - but in ourselves, the Pharaoh himself, to fulfil personal desires? And further: isn't it the terrible danger in power itself that it may be used for ultimate distorted purpose. Dictators, tyrants. Mahfouz sets one's mind off beyond the instance of his story.

Rhadopis herself. Beginning with the introduction as prototype Barbie Doll as well as *femme fatale* the young Mahfouz achieves an evocation of the inner contradictions of the life she lives that no other writer whose work I know has matched. Zola's Nana must retire before her. On the evening at the end of the Nile festival, Rhadopis's admirer-clients knock on her door as usual. After dancing suggestively at the men's request, 'dalliance and sarcasm came over her again'. To Hof, eminent philosopher among them: 'You have seen nothing of the things I have seen.' Pointing to the drunken throng, '... the cream of Egypt... prostrating themselves at my feet... It is as if I am among wolves.' All this regarded amid laughter, as her titillating audacity. No one among these distinguished men seems to feel shame at this degradation of a woman; no one sees it as a consequence of the poverty she was born into, and from which it was perhaps her only escape. The class-based denial of the existence of any critical intelligence in menial women, including prostitutes, is always an injustice refuted convincingly by Mahfouz's women. This night she uses the only weapon they respect, capriciously withholds herself. 'Tonight I shall belong to no man.'

A theatrical 'storm of defiance' is brewing in her as she lies sleepless. It may read like the cliché passing repentance of one who lives by the sale of her body. But the salutary mood is followed next night by her order that her door should be kept closed to everyone.

That is the night Pharaoh comes to her. No door may be closed to him. He is described as sensually as Mahfouz's female characters. The encounter is one of erotic beauty and meaning without necessity of scenes of sexual gyration. It is also the beginning of Pharaoh's neglect of state affairs for the power of a 'love affair that was costing Egypt a fortune'. The price: prime minister Khnumhotep has had to carry out Pharaoh's decree to sequester temple estates. Pharaoh's choice is for tragedy, if we accept that the fall of the mighty is tragedy's definition, as against the clumsy disasters of ordinary, fallible people. Rhadopis, in conflict between passion for a man who is also a king and the epiphany of concern for the Egyptian people of whom she is one, uses her acute mind to devise means by which Pharaoh may falsely claim that there is a revolt of the Maasayu tribes in the region of the priests' lands and summon his army there to overcome the real rebellion, that of the priests. The intricate subterfuge involves exploiting an innocent boy - also in love with her - when Rhadopis resorts to her old powers of seduction to use him as messenger.

Tragedy is by definition inexorable as defeated Pharaoh speaks after the priests have exposed his actions to his people and the mob is about to storm the walls of his palace. 'Madness will remain as long as there are people alive ... I have made for myself a name that no Pharaoh before me ever was called: The Frivolous King.' An arrow from the mob pierces his breast. 'Rhadopis,' he orders his men, 'Take me to her ... I want... to expire on Biga.' We hardly have been aware of the existence of Pharaoh's unloved wife, the queen; how impressively she emerges now with a quiet command, 'Garry out my lord's desire.' Mahfouz's nascent brilliance as, above all political, moral, philosophical

purpose, a *story-teller*, is revealed in the emotional pace of events by which *this* story meets its moving, questioning end, with the irony that Rhadopis's last demand on a man is to have the adoring boy messenger find a phial of poison with which she will join Pharaoh in death, final consummation of sexual passion. For the last, unrequited lover, asked how he obtained the phial, Mahfouz plumbs the boy's horror in the answer: "I brought it to her myself. What was the young writer, Mahfouz, saying about love?"

\*

The Nile is the flowing harbinger of Egypt's destiny in the scope of Mahfouz's re-imagined pharaonic history, starting with *Khufu's Wisdom*, Fourth Dynasty, continuing with *Rhadophis of Nubia*, Sixth Dynasty, and concluding with *Thebes at War*, Seventeenth-Eighteenth Dynasty.

A ship from the North arrives up the Nile, at Thebes. On board not a courtesan or a princess but the chamberlain of Apophis, Pharaoh by conquest of both the North and South kingdoms. Again, through the indirection of an individual's thoughts, anticipation is roused as one reads the musing of this envoy: "I wonder, tomorrow will the trumpet sound... Will the peace of these tranquil houses be shattered... ? Ah, how I wish these people knew what a warning this ship brings them and their master!" He is the emissary of an ancient colonialism. Thebes is virtually a colony of Apophis's reign. The southerners are, within the traditional (unchanging) justification of colonization, different: darker than self-appointed superior beings -in this era the Hyksos of the North, from Memphis. Compared with these, a member of the chamberlain's mission remarks, the southerners are 'like mud next to the glorious rays of the sun'. And the chamberlain adds, 'Despite their colour and their nakedness... they claim they are descended from the loins of the gods and that their country is the wellspring of the true pharaohs.' I wonder what Naguib Mahfouz, looking back to

1938 when his prescient young self wrote his novel, thought of how we know, not through any godly dispensation, but by palaeontological discovery, that black Africa - which the southerners and the Nubians represent in the story - is the home of the origin of all humankind.

After this foreboding opening, there comes to us as ludicrous the purpose of the mission. It is to demand that the hippopotami in the lake at Thebes be killed, since Pharaoh Apophis has a malady his doctors have diagnosed as due to the roaring of the animals penned there! It's a power pretext, demeaning that of the region: the lake and its hippos are sacred to the Theban people and their god Amun. There is a second demand from Pharaoh Apophis. He has dreamt that the god Seth, sacred to his people, is not honoured in the South's temples. A temple devoted to Seth must be built at Thebes. Third decree: the governor of Thebes, deposed Pharaoh Seqenenra, appointed on the divide-and-rule principle of making a people's leader an appointee of the usurping power, must cease the presumption of wearing the White Gown of Egypt (symbol of southern sovereignty in Egypt's double crown): 'There is only one king in this valley who has the right to wear a crown' -conqueror Apophis.

Seqenenra calls Grown Prince Kamose and his councillors to discuss these demands. His chamberlain Hur: 'It is the spirit of a master dictating to his slave ... it is simply the ancient conflict between Thebes and Memphis in a new shape. The latter strives to enslave the former, while the former struggles to hold on to its independence by all the means at its disposal.' Of the three novels, this one has the clearest intention to be related to the present in which it was written - British domination of Egypt, which even after Britain renounced her protectorate in 1922 was to continue to be felt, through the 1939-45 war until the deposing of King Farouk by Nasser in the 1950s. It also does not shirk the resort to reverse racism which inevitably is used to strengthen anti-colonial resolves. One of Seqenenra's military commanders: 'Let us fight till we have liberated the North and driven the last of the white Herdsmen with their long, dirty beards from the land of the Nile!' These are Asiatic foreigners, the Hyksos, referred to as 'Herdsmen' presumably because of their wealth in cattle, who dominated from northern Egypt for two hundred years.

Grown Prince Kamose is for war, as are some among the councillors. But the final decision will go to Queen Tetisheri, Seqenenra's scholarly mother, the literary ancestress of Mah-fouz's created line of revered wise matriarchs, alongside his recognition given to the embattled dignity and intelligence of courtesans. Physically, she's described with characteristics we would know as racist caricature, but that he proposes were a valid standard of African beauty, 'the protrusion of her upper teeth... that the people of the South found so attractive'. Tetisheri's was the opinion to which 'recourse was had in times of difficulty': 'the sublime goal' to which Thebans 'must dedicate themselves was the liberation of the Nile Valley'. Thebes will go to war.

Grown Prince Kamose is downcast when told by his father that he may not serve in battle: he is to remain in Seqenenra's place of authority tasked with supplying the army with 'men and provisions'. In one of the thrilling addresses at once oratorical and movingly personal, Seqenenra prophesies, 'If Seq-enenra falls... Kamose will succeed his father, and if Kamose falls, little Ahmose [grandson] will follow him. And if this army of ours is wiped out, Egypt is full of men ... if the whole South falls into the hands of the Herdsmen, then there is Nubia... I warn you against no enemy but one - despair.'

It is flat understatement to acknowledge that Seqenenra dies. He falls in a legendary hand-to-hand battle with javelins, the double crown of Egypt he is defiantly wearing topples, 'blood spurted like a spring... another blow... scattering the brains', other blows 'ripped the body to pieces' - all as if this happens thousands of years later, before one's eyes. It is not an indulgence in gore, it's part of Mahfouz's daring to go too far in what goes too far for censorship by literary good taste, the hideous human desecration of war. The war is lost; Kamose as heir to defeat must survive by exile with the family. They take refuge in Nubia, where there are supporters from among their own Theban people.

From the horrifyingly magnificent set-piece of battle, Mahfouz turns - as Tolstoy did in *War and Peace* - to the personal, far from the clamour, which signifies it in individual lives. Kamose leads the family not conventionally to the broken body but to 'bid farewell to my father's room'. To 'face its emptiness'. With such nuance, delicacy within juggernaut destruction, does the skill of Mahfouz penetrate the depth of responses in human existence. And the emptiness of that room will become of even greater significance. Pepi, Seqenenra's defeated commander, has Seqenenra's throne taken from the palace to the temple of Amun, where the king's body lies. Prostrate before the throne, he speaks: 'Apophis shall never sit upon you.'

\*

Ten years have passed. The story is taken up again along the Nile. A convoy of ships is pointing North, now, from Nubia to the border with Egypt, closed since the end of the war. The sailors are Nubian, the two commanders Egyptian. Beauty and rightfulness go together in early Mahfouz's iconography. The leading commander has 'one of those faces to which nature lends its own majesty and beauty in equal portion'. Here is Isfinis, a merchant bringing for sale the precious jewels, ivory, gold and exotic creatures that are the natural resources of Nubia. The convoy lands first at Biga, that island from which Rhadopis's siren call once sounded, where now the merchant bribes the local governor with an ivory sceptre in exchange for intercession to be received by the Pharaoh Apophis.

Isfinis is not a merchant and Isfinis is not his name. His purpose is not business but justice; we overhear him saying to his 'agent' Latu, 'If we succeed in restoring the ties with Nubia... we shall have won half the battle ... the Herdsman is very arrogant... but he is lazy... his only path to gold is through someone like Isfinis who volunteers to bring it to him.' So this merchant must be disguised Kamose, Seqenenra's heir, come for retribution?

Mahfouz is the writer-magician, pulling surprise out of the expected. No, Isfinis is Ahmose, Seqenenra's grandson, last heard of going as a child into exile with the defeated family. A royal vessel sails near the merchant convoy and a princess with her slave girls is amazed at the sight on the merchant's deck of an item of cargo never seen before. It is a pygmy. Her Pharaonic Highness sends a sailor to say she will board the merchant ship to look at the 'creature' - if

it is not dangerous. Isfmis presents the pygmy with a show of obsequiousness: 'Greet your mistress, Zolo!' A wryly ~~mischievous scene of the cruel sense of absolute superiority in race, hierarchy of physique, follows.~~ The princess asks, 'Is he animal or human?' Isfinis: 'Human, Your Highness.' 'Why should he not be considered an animal?' 'He has his own language and his own religion.'

To her the pygmy is like anything else the merchant might offer, something to own or reject. 'But he is ugly; it would give me no pleasure to acquire him.' From some other examples of the merchant's wares she picks a necklace; it's simply assumed he will have to come to the palace to be paid. The satirical social scene explodes as Latu cries angrily, 'She is a devil, daughter of a devil!' In this tale of doubled-up identities Isfinis/ Ahmose realizes that this woman he's attracted to is the daughter of the 'humiliator of his people, and his grandfather's killer'.

On land, the merchant takes lodgings at an inn among fishermen. In the bar (as later, in the Cairo trilogy) inhibitions dissolving in drink mean people reveal in banter the state of the country. It's serious social criticism and delightful entertainment, at once. 'You're certainly a rich man, noble sir! ... But you're Egyptians, from the look of you!' Isfinis/Ahmose: 'Is there any contradiction between being Egyptians and being rich?' 'Certainly, unless you're in the rulers' good graces'; this bar 'is the refuge of those who have no hope... The rule in Egypt is that the rich steal from the poor, but the poor are not allowed to steal from the rich.'

Mahfouz has the rare gift of rousing a subconscious alertness in the reader: a kind of writerly transmission so that one moves on for oneself, as if before he does, to how things will develop and why. Nothing is an aside. A man bursts into the inn's rowdiness to tell how someone the locals know, Ebana, has been arrested on the pretext that she attacked a Herdsman officer who was soliciting her. When Isfinis hears the woman will be flogged because she's unable to pay a fine, he insists on going to the court to do so. The apparently irrelevant good deed that a man principled against injustice may casually settle with cash. But perhaps one has been prompted. Who is this woman? And indeed her presence is invoked in context of Isfinis's mission when, at another of the progressively hierarchal meetings that must precede granting of audience with Pharoah Apophis, the judge from the woman's trial happens to be present, and he remarks superciliously of the merchant, 'It seems that he is ever ready with himself and his wealth, for he donated fifty pieces of gold to save a peasant woman charged with insulting Commander Rukh.' And Princess Amenridis - she's there too, sarcasm her form of baiting flirtation, 'Isn't it natural that a peasant should roll up his sleeves to defend a peasant woman?' Echoing tones of Rhadopis; but the courtesan was arming herself against her vulnerability as a despised woman, while Amenridis is amusing herself by taunting a man beneath her class, albeit attractive. Mahfouz hasn't cloned from a previous creation, he's making a statement that the caprice of the privileged is not the need of the dispossessed.

Merchant Isfinis, ready to produce a bribe of the governor's choice, reveals the splendour of objects he wants to offer before Pharoah Apophis. The princess enjoys making a sensation by saying, of the merchant, to the judge, "I am in his debt.' She relates how she was drawn to the merchant's convoy by the weird sight of the pygmy and picked out from his other wares the necklace with its emerald heart she is now wearing. The governor joins the mood of repartee and innuendo: And why did you choose a green heart... pure white hearts... wicked black hearts, but what might be the meaning of a green heart?' The princess: 'Direct your question to the one who sold the heart!' Isfinis: 'The green heart... is the symbol of fertility and tenderness.' The Beatrice and Benedict volley will develop into the taming of the shrew, this arrogant beauty who privately wishes 'she might come across such stature in the body of one of her own kind... Instead she had found it in the body of a brown-skinned Egyptian who traded in pygmies.'

The - blessed or cursed - complication of sexual attraction along with the imperative will to political power causes Isfinis, out of beguilement and tactics to keep in with those who can take him to Pharoah, to decide he can't ask payment for the green heart.

A sharp-minded reader is required to follow the shifts in identity of protagonists in this marvellous chronicle; and he/ she will be rewarded by the stunning agility of the author's mind. Ebana is, indeed, no simple incident

illustrating Isfinis/ Ahmose's compassion. She is the widow of Pepi, Seqenenra's commander killed during the final defence of Thebes ten years ago, since when she has concealed herself among a poor fisher community to the south of Thebes. Pepi had named their son Ahmose, after the grandson of Seqenenra, born the same day. It is more than coincidence; this *other* Ahmose is also twinned in bravery and dedication with Ahmose-disguised-as-Isfinis, to win back for Thebes the double crown of Egypt.

The dynastic Ahmose hears through Ebana that the fishermen's quarter is full of former owners of estates and farms, dispossessed by Apophis. He tells them - and lets on to the reader for the first time - the true purpose of his 'trade mission' is to link Egypt to Nubia by getting permission to transport these men ostensibly as workers to produce the treasures of Nubian resources for Memphis's acquisitive taste. 'We shall carry gold to Egypt and return with grain and men and maybe we shall come back one day, with men only...' Eros too, is relentless; while Ahmose is engaged in planning this great campaign an 'invading image' causes him to shudder. 'God, I think of her ... And I shouldn't think of her at all.' Amenridis, daughter of the enemy, the Pharaoh Apophis.

The day of his reception by the Pharaoh brings another emotional experience Ahmose cannot let disempower him: the garden of the palace usurped by Apophis was his grandfather Pharaoh Seqenenra's where in childhood he would play with Nefertari - now his wife, whom Mahfouz knows, in his skill at conveying the unstated merely by an image, he does not have to remark that Ahmose is betraying.

In the palace Apophis discards his crown and puts on his head the vanity of a fake, bejewelled double crown the merchant presents him with along with the gift of three pygmies. They are to amuse him; or to remind him of something apposite to His Majesty, in guise of quaint information. 'They are people, my lord, whose tribes ... believe that the world contains no other people than themselves.' The scene of greedy pleasure and enacted sycophancy is blown apart by the charging in of Apophis's military commander Rukh, the man who brought Ebana to court accused of insulting him. He is drunk, raging, and demands a duel with the Nubian trader who paid gold to save her from flogging.

Ahmose is strung between choices: flee like a coward, or be killed and his mission for his people lost. He's aware of Princess Amenridis regarding him with interest. Is it this, we're left to decide, which makes him accept Rukh's challenge? As proof of manhood? For the public the duel is between class, race: the royal warrior and the peasant foreigner. Commander Rukh loses humiliatingly, incapacitated by a wounded hand. Whatever Ahmose's reckless reason in taking on the duel, his present mission is fulfilled; the deal - treasures to Pharaoh Apophis in exchange for the grain and workers - is agreed. He may cross the border for trade whenever he wishes. Aboard his homeward ship in what should be triumph, Ahmose is asking himself in that other mortal conflict, between sexual love and political commitment: Is it possible for love and hate to have the same object? Amenridis is part of the illicit power of oppression. 'However it be with me, I shall not set eyes upon her again ...'

He does, almost at once. Rukh pursues him with warships, to duel again and 'this time I shall kill you with my own hands'. Amenridis has followed on her ship, and endowed with every authority of rank, stops Rukh's men from murdering Ahmose when he has once again wounded Rukh. Ahmose asks what made her take upon herself 'the inconvenience' of saving his life. She answers in character: 'To make you my debtor for it.' But this is more than sharply aphoristic. If he is somehow to pay he must return to his creditor; her way of asking when she will see again the man she knows as Isfinis. And his declaration of love is made, he will return, 'my lady, by this life of mine which belongs to you'.

His father Kamose refuses to allow him to return in the person of merchant Isfinis. He will go in his own person, Ahmose, only when 'the day of struggle dawns'. Out of the silence of parting comes a letter. In the envelope is the chain of the green heart necklace. Amenridis writes she is saddened to inform him that a pygmy she has taken into her quarters as a pet has disappeared. 'Is it possible for you to send me a new pygmy, one who knows how to be true?' Mahfouz discards apparent sentimentality for startling evidence of deep feeling, just as he is able to dismantle

melodrama with the harshness of genuine human confrontation. Desolate Ahmose: 'She would, indeed, always see him as the inconstant pygmy.'

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The moral ambiguity of a love is overwhelmed by the moral ambiguities darkening the shed blood of even a just war. The day of struggle comes bearing all this, and Kamose with Ahmose eventually leads the Theban army to victory, the kingdom is restored to the Thebes.

Mahfouz like Thomas Mann is master of irony, with its tugging undertow of loss. Apophis and his people, his daughter, have left Memphis in defeat. It is a beautiful evening of peace. Ahmose and his wife Nefertari are on the palace balcony, overlooking the Nile. His fingers are playing with a golden chain. She notices: 'How lovely! But it's broken.' 'Yes. It has lost its heart.' 'What a pity!' In her innocent naivety, she assumes the chain is for her. But he says, "I have put aside for you something more precious and more beautiful than that... Nefertari, I want you to call me Isfinis, for it's a name I love and I love those who love it.'

\*

'Are you still writing?'

People whose retirement from working life has a date, set as the date of birth and the date of death yet to come, ask this question of a writer. But there's no trade union decision bound upon writers; they leave practising the art of the word only when their ability to transform with it something of the mystery of human life, leaves them.

Yes, in old age Naguib Mahfouz was still writing. Still finding new literary modes to express the changing consciousness of succeeding eras with which his genius created this trilogy and his entire oeuvre, novels and stories. In the rising babble of our millennium, radio, television, mobile phone, his mode for the written word is distillation. In a recent work, *The Dreams*, short prose evocations drawing on the fragmentary power of the subconscious, he is the narrator walking aimlessly where suddenly 'every step I take turns the street upside-down into a circus'. At first he 'could soar with joy', but when the spectacle is repeated over and over from street to street, "I long in my soul to go back to my home ... and trust that soon my relief will arrive'. He opens his door and finds - 'the clown there to greet me, giggling'.\* No escape from the world and the writer's innate compulsion to dredge from its confusion, meaning.

Nadine Gordimer

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\* Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, Merlin Press, 1962.

\* Palace Walk, Palace of Desire, Sugar Street, trans. William Maynard Hutchins, Olive E. Kenny, Lome M. Kenny and Ang Botros Samaan, Everyman's Library, 2001.

\* Naguib Mahfouz, *The Dreams* (Dream 5), The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo/New York, 2005.

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## CHRONOLOGY

DATE	AUTHOR'S LIFE	LITERARY CONTEXT
1911	On Monday 11 December, birth of Naguib Mahfouz to 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibrahim Ahmad al-Basha and Fatimah Ibrahim Mustafa, in Cairo, in the old district of al-Gamaliya.	Muhammad Husain Haykal (1888-1956) completes the writing of <i>Zjynab</i> in Paris. Conrad: <i>Under Western Eyes</i> .
1912		Publication of <i>^aynab</i> , the first Arabic novel, in Cairo, under the pseudonym Mìsrì Fallali (Egyptian Peasant).
1913		Proust: <i>Swann's Way</i> . Lawrence: <i>Sons and Lovers</i> .
1914		Death of Jurjì Zaydan (1861-1914), founder of the historical novel in Arabic. Joyce: <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i> (to 1915).
1916	Goes to traditional <i>Kuttab</i> school.	Bely: <i>Petersburg</i> .
1918	Goes to primary school.	
1919	Participates in demonstrations during the 1919 revolution.	Woolf: <i>Night and Day</i> . Shaw: <i>Heartbreak House</i> . Joyce: <i>Ulysses</i> . Eliot: <i>The Waste Land</i> . Galsworthy: <i>The Forsyte Saga</i> . The
1922		discovery of the tomb and treasures of Tutankhamen becomes a source of national pride and fosters great interest in Egypt's Pharaonic past. Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947) establishes the

1923	Begins his secondary school education.	first Feminist Union of Egypt. Svevo: <i>Reno's Conscience</i> .
1924		Forster: <i>A Passage to India</i> . Mann: <i>The Magic Mountain</i> . Ford: <i>Parade's End</i> (to 1928).

#### HISTORICAL EVENTS

Egypt under protectorate. Mustafa Kamil's Patriotic Quest for Independence. Agadir crisis.

Sinking of the *Titanic*. Scott's Antarctic expedition.

Outbreak of World War I.

Easter Rising in Dublin.

October Revolution in Russia.

Armistice. Egypt demands the fulfilment of Britain's promise to evacuate Egypt after the end of the war.

The outbreak of the 1919 revolution and the formation of the Wafd party with its liberal nationalism.

End of protectorate and first declaration of Independence. Establishment of USSR. Mussolini forms government in Italy.

First Constitution of 1923. Munich putsch by Nazis. German financial crisis.

Zaghlul forms the first Wafd government. The foundation of the first Communist party in Egypt. First Labour government in Britain.

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ

#### DATE AUTHOR'S LIFE

#### LITERARY CONTEXT

1925  
The launch of *al-Fajr*, a literary journal devoted to the promotion of new narrative genres. Ali Abd al-Raziq (1887-1966): *Islam and the Rules of Government*. Kafka: *The Trial*. Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*.

1926  
Taha Husain publishes *Fi al-Shi'r al-Jahili (On Pre-Islamic Poetry)*. The book is banned and the author is tried but acquitted.

1927  
Tawfiq al-Hakim (1899-1987) writes his novel *Awdar al-Ruh (The Return of the Spirit)* in Paris. Taha Husam publishes *al-Ayyam (An Egyptian Childhood)*. Haykal starts a national debate on the pages of *Al-Siyasah* on the need for the creation of a national literature.

Proust: *In Search of Lost Time*. Woolf: *To the Lighthouse*.

Introduction of mixed university education. Salama

1928	Musa (1887-1958) and his progressive journal, <i>Al-Majallah al-Jadidah</i> , play key role in the dissemination of left-wing ideas.
1929	Faulkner: <i>The Sound and the Fury</i> . Hemingway: <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> .
1930	Begins his university education. Publishes his first article on Fabian Socialism in <i>Al-Majallah al-Jadidah</i> . Musil: <i>The Man Without Qualities</i> (vol. 1). Faulkner: <i>As I Lay Dying</i> .
	Translates from English a short book on Ancient Egypt. Publication of <i>The Return of the Spirit</i> in Cairo. Death of
1932	Supports the schism in the Wafd for some time, then returns to the main Wafd. two major poets: Ahmad Sawqì (b. 1868) and Hafiz Ibrahim (b. 1872). Huxley: <i>Brave New World</i> .

#### HISTORICAL EVENTS

General Strike in Britain. Death of Sa'd Zaghlul.

The religio-political movement, the Muslim Brethren, is founded by Hasan al-Banna.

Wall Street Crash.

Isma'il Sidqi becomes Prime Minister of Egypt, abrogates the 1923 Constitution and replaces it with 1930 Constitution. World economic crisis.

Egypt suffers the impact of the 1930s economic crisis. Schism in Wafd party and formation of Sa'dis party.

#### N A G U I B M A H F O U Z

DATE	AUTHOR'S LIFE	LITERARY CONTEXT
1933	Contemplates becoming a musician, joins the Institute for Oriental Music for one year, then goes back to complete his degree in philosophy. Graduates from Fu'ad I University (later Cairo University) with degree in philosophy. Obtains his first job in the university administration. His first short story appears in <i>Al-</i>	Hemingway: <i>Winner Take Nothing</i> . Waugh: <i>A Handful of Dust</i> .

1934	<p><i>Majallah al-Jadidah</i>. Starts postgraduate studies in philosophy with the intention of writing a thesis on 'Aesthetics in Islamic philosophy' with his mentor, Mustafa Abd al-Razìq (1885-1947).</p>	<p>Fitzgerald: <i>Tender is the Night</i>.</p>
1936	<p>Under the influence of Salama Musa, decides to abandon postgraduate study and devote his time to writing fiction. Starts an intensive programme of reading the classics of world literature, particularly the novel.</p>	<p>The promise of independence gives rise to cultural euphoria. Huxley: <i>Eyeless in Gaza</i>.</p>
1937	<p>Death of his father. He continues to live with his mother. Continues his intensive reading programme.</p>	<p>Woolf: <i>The Tears</i>.</p>
!938	<p>Publication of first collection of short stories, <i>Hams al-Junun</i>(Whispers of Madness).</p>	<p>The publication of Taha Husain's <i>Mustaqbal al-Thaqafa fi Misr</i>(Future of Culture in Egypt). Dos Passos: <i>USA</i>.</p>
1939	<p>Appointed Parliamentary Secretary to Mustafa Abd al-Razìq, the Minister of <i>Awqaf</i>(Religious Endowments). <i>Hikmat Khufu</i> [<i>Khufu's Wisdom</i>] first published under the title <i>Abath al-Aqdar</i>(Vicissitudes of Fate).</p>	<p>Steinbeck: <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>. Joyce: <i>Finnegans Wake</i>.</p>
1940		<p>Hemingway: <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i>. Stead: <i>The Man Who Loved Children</i>. Greene: <i>The Power and the Glory</i>. Brecht: <i>Mother</i></p>

## HISTORICAL EVENTS

Ahmad Husain founds Young Egypt, an extreme Egyptian nationalist movement with its Green Shirts.

Hitler becomes German Chancellor.

Death of King Fu'ad; his young son, Farouk, ascends the throne. Italian forces occupy Abyssinia. Aware of the mounting Axis threat in Europe, Britain signs a conciliatory treaty with Egypt. Outbreak of Spanish Civil War (to 1939)- Stalin's 'Great Purge' of the Communist Party (to 1938).

Japanese invasion of China.

Germany annexes Austria; Munich crisis.

World War II.

France surrenders to Germany. Battle of Britain. US enters war.

## N A G U I B M A H F O U Z

## DATE AUTHOR'S LIFE

LITERARY  
CONTEXT

1942 As a Wafdist, Mahfouz is dismayed and disillusioned by his party's agreement to form a government at the request of its arch-enemy, the British.

Camus: *The Outsider*.

1943 *Radubis [Rhadopis q/JVubid]* wins the literary prize of the philanthopist Qut al-Qulub al-Dimirdashiyyah (1892-1968).

Borges: *Ficciones*.

1944 *Kifah Tibah [Thebes at War]* is published and wins the literary prize of the Arabic Academy.

Waugh:

*Brideshead*

*Revisited*.

Publication of

Yahya

Haqqi's(1905-94)

*Qindil Umm Has*

*him, (The Saint's*

*Lamp)*. Sartre:

*The Roads to*

*Freedom(to*

1947). Orwell:

*Animal Farm*.

1945 *Al-Qahira al-Jadidah*(New Cairo) is published.

1946 *Khan al-Khalili* is published and wins the literary prize of the Ministry of Education.

Many left-wing writers and intellectuals arrested.  
Tanizaki: *The Makioka Sisters* (to 1948).

Abd al-Raziq becomes Minister of *Awqaf* ??? appoints Mahfouz as his Parliamentary Secretary. *Zjiqaq al-Midaqq (Midaq Alley)* is published and is rejected by the committee of the literary prize of the Ministry of Education. Writes his first screenplay, *Antar waAblah* (Antar and Ablah): the film is directed by Salah Abu-Saif This marks the beginning of a secondary career as screenplay writer. (He was to script more than twelve films.) The beginning of a long friendship with Tawfiq Al-Hakim.

1947 *Doctor Faustus*.  
Levi: *If This is a Man*.  
1948 *Al-Sarab* (Mirage) is published and is rejected by the committee of the literary prize of the Ministry of Education for its eroticism. *Greene: The Heart of the Matter*.

#### HISTORICAL EVENTS

The German army threatens to overrun Egypt; demonstrations chant 'Forward Rommel!', and the British are unable to secure their supply lines. British tanks surround the palace and force the king on 4 February to appoint a Wafd government to control the masses. Rommel is defeated at El Alamein. Allied forces invade Italy.

D-Day landings in Normandy.

WWII ends. Atomic bombs dropped on Japan. United Nations founded.

Massive demonstrations of students and workers against the British. USSR extends influence in eastern Europe: beginning of the Cold War.

Marshall Plan begins in Europe.

The Nakbah, the loss of Palestine and the foundation of the state of Israel on Arab territories. Apartheid introduced in South Africa.

#### N A G U I B M A H F O U Z

#### DATE AUTHOR'S LIFE

#### LITERARY CONTEXT

Publication of Taha Husam's *sal-Mu'adhdhbun fi al-Ard* [*The Wretched*]

1949 <i>Bidayah wa JVihayah [ The Beginning and the End)</i> is published.	of the Earth) gives tremendous boost to realistic narrative. Orwell: <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> .
!952 The writing of <i>The Cairo Trilogy</i> is completed. As a Wafdist, Mahfouz is completely surprised by the army takeover.	Beckett: <i>Waiting for Godot</i> . Waugh: <i>Men at Arms</i> .
Yahya Haqqi is given the role of establishing a new Department for the Arts; this becomes the nucleus of the later Ministry of Culture. He appoints Mahfouz as his assistant.	More arrests of left-wing intellectuals. Bellow: <i>The Adventures of Augie March</i> .
!954 The serialization of the Trilogy in <i>al-Risalah al-Jadidah</i> . Marries Atiyyatallah Ibrahim from Alexandria. The peak of his cinema activities until end of 1950s.	The publication of Yusuf Idris' <i>Arkhas Layali [Cheapest Nights)</i> and Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi's <i>al-Ard [The Egyptian Earth)</i> .
1955	Nabokov: <i>Lolita</i> . Kemal: <i>Memed, My Hawk</i> .
!956 <i>Bayn al-Qasrain [Palace Walk)</i> is published in book form.	Performance of Nu'man 'Ashour's <i>Al-Jwas Uli That</i> (People Downstairs). Mishima: <i>The Temple of the Golden Pavilion</i> . Osborne: <i>Look Back in Anger</i> .
!957 The two other parts of the <i>Cairo Trilogy</i> , <i>Qasr al-Shawq [Palace of Desire)</i> and <i>al-Sukkariyyah [Sugar Street)</i> are published. Obtains the State Literary Prize for the Novel.	Pasternak: <i>Doctor Zhivago</i> .
!958 Becomes Head of Cinema in the Arts Department and Chair of Board of Censorship. <i>Awlad Haratina [Children of Gebelawi)</i> is	Performance of Al-Hakim's <i>al-Sultan al-Ha'r [Sultan's Dilemma)</i> . Lampedusa: <i>The Leopard</i> .

serialized in *al-Ahram*, but the Azhar, the Further arrests of left-

1959 central religious establishment, objects to wingintellectuals. Grass: *The Tin*  
it and it does not appear in book form in *Drum*.  
Egypt.

#### HISTORICAL EVENTS

Foundation of NATO.

An organization of Free Officers in the army, led by Jamal abd al-Nasser, takes over on 23 July and forces the king to abdicate in favour of his baby son; he leaves the country on 26 July.

The new military regime concludes a treaty with the British to evacuate their troops from the country. Death of Stalin. Conquest of Everest.

Massive programme of agrarian reform and industrialization begins. An attempt on Nasser's life leads to large-scale arrest of Muslim Brothers. Vietnam War begins (to 1975)

British troops are evacuated, a new Constitution declaring Egypt a republic is promulgated and Nasser is elected by a plebiscite as President. Nationalization of the Suez Canal and the eruption of the Suez war, known in Egypt as 'the tripartite aggression'. Soviets invade Hungary.

European Economic Community founded.

Union between Egypt and Syria is declared and the countries form the United Arab Republic.

Castro siezes power in Cuba.

#### DATE AUTHOR'S LIFE

Diagnosed as diabetic he imposes a strict health  
1960 programme on his life. *Al-Liss wa'l-Kilab (The Thief and the Dogs)* is serialized in *al-Ahram*.

Becomes adviser to the Minister of Culture. *Al-Liss wa'l-*  
1961 *Kilab* is published in book form. *Al-Simman wa'l-Kharif (Autumn Quail)* is serialized in *al-Ahram*.

*Al-Simman wa'l-Kharif* is published in book form. *Dunya*  
1962 *Allah {God's World}*\*, his first collection of short stories in 25 years.

1963 *Al-Tariq (The Search)* is serialized in *al-Ahram*.

Becomes the Head of the Cinema Organization, Ministry

#### LITERARY CONTEXT

Performance of Yusuf Idris' *Al-Farafir*(Flip-Flap). Updike: *Rabbit, Run*.

Heller: *Catch-22*.

Naipaul: *A House for Mr Biswas*.

Solzhenitsyn: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Bassani: *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*.

Nabokov: *Pale Fire*.

Levi: *The Truce*.

Bellow: *Herzog*.



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