

Fictions of Revolution:

Empire and Nation in Lawrence Durrell, Naguib Mahfouz, John Wilcox, and Bahaa Taher

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Abstract

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This dissertation engages postcolonial theory and historiography in order to illuminate our understanding of the ways in which literary works re-create and interrogate history and, to evoke Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “world” worlds. This study provides a comparative analysis of narrations of the 1881-1882 Urabi Revolution and the 1919 Revolution in British and Egyptian fiction from 1957 to 2007. In engaging the *Bildungsroman*, these works construct competing histories of Egypt’s revolutions. Confirming colonial accounts of these revolutions, the British novels view Egyptian subjectivity as frozen and unchanging. In contrast, the Egyptian fictions present these events as ongoing and always open to re-definition. Ultimately, these narratives reflect different perceptions of Egyptian identity and, in more general terms, varying views of history.

Chapter One reads Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive*, the third volume of his famous *The Alexandria Quartet*, as a reaffirmation of the orientalist Enlightenment values of the *Bildungsroman*, which upholds Western values as the standard to which society must conform. In its portrayal of the legacy of the 1919 Revolution, the novel marks the British protagonist's disillusionment with grotesque Egypt and his acknowledgement of the English social order as his moment of maturity. Identifying Egyptians as forever different, it establishes the European standard as the only route towards modernity. Chapter Two reads *Sugar Street*, the last volume of Naguib Mahfouz's landmark *The Cairo Trilogy*, as a subversion of the *Bildungsroman*. In depicting the decades following the 1919 Revolution, a period where Egyptian attempts at political autonomy are constantly thwarted by Egyptian government corruption and British interference in domestic affairs, Mahfouz interrogates the genre's imperialist project as well as Egyptian calls to cling to native traditions. I argue that *Sugar Street* introduces an alternative, culturally specific *Bildungsroman* that advocates for eternal revolution as the condition of Egyptian subjectivity. The third chapter reads John Wilcox's *The Guns of El Kebir*, arguing that by fusing the imperial romance with the *Bildungsroman* in addressing the Urabi Revolution, the novel harkens back to British rule over Egypt as a glorious time signifying British heroism and altruism. Despite brief questioning of Empire, the novel affirms imperialist discourse when its protagonists – an unorthodox ex-army officer and a feminist anti-imperialist – both recognize the necessity of the British occupation. Reviving the *Bildungsroman* as the narrative of modernity, *Guns* denies Egyptian nationalism and revolution by redefining it as a class conflict or by qualifying it, and ties the protagonists' maturity to identification with the occupation. Chapter Four reads Bahaa Taher's *Sunset Oasis*. In addressing the Urabi Revolution, the novel subverts, the imperial romance, the *Bildungsroman* and the national romance. Unforgiving in its exposure

of Egypt's own role in its own subjugation and as a colonial power in the Egyptian western region of Siwa, *Sunset Oasis* rejects all forms of national belonging – Pharaonism and Ottomanism – as limiting and exclusionary, advocating for an Egyptian subjectivity that transcends ideologies to include all Egyptians.

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DEDICATION

To my parents

Introduction:

Revolution and Candy

As I prepared for my final exam in History in my last year of secondary school in Egypt, my teacher assigned me a sample question that asked for a narration of the 1881-1882 Urabi Revolution from the point of view of the British Consul. Expecting him, as a Briton, to be mainly invested in the interests of Empire, I launched into a condemnation of the revolutionaries as unjustified agitators, portraying their wish for Egyptian autonomy as a childish rebellion against superior British rule. To my surprise, my Egyptian teacher did not approve of such a response since, he explained, the British respected patriotism and despite the conflict of interest, the British Consul would have admired Urabi's noble heroism. Years later, as I wrap up my dissertation on fictional representations of Egyptian revolutions in British and Egyptian fiction, I am reminded of this conversation.

At the heart of this exchange are different understandings of the discourse of history. While my answer, inadvertently, pointed to the illusion of objectivity and the elusiveness of history, and contended that evaluations of events are bound to be tainted by national or other interests, my instructor's response alerted me to the danger of generalization. Yet, his view housed a paradox. On the one hand, in cautioning me against making assumptions based on the national and political allegiances of certain groups, it exhibited an awareness that although a member of the British Empire, the Consul might in reality sympathize – either sincerely or in a patronizing spirit – with the demands of the Egyptian people. On the other hand, my teacher himself made a generalization and an assumption about the British, describing all of them as a people who appreciated courage and patriotism, even when directed against them. Once more, we come face to face with the illusion of objectivity.

Interestingly, and sadly, initial assessments of the 2011 Revolution re-activated colonial discourse. While international media portended impending doom featured in the institution of another Iran, equating the end of Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule with the rise of a reign of "Islamic terror," the Egyptian state and state media deployed the same narrative in order to warn Egyptians of the dangers of civil unrest. The state portrayed demonstrating Egyptians as ignorant, indolent mobs. In a replication of the colonial parent-child narrative, state figures, supported by most state media, referred to demonstrating Egyptians as a "bunch of kids." In an infamous television interview, the former Prime Minister commented that he would send the demonstrators some candy. In another instance, the former Vice President declared on CNN that Egyptians were not yet ready for democracy. Thus, the state re-configured young Egyptian men and women who were voicing serious demands into irresponsible children once more assigning Egypt to the waiting-room of history. Described as lacking the training required to transition into autonomy and modernity, Egyptians were pronounced as not yet prepared for self-rule.

Attributing acts of sabotage and rampant violence to demonstrators, state media promulgated various fictions casting the revolutionaries as rabble-rousers sponsored by foreign money, depicting heroes and martyrs of the revolution and of previous state violence as collaborators, spies, morally depraved men and women or as rich, spoilt drug addicts. Soon after, perspectives on the revolution changed, yet many mysteries remained. For example, evidence is yet to be found identifying the person(s) who hired the snipers that shot at the demonstrators in *Tahrir Square*. With the absence of evidence inculcating a specific group, various fictions arose, first accusing the ousted Mubarak and/ or his ousted Minister of Interior and, later, after the ouster of Mohamed Morsi from Egypt's presidency in June 2013, accusing the Muslim Brotherhood of the offense. As both former presidents undergo trial, Egypt has nothing but

fictions of the 2011 Revolution.

Publications on modern Egypt, its history and revolutions abound, yet these studies mostly occur within area studies while postcolonial studies is still largely dominated by India. Similarly, discussion of Arabic literature tends to occur within Arabic and Near East or Middle East Studies with occasional readings within a postcolonial framework, such as those by Elliott Colla, Hala Halim, Shaden Tageldin and Sahar Hamouda. Fewer yet, are comparative studies that set up a conversation between English and Arabic literary texts. Because Egyptians, and most of the Arab world, have continued to produce their literature in Arabic, there seems to be a consensus that Arabic literature and postcolonial studies are at odds. In juxtaposing British and Egyptian fictions of the Urabi Revolution and the 1919 Revolution through a postcolonial framework, first, this study continues approaches by the above mentioned scholars and, second, provides some material in what seems to be an under represented area. Third, it seeks to understand to what extent fictional visions of these revolutions continue to inform our present moment and in what ways they illuminate assessments of the latest developments in Egypt.

This dissertation draws upon postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, historiography and narratology in its analysis of fictional portrayals of Egypt's first two modern revolutions – the 1881-1882 Urabi Revolution and the 1919 Revolution – in British and Egyptian fiction. Pairing novels by revolution, progressing through time according to publication date (from 1957 to 2007), I argue that these two historical landmarks become fictional creations which are not only impacted by the writers' national identities, political views and socio-historical contexts, but that also represent different understandings of history. That is, these fictions convey, first, the authors' views of the relationship between past events and their manner of linguistic transmission and, second, the authors' perspectives on the historian's relationship to the events

and how this influences evaluations of these incidents in terms of objectivity or lack thereof. Finally, they point to the authors' stances on the integrity of the historical archive itself as document. In this dissertation I use the term "archive" flexibly to include documents, monuments, locations or people. I focus on Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive* (1958), the third volume of *The Alexandria Quartet*, Naguib Mahfouz's *Sugar Street* (1957), the last volume of *The Cairo Trilogy*, John Wilcox's *The Guns of El Kebir* (2007), and Bahaa Taher's *Sunset Oasis* (2006).

In *The Guns of El Kebir*, Barker, a magistrate acting as a witness in court, offers testimony that incriminates Jenkins, the defendant. The narrator comments that "the facts as he related them were not specifically inaccurate, but they skillfully shaded the evidence against Jenkins" (22-3). What the narrator refers to, here, is a disjunction between events as they occur in time and what they are made to signify when wrought together in narrative form; in other words, what Hayden White describes as emplotment. White explains emplotment as "selecting from the evidence that which is significant and that which, when strung together, produces a meaningful explanation" (qtd in Munslow 34). In a similar vein, Roland Barthes describes the process of signification as organizing events in a specific way so as to impart meaning (Barthes 120-23). Like White, Barthes challenges the idea of history as a simple correspondence between evidence, facts, and therefore reality. Highlighting the literary qualities of historical discourse, he argues that history's realist mode, masking the narrator's creative voice, creates a realistic effect, leading readers to believe that they exist in direct communion with what White refers to as a "historiographically uncontaminated past" (qtd in Munslow 33).

History, therefore, exists only as a distorted copy of past events. Walter Benjamin's description aptly captures this: "the true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only

as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. ... For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (Benjamin 257). In other words, historians create history by deciding what to include and what to exclude from their records based on the relevance of the material to their contemporary moment – itself a judgment that might vary from one historian to another. It follows, then, that historical accounts are adumbrated representations of the past.

This deficiency sharpens when the discussion shifts to literature where, in realist novels, for instance, the work is a creative copy of another creative copy, yet – because of its narrative mode – poses as a realistic rendition of events. To quote Barthes, realism involves “copying a (depicted) copy of the real” (55). The novels under investigation in this study, including *Sunset Oasis* (2006) which employs a multiple narrative technique, follow the realist mode, each depicting an image of previously-existing images of an Egyptian revolution. Readers are multiple times removed from historical events that are accessible through fictionalized literary representations, which themselves rely on distorted accounts, and all of which are filtered through their authors’ subjectivities. How writers understand, utilize and mobilize history and to what ends, is the core question that informs this study.

First, in its analysis of literary representations of revolutions, *Fictions of Revolution* investigates the histories which these manufactured narratives depict, examining the ways in which they impact and are impacted by their immediate historical contexts. Second, the study discusses the narratives that these works advance. In other words, it elaborates on the ways in which the restructuring and literary rendition of historical events corroborate, supplement, or contest official imperialist or nationalist narratives. Last, this project explains how the writers’ respective conceptualizations of the past inform their visions of Egyptian subjectivity and, in

turn, Egypt's past, present and future.

The *Bildungsroman* and the ways in which the writers under study engage with it is integral to the kind of imagined community that the works create. I specifically focus on the genre's function as an educational narrative where the protagonist's growth is predicated upon relinquishing his/her individuality and submitting to the social order. While this is oppressive to a European protagonist, it is doubly so for a non-European character whose education requires embracing a discourse which others him/her. Therefore, the novels' affirmation or rejection of the *Bildungsroman* serves as a justification or repudiation of the genre's colonialist, civilizational narrative, which equates Enlightenment with Europe and the latter with modernity. In adopting this paradigm, the non-European protagonist is cast adrift: alienated from the vast majority of fellow Egyptians, tolerated, at best, by the Europeanized or rejected by everyone. The Egyptian protagonist fails to reach enlightenment within the framework of the European *Bildungsroman*.

In charting the protagonist's education in relation to the *Bildungsroman* and in validating or subverting the genre, the novels in this study function as histories that disseminate specific "historical truths" about Egypt or Britain. Despite that, the writers of these works and/or critics might disagree. Three of the novelists under discussion have either been defended against or asked about writing a historical novel. The responses indicate a certain conceptualization of the historical novel and of the role of literature. For instance, defending Durrell's *The Alexandria Quartet* against historical inaccuracies, Theodore L. Steinberg asserts that Durrell is not writing history. Thus, the cultural inaccuracies which critics such as Mahmoud Manzaloui raise, or the Jewish conspiracy to which Kenneth Rexroth objects, are irrelevant since the *Quartet* is "a work, like other epics (as well as like historical novels) that uses history, but it is a work of the imagination [...] Durrell is not pretending to write history. Whether the Copts and the Jews ever

joined forces against the British is as irrelevant as whether there was an actual Aeneas or Beowulf. The real question is whether the plot device works.” (Steinberg 206-7). Yet, the fact remains, that the *Quartet* creates a certain reality for its contemporary Egypt.

Mahfouz, too, when asked about the difference between portraying historical versus realistic characters replies that he has not written a historical novel *per se* (Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 63). Additionally, he has declared that he does not treat the *Cairo Trilogy* as a historical novel and in fact states that he has omitted many parts about the 1919 Revolution because the work focuses on the family whose life it depicts (Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 187). In contrast, when asked if he has considered writing a historical novel Taher asserts that all his novels are historical because history is a living thing that extends into the present (Hussein A. 125). Likewise, Mahfouz, having written three novels set in ancient Egypt and whose main focus has been history, emphasizes that he has always depicted the present in his works (Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 63). Apparent in these declarations is the discrepancy in views, and some ambivalence in the case of Mahfouz, on the connection between history, works of imagination which utilize plot devices, and the presence of the contemporary moment in the past. These elements, to evoke White and Barthes, highlight the fluidity of history/historical writing, causing the boundaries between history and fiction to collapse.

In *The Historical Novel*, Georg Lukács explains that “what matters ... in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured 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 reality” (42). Speaking of Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels, Lukács writes that historical authenticity for Scott means “the quality of the inner life, the morality, heroism, capacity for sacrifice, steadfastness etc.

peculiar to a given age” (50). In other words, a historical novel, through a depiction of the conditions surrounding the actual events, foregrounds the people’s experience of revolutions and, one deduces, the ramifications of these events. Lukács also adds that what distinguishes the epic from the historical novel is that in the latter, the historical figure exists on the margin of the narrative (45). One may re-word Lukács’ statement to say that, in marginalizing the historical figure, the historical novel focuses on the subaltern.

Endorsing in its approach Taher’s view that the historical is always part of the work, this dissertation prefers a more flexible understanding of the historical novel not as a work which deliberately sets out to present a fictionalized documentation of the past, but one which uses history – the past – as a vehicle to address its contemporary moment. For the purposes of the dissertation, I would like to extend the concept of the historical figure, to include persons belonging to a dominant group that exercises power over the disempowered. This includes, for example, David Mountolive, the British ambassador in Durrell’s *Mountolive*.

By centering figures of authority or pushing them to the margins of the narrative, each of the works discussed below offers a historical account which, to evoke Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “worlds” a world, inviting readers to act as participants in an imagined community while excluding others. As such, as the texts appear to talk to each other as they re-invent Egypt’s revolutions. For instance, Durrell’s *Mountolive* decontextualizes its narrative presenting it as a timeless Egyptian story of government corruption resulting from Egyptians’ flawed nature and their illogical religious proclivities. The novel imagines a superior British community, displaced by incompetent Egyptians who do not possess the skills needed to administer an efficient, modern state. This imagined community of dispossessed Britons, like Durrell and his parents, no longer has access to colonial posts previously facilitated by its privileged position under Empire.

It – the imagined community – struggles with the morality and validity of Empire yet, succumbs to imperial nostalgia. Doubtful of Egypt's ability to join the civilized world, British subjects like Durrell's protagonist are re-habilitated and taught to validate the colonial narrative.

Unlike *Mountolive*, Mahfouz's *Sugar Street* records factionalism and corruption in the context of an independent Egypt that cannot yet attain full sovereignty because of continued British interference in domestic affairs. Whereas, Durrell sees only religious voices, gracefully blinking off dissent and declaring that Egypt is not prepared to emulate Britain's rule of law, Mahfouz's novel shows the existence of multiple voices – such as that of the *Wafdists*, the Muslim Brothers, and the communists – signaling the country's readiness for a pluralistic political life. Keeping the leaders of the revolution on the margins, Mahfouz centers the petty bourgeoisie and moves towards including the laborers towards the end.

Mahfouz's world is one of disillusioned Egyptians who realize that the promise of colonial discourse – and its accompanying narrative the *Bildungsroman* – to accept them as equals is never to be fulfilled. Mimicry, upon which colonial discourse relies, is a self-sustaining discourse constantly producing the Other's difference. Therefore, in casting the colonized Other as a mimic, an imperfect copy of the Self, colonial discourse operates on a deferred promise, setting him/her up for eternal failure (Bhabha). Egyptians are doomed to failure in the European *Bildungsroman*. Because the Other/ Egypt is never assimilated, the promises of the 1919 Revolution are not fulfilled. Mahfouz's world does not offer a homogeneous imagined community which subscribes to the same ideology. That is, while the *Wafdists*, the Muslim Brothers, and the communists all reject British colonialism, they differ on the program of action.

Reading Durrell's *Quartet* as an epic, Steinberg defines epic as a “narrative that focuses simultaneously on the lives of its characters and on a pivotal moment in the history of a

community, whether that community be a nation or a people or the whole of humanity. That pivotal moment may be the founding of a civilization, the collapse of a civilization, or any other major event, such as an invasion or another sort of threat” (29). Steinberg extends Lukács’ definition quoted above from a work which focuses on a historical persona to an account allotting equal attention to the characters and the whole nation at a crucial moment in time. In this respect, both the *Quartet* and Mahfouz’s *Trilogy*, of which *Sugar Street* is the last volume, stand together as two epics: one commemorating a lost greatness and the other, though ruing corruption, foretelling a new beginning.

Like *Mountolive*, *The Guns of El Kebir* offers an imagined community of benign British officials gracefully bearing the white man’s burden by intervening militarily, and out of altruistic motives, in a lawless country. Britain’s purpose in invading Egypt, as the story goes, is ending a class uprising and saving an ignorant, misled population from further bloodshed by protecting them from their nationalist leaders. Even dissenting figures are co-opted into the narrative by making them acknowledge the need for Britain’s civilized intervention. By brushing aside British dissenting voices, the novel forges an uncomplicated British social imaginary where everyone admits to the necessity of intervention in Egypt. The protagonists of this *Bildungsroman* in the guise of an imperial romance, are taught to trust the social order. One could say that *Mountolive* and *The Guns of El Kebir*, both nostalgically longing for a bygone era, record endings whereas *Sugar Street* and *Sunset Oasis* record beginnings.

Taher’s vision, like Mahfouz’s, is more nuanced. His narrative reflects the multiplicity of imagined communities at any given time. For example, *Sunset Oasis* contains figures where patriotism and treason meet. These figures do not all share the same nationalist aspirations. Taher’s account shows the various shades of subalternity. As Ranajit Guha notes, a said group

could occupy different roles based on location, so that the same group is dominated in one area, but in another one belongs to the dominant group (Guha 7). Such is the case with the protagonist who is a subaltern in Cairo, but in Siwa is a member of a dominant group. Egyptian-Siwan relations, where Egyptian identity breaks along ethnic and gender lines, further complicate concepts such as nationalism, colonialism and patriotism. Equally denied assimilation, the protagonist of this *Bildungsroman* embraces a death that grants life for future generations of Egyptians. Choosing to destroy emblems of history, represented in an ancient temple, he opens up history for fresh narratives.

As evident, both Durrell's and Wilcox's views of history are conservative. Their works subscribe to the notion of a single, true history, that of colonialist, imperialist discourse. In their affirmation of the *Bildungsroman* they echo imperialist accounts of Egyptians as fanatical and therefore immune to Britain's civilizing attempts – Durrell, or as ignorant peasants deceived by power-hungry leaders – Wilcox. Durrell's protagonist, a stand in for Durrell, goes to Egypt, first, in 1918, then, in the 1930s using Edward William Lane's 1836 book as a true gospel on Egypt, expecting it to be an accurate representation of Egypt 100 years after its publication. Durrell in this sense corroborates one history, one paradigm which states that Egypt is timeless, exotic, yet fanatic and grotesque. He refuses to see the actual people preferring to see disease and deformation as opposed to the vibrant intellectual life that rivaled that of England (Diboll, *Lawrence* 185). Similarly, Wilcox's narrative excludes historical British voices that spoke against Empire, making the two dissenting voices in the novel embrace the dominant discourse. In short, neither writer attempts to re-evaluate the past. Rather, both novels uphold the Enlightenment with its structure that deems Europe to be superior and the Other inferior.

Noticeable in Mahfouz's and Taher's works is an increasing disillusionment with the

(ab)use of history. The protagonist in *Sugar Street* announces that he is ready to destroy the pyramids in exchange for a fresh, new history, while the protagonist in *Sunset Oasis* destroys an ancient temple which has become the cause of much strife. These two stances reflect progressively flexible views of history as an individual creation where all should be allowed to contribute and where no one model should be held as a paradigm for all. For both authors, history is always in the making. It is an ongoing process that changes according to need and historical moment. As mentioned above, for both Mahfouz and Taher history is not confined to the past, but also extends to the present. Written from the point of view of the now-vanquished victor, the British novelists follow in the footsteps of Walter Benjamin's historicist who presents "the 'eternal' image of the past" (264), whereas the Egyptian novelists, unmasking the inequalities and unfulfilled promises of Empire or, in Benjaminian terms, exposing the history of barbarism lying beneath that of civilization, "blast open the continuum of history" (264), freeing Egyptians to create it anew.

Thus, in these competing histories of the two revolutions, British and Egyptian authors have exhibited different perceptions of Egyptian subjectivity. On the one hand, Durrell's *Mountolive* and Wilcox's *The Guns of El Kebir* portray Egyptians as static and politically inept, in the former because of their religious predisposition, and in the latter because of their ignorant trust in imposters posing as nationalists. On the other hand, Mahfouz's *Sugar Street* and Taher's *Sunset Oasis* reflect the contemporary debates on Egyptian national identity vis-à-vis the West, particularly Britain. In effect, while the British authors under study confine Egypt's revolutions to the past, dissociating them from ongoing discussions of Egyptian nation formation and self-definition, for their Egyptian counterparts these revolutions are forever present in the Egyptian national memory, existing on a continuum and shaping views of the past, present and future.

Quite unexpectedly, or perhaps not surprisingly, in the same way that the discourse of the *Bildungsroman* has inspired fictional retellings of the Urabi and the 1919 revolutions, it continues to inspire Egyptian evaluations of the contemporary moment. In their negotiations of their current state after the 2011 Revolution, Egyptians have utilized the narrative of the *Bildungsroman* to measure their progression towards a healthy democratic government. Evoking the schooling system, the media has been using the phrase “First Year democracy,” as a descriptor of this transitional stage, not so much to denote a temporal moment that started early in 2011, but to identify a phase that marks Egypt’s transition from the waiting room of history into maturity. These assessments have given rise to two narratives simultaneously. One narrative emphasizes the shrewdness of Egyptians and their quickness to rise against a president who, despite earlier promises, abandoned democracy. The other narrative, critiquing ongoing demonstrations, revives orientalist portrayals of Egyptians as yet unschooled in the art of democracy. At times, this leads to calls for enlightened despotism during this transitional period. During the process, events are constantly re-defined, gaining legitimacy or losing it, or sometimes occupying an ambiguous position – a prominent example is the June 30th, 2013 events, seen by many as a populist revolution and coded by many others as a military coup.

Reflecting on the 1952 coup, referred to in Egypt as a revolution, Mahfouz expounds his theory of revolution. He observes that it is planned by the shrewd, executed by the courageous while the cowardly reap its benefits. He outlines three stages through which revolutions pass: first illegitimacy, which he alternatively terms the struggle to gain legitimacy, second dictatorship, which lasts long until it culminates into the final step of legitimacy and democracy (Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 216-17). As current debates point to the unfulfilled promises of the 2011 revolution, locating Egypt in the middle stage, the struggle continues. While Egypt

decides on which paradigm to adopt and which to adapt, traces of the past emerge in the present. Similar patterns emerge causing Egyptians to evaluate previous responses in an attempt to find answers. A case in point is the issue of free speech which many Egyptians disagree upon, some identifying it as most important during times of strife and others viewing it as least important. How dissent was handled throughout Egypt's past is a question which informs conversations about ways of addressing it at this contemporary moment. In the absence of a resolution to this *Bildungsroman*, there are no better words to end on than Ahmad's reminder in *Sugar Street* that the resolution lies in perpetual revolution – an indefatigable effort to reach an ideal, and a constant revolt against false ideals. Mahfouz's and Taher's visions, analyzed in this study, are highly relevant for the suggestions that they offer.

Chapter 1 reads Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive* (1958), the third volume of his famous *The Alexandria Quartet*, as a reaffirmation of the orientalist Enlightenment values of the *Bildungsroman*, which upholds Western values as the standard to which society must conform. I argue that in a novel published at the end of Empire and in the aftermath of the nationalization of the Suez Canal and the Tripartite Invasion of Egypt, Durrell revives orientalist portrayals of Egypt in which both Muslims and Christians are incapable of functioning as rational political beings because of their flawed natures and their illogical religious proclivities. Falling in love with an Egyptian Coptic woman who stands for Egypt, the eponymous protagonist subscribes to the mirage of the civilizing mission believing that Egyptians could enter a state of social and political maturity through adoption of European ways. The novel marks his disillusionment with grotesque Egypt and his acknowledgement of the English social order as his moment of maturity. Identifying Egyptians as forever different, it establishes the European standard as the only route towards modernity.

Chapter 2 reads *Sugar Street* (1957), the last volume of Naguib Mahfouz's landmark *The Cairo Trilogy*, as a subversion of the *Bildungsroman*. I argue that, in depicting a period where Egyptian attempts at political autonomy are constantly thwarted by Egyptian government corruption and British interference in domestic affairs, Mahfouz interrogates the genre's imperialist project as well as Egyptian calls to cling to native traditions. Through Kamal, the protagonist, Mahfouz exposes the failure of the *Bildungsroman* to create a modern Egyptian nation since the education of the Egyptian protagonist is predicated upon self-Othering, alienating him from, instead of reconciling him with, his native society. Mahfouz equally critiques the inherited Arabic form of *al hubb al udhri*, unrequited, romantic love, as unfit for the Egyptian national intellectual after 1919. *Sugar Street* introduces an alternative, culturally specific *Bildungsroman* that advocates for eternal revolution as the condition of Egyptian subjectivity. That is, rather than limit Egyptian national identity to a certain ideology or religion, Mahfouz offers a program that allows for continuous self-definition. In short, unlike *Mountolive*, which views modernity as submission to the English social order, *Sugar Street* understands it as a strategic, eclectic piecing together of Eastern and Western values that fit the contemporary moment.

In Chapter 3, I argue that by fusing the imperial romance with the *Bildungsroman* in addressing the Urabi Revolution, John Wilcox's *The Guns of El Kebir* (2007) harkens back to British rule over Egypt as a glorious time of British heroism and altruism. Despite brief questioning of Empire, the novel affirms imperialist discourse when its protagonists (an unorthodox ex-army officer and a feminist anti-imperialist) both recognize the necessity of the British occupation. Reviving the *Bildungsroman* as the narrative of modernity, *Guns* denies Egyptian nationalism and revolution by redefining it as a class conflict and ties the protagonists'

maturity to identification with the occupation. The narrator's restructuring of events through use of prolepsis – flash-forward – and manipulation of narrative speed, delivers an imperialist account of the revolution. Written in the early 21st century when America is currently imperial power, *Guns* justifies and celebrates Britain's imperial past.

In Chapter 4, I analyze Bahaa Taher's *Sunset Oasis* (2006), the only one of the four novels with a multiple narrative form. In addressing the Urabi Revolution, it subverts several genres including the imperial romance, the national romance, and the *Bildungsroman* as it engages with native and foreign cultural traditions represented by the *One Thousand and One Nights* and Irish folktales respectively. While the novel is intent upon retelling events as a revolution in which unequal power and treason led to the victory of the British and subsequent occupation of Egypt, it is unforgiving in its exposure of Egypt's own role as a colonial power in the Egyptian western region of Siwa. Written amid Egyptian calls for democratic reform and heavy-handed suppression of opposition, the novel reflects Egypt's despair around 2006. The most radical of the four, it rejects all forms of national belonging – Pharaonism, Ottomanism and Egyptian nationalism – as limiting and exclusionary. Yet, despite that, it does not reject nationalism, advocating for an Egyptian subjectivity that embraces the creativity of historiography while transcending ideologies to include all Egyptians.

Chapter One: Egypt the Grotesque:

Egyptian Political Life after the 1919 Revolution in Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive*

Introduction

When Lawrence Durrell first started taking notes for what was to become *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957-1960) he was planning to set the book in India or Tibet but, after living in Alexandria, he decided to set it in Egypt (Rashidi 7). Arriving in Alexandria in 1941, Durrell reacted to the city with a mixture of fascination and aversion, viewing it as a “broken-down version of Naples.” He loathed, romanticized and exoticized it all at the same time, seeing in it “the great hinge where oriental and occidental cultures met – the ancient source of so much western culture” (Bowker 151-52). In his introduction to the 1982 edition of E. M. Forster's guidebook to the city, Durrell laments the 7th century Arab invasion of Egypt contrasting it to the 1798 French invasion setting one as a harbinger of darkness and the other as a herald of enlightenment. Commenting on his 1977 visit to Alexandria, he disparages the use of Arabic and the emergence of a culture for the native population and attributes the city's decline to the disappearance of foreigners (Durrell, “Introduction” XI-XII). This tension between what Durrell views as Arab darkness and European rationality informs his argument in the *Quartet*.

This chapter proposes reading *Mountolive* (1958), the third volume of the *Quartet*, through Tzvetan Todorov's explanation of the fantastic in order to understand the ways in which Durrell infuses the traditional *Bildungsroman* with elements of the fantastic crafting a novel that validates imperialist discourse within which the British presence in Egypt appears as a benign, rational force. Depicting 1934-36 Egypt in nostalgic terms, *Mountolive* records the life of David Mountolive as ambassador in an independent Egypt. The novel traces the *Bildungsheld's* – hero's – education as he grows out of his love for both Egypt and Leila Hosnani, an elite Coptic

Egyptian woman, and recognizes the grotesqueness of both.

I argue that the text paints Egyptian political life after the 1922 independence as rife with corruption inaccurately showing this to be the result of limited if not non-existent British intervention therefore condemning, rather than celebrating, Egypt's 1919 Revolution. In so doing, it replicates the colonialist master-servant/ parent-child relationship by depicting 1919, and the subsequent nominal independence of 1922, as events that sent the child, Egypt, too early out in the world, and in so doing unleashed an outbreak of corruption and religious zeal which in the end destroyed both Egypt and Britain; the former by separating it too early from Britain's watchful authority and the latter by breaking up an empire.

The 1919 Revolution: Historical Background

Two anti-British nationalist strains dominated Egypt before the 1919 Revolution. The first favored continued alliance with the Ottoman Empire as a means of preserving a Muslim identity which, for a long time, carried with it military, scientific, commercial and cultural hegemony. The second stance viewed the Ottoman presence as an invasion that caused Egypt's stagnation while nurturing the Ottoman metropole and advocated independence from both empires – Ottoman and British.¹ In 1912 Egyptians rejected a plan to separate from Turkey refusing to abandon it during its war with Italy (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 44-5). Contemporary historians Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, however, attribute the failure of the plan to Lord Kitchener (Gershoni, "Introduction" 9).

The victory of the Allies in World War I, their promises of freedom for smaller nations, as well as President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen-Points-speech encouraged Saad Zaghloul,

¹ See Gershoni, *Egypt, Islam and the Arabs*.

former Egyptian Cabinet Minister and Vice-President Elect of the Egyptian Legislative Assembly, to ponder Egyptian independence. Forming the seed of the *Wafd* Party, Zaghloul and four other prominent Egyptians convened to discuss a plan. With the support of the Egyptian Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the original five founders elected Zaghloul and two other members of the Egyptian Legislative Assembly to form a *wafd* (delegation) to meet with Sir Reginald Wingate, the British High Commissioner who was sympathetic to their demands, to discuss an appeal of Egypt's case at the Versailles Peace Conference (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 46-9).

Britain had announced a Protectorate over Egypt in 1914 against the latter's will, and, according to twentieth century Egyptian nationalist historian Abdel Rahman al Rafi, Egypt paid a heavy price for the war. Britain had used the country as a military base in the Middle East. Besides serving as a center for political publicity for Britain in Syria and the Arab Peninsula, Egypt was also the base for the battle of Dardanelles and Iraq, then for battles in Syria and Palestine which, Rafi explains, eventually led to Britain's victory in the war. According to Rafi, soldiers from various parts of the Empire stationed in Egypt attacked and killed Egyptians in various parts of the country causing them to further hate the Protectorate (Rafi, *Thawrat* 27-8).

The British Secretary of State denied Egypt permission to present its case at Versailles, maintaining that the Secretaries of State would not be available until much later (Lloyd 286-87). The original five founders of *Wafd* Party along with two new recruits formed an organization named *al-Wafd al-Misri* (the Egyptian Delegation) whose goal was attaining Egypt's independence through peaceful means. To gain public support the *Wafd*, with the Egyptian government's approval, collected signatures from Egyptians authorizing the party to act as their representatives. Depicting the Egyptian government as intimidated into supporting the party,

David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister from 1916-1922 and Egypt's High Commissioner from 1925-1929, declared that once signatures had been collected, Egypt's ministers saw no other option but to join the movement (286-87). According to contemporary Egyptian historian Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, however, the *Wafd* enjoyed such popular support that its Central Committee reached 17 members while public membership included almost all of Egypt. The party also included members from the Coptic community who allied themselves with the rest of Egyptians for the first time (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 49).² Janice Terry, a *Wafd* historian, points out that “ ‘the inclusion of the influential Coptic community, the largest Christian minority in Egypt, unified the nation and in the process provided the *Wafd* with some of its most able strategists. Nor should the considerable financial contributions of the Copts be underestimated’ ” (Diboll, “The Secret” 82). The *Wafd* delivered speeches around the Egyptian countryside as a means of rallying public support (Sayyid-Marsot. *Egypt's* 49-50).

Both Rafi and Valentine Chirol, a journalist and British diplomat contemporary to the 1919 Revolution, agree that Egyptians believed that they had the right to attend the conference since other countries such as India, Syria and the Hijaz – present-day Saudi Arabia – were invited to discuss their situations. But, whereas the former views Egypt's reaction to the exclusion from the conference as a justified frustration with the occupation and the Protectorate (Rafi, *Thawrat* 36-68), the latter portrays it as pettiness on Egypt's part using terms such as “blind anger at Britain's refusal to listen to Egypt's demands,” “the wrath of the Nationalists,” and “the storm of protest” to describe the 1919 demonstrations (Chirol 142-55).

The British government refused to negotiate with what Lloyd George describes as

² On Copts in the *Wafd* see Terry. To this day the *Wafd* Party includes prominent Coptic figures, an example of whom is Mounir Fakhry Abdel Nour, Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment.

“Nationalist politicians, not representative of Egypt, carrying extreme demands.” In his account of the events, Lloyd George, who sees constitutional reform in Egypt as a “parish affair” (291), blames the nationalists for causing mayhem maintaining that “their business was to raise a storm, not to be over-careful as to whether they could control it” (288-89) and finds the British government “righteously indignant with the Nationalists, whose country and liberties had been sheltered from the horrors of war by British arms, for advancing unacceptable demands; with the Prime Minister for persistently pressing the claims of Egypt at so inopportune a moment; even with the High Commissioner [Wingate] for not appearing to realise that the Foreign Office had matters of world-wide importance on hand” (288-89, 291).

On March 9, 1919, Britain, having reportedly summoned the sympathetic Wingate to London in order to alienate him from the Egyptian scene, authorized Sir Milne Cheetham, acting High Commissioner, to exile Zaghoul and two other *Wafd* members to Malta (Lloyd 296-97), thus inflaming the situation as twentieth-century Egyptian historian Yunan Labib Rizq argues (49). This sparked a series of demonstrations starting on March 10, and lasting six days, which later became known as the 1919 Revolution.³ They were initiated by students at the colleges of Law, Medicine, Engineering and Al-Azhar, who were joined by tram and taxi drivers as well as Cairo shopkeepers who closed their shops in solidarity. Protests grew to include the Syndicate of Lawyers, all government officials, railway workers,⁴ and elite women in their veils.⁵ Students circulated news of the unrest in other cities, towns, and villages, where demonstrating Egyptians tampered with railway lines and carriages in order to prevent the British from sending troops

³ For an Egyptian account of the revolution, see Rafi, *Thawrat* 39-68.

⁴ For details of the demonstrations and the violent police response to it, see Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 50-1.

⁵ On the role of Egypt's female elite in the 1919 Revolution see Baron 105-213. For an imperialist report on the events by a contemporary journalist as well as a brief, orientalist account of the contribution of females from various social classes: elite, *fallahat* (peasant-women), lower class courtesans, and school girls, see Chirol 167-69.

from India to suppress the uprisings, as they had previously done with the 1881-82 Revolution. In rural areas Egyptians killed British officials (Sayyid-Marsot, *Liberal* 50-1).

Although Chirol lists inflation, British affluence, domination in employment and business, and Britain's unwillingness to repay charges it had incurred during the war, his statement describing the transfer to the masses of "crude belief in Western ideals" of liberty and democracy strips the demonstrations of legitimacy. He claims that the *fallahin* (peasants) joined the demonstrations because they were made to believe that the Protectorate was the cause of their plight, while the native upper classes might have joined for the thrill (149-55). Further, Chirol and other historians such as Jacques Berque, a 20th century Algerian-French orientalist and sociologist, attribute the revolution to religious sentiment (306-07). In a similar vein, Ellie Kedourie, a 20th century British scholar of Iraqi Jewish descent, claims that Zaghloul depended on religious fanaticism to attain power (139-60). Rafi, however, believes that the events constituted a legitimate revolution born out of social, economic, and political grievances (Rafi, *Thawrat* 39-68).

On March 25, 1919 General Allenby arrived in Egypt as the new High Commissioner and advised the release of Zaghloul and other exiled Wafdists. On April 6, 1919 Britain released the exiled nationalists giving them permission to go to Paris. However, unrest continued in Egypt until the end of 1919 and over the period of ten months British forces killed 800 Egyptians and wounded 1400 (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 51-2). The *Wafd's* negotiations with Britain continued until Britain's unilateral Declaration of 1922 which ended the Protectorate, granted Egypt independence, and elevated the ruler of Egypt from Sultan Fuad to King Fuad.⁶ The party was also instrumental in achieving the 1936 Treaty which slackened Britain's grip over Egypt. One

⁶ For details on the continued negotiations between 1920 and 1922 see Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 55-64.

important result of this treaty was that Britain would no longer send a High Commissioner to Egypt, but, instead, would send an ambassador,⁷ the post which David Mountolive fills in Durrell's novel. The *Wafd* continued to lead the national struggle until 1952 when Gamal Abdel Nasser, second president of Egypt, dissolved it after the 1952 Coup d'état (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 57).

Durrell's Life and the Composition of the *Alexandria Quartet*

Lawrence Durrell (1912-1990) was born in India to an Anglo-Indian family of Irish descent who had not lived in Britain for two generations (Diboll, "Introduction" 2). His family sent him to England to finish his education after a childhood spent in India and Burma (Rashidi 6). Eight years after his father's death and at the age of 24, Durrell, his mother, and siblings moved to Corfu, Greece (Diboll, "Introduction" 2) in search of more affordable living. He lived in Greece for 21 non-consecutive years moving among various Greek islands (Lillios, "Introduction" 19, 27).

Durrell arrived in Alexandria after escaping a Nazi attack on Corfu during World War II and spent four years in Egypt from 1941-1945 (Friedman, Chronology XX). He wrote for the Alexandria-based *Egyptian Gazette* before working as a Foreign Press Service Officer for the British Embassy in Cairo and, in 1944, became the Press Attaché to Alexandria. He finished *Justine* in 1957, while living in Cyprus, and wrote *Balthazar*, *Mountolive*, and *Clea*, the other parts of the *Quartet*, in France (Pinchin 159, 162). Despite having published many pieces before the *Quartet*, Durrell did not receive critical attention until the publication of *Justine* (1957), the first novel of the tetralogy and, although he continued to write afterwards, the *Quartet* remains

⁷ For the full text of the 1936 Treaty see Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 253-67.

his most prominent work (Friedman, “Introduction” 1). According to contemporary British scholar Michael Diboll, praise for the tetralogy put Durrell on equal footing with Joyce and Proust, raising calls to award him the Nobel Prize (Diboll, “Introduction” 3). In 1988 he competed with the Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz for the prize and lost it to the latter (Diboll, *Lawrence* 93).

From praising Durrell for his high artistic style (Dobrée 61-79), to applauding his talent in portraying Alexandria’s visual, aural, and olfactory aspects (Stewart 129-42), to analyzing his tetralogy in relation to Marquis de Sade’s writing (Quinn 270-281), criticism on the *Quartet* abounds.⁸ Ignoring the socio-historical and political contexts of the *Quartet*, many studies focus on its modernist and postmodernist aspects exploring its psychological,⁹ philosophical,¹⁰ Einsteinian,¹¹ and Buddhist¹² themes. When his contemporaries addressed the orientalist aspect of the *Quartet*, other scholars rose in defense. For example, in an essay originally published in 1962, sixteen years before the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, Mahmoud Manzaloui, an Egyptian scholar, critiques what he calls the “Levantinism” in the *Quartet* citing various historical and linguistic inaccuracies. Manzaloui also points to the erasure of Egyptians from the narrative (144-57). In an article published in the same year, Alfred Kazin, American writer and literary critic, sees Durrell’s exotic portrayal of Alexandria as a means of expiating his guilt about Empire and concludes that Durrell is more interested in pleasing his imagination than in using it to make “deeper contact with the world” (30-33). In a 1967 response to Manzaloui, American scholar William Leigh Godshalk dismisses the former’s argument and, citing Durrell’s

⁸ For an anthology of criticism on Durrell by his contemporary scholars, see Moore. See also Friedman, *Critical*.

⁹ See Creed for an analysis of the way Durrell improves on Georg Groddeck’s theory of relativity in the tetralogy.

¹⁰ See for example Rose 215-238.

¹¹ See Bode 135-44, who discusses the *Quartet* in relation to Tarot and the concepts of Space and Time focusing specifically on the Einsteinian conception of Time.

¹² See Woods 93-112.

passages next to their 19th century orientalist sources, determines that Durrell's depictions of Egypt and Egyptians are accurate (158-71).¹³

Such a response indicates an effort to defend the *Quartet* as Durrell's "greatest novel series," as Anna Lillios calls it, and to preserve his reputation as a "major twentieth-century writer" (Lillios, "Introduction" 21) who, in Alan Friedman's words, ranks not just with the "truly great British novelists of the century" such as Conrad and Joyce but with "those of the next order" such as Greene and Huxley (Friedman, "Introduction" 9). In fact, critics such as Anna Lillios extend Durrell's orientalizing of Egypt by falling into the trap of romanticizing Greece then contrasting it to Egypt.¹⁴ Other critics describe Durrell's orientalist depictions in such ambiguous terms as "Durrell is so convincing as a good European he comes close to being a good Levantine" (Rexroth 22). Others, such as Rosalind Gwynne, are inclined to forgive Durrell for certain incomplete depictions of Muslims and Islam in the *Quartet* since he does not portray the Quran itself negatively. Noting the absence of "positive" images of Islam, such as Sufism, Gwynne points to Durrell's artistic talent which allows him to spare his readers the abstractions of theology or metaphysics (92-102).

On the contrary, I argue that this scholarly defense of Durrell and his book focuses exclusively on the aesthetics of the *Quartet* as if they were separable from its racial politics and defense of Empire. In so doing these studies continue to place primary importance on the *Quartet* as an aesthetic object. The focus once again is art while Egypt remains a secondary object – an exotic backdrop that aids our understanding of how the aesthetics work. The novel's erasures, whether of the Quran or of Islam or simply of the way Muslims carry out their lives mark the

¹³ For the sources Durrell consulted while writing the *Quartet*, see Diboll, *Lawrence* 95.

¹⁴ Providing a romanticized description of Greek geography, Lillios writes that for Durrell "after Greece, Egypt was a bitter disappointment" (Lillios, "Introduction" 20).

author's conceptualization of Islam and Muslims as mysterious beings, which in turn reaffirms orientalist images of Muslim society as mysteriously other.

In a notable departure from this aesthetic criticism recent Egyptian, English, and American scholarship has insisted on the importance of the *Quartet's* socio-historical context. Notably, Egyptian scholar Amani Tawfik, British Michael Diboll, American scholars Donald Kaczvinsky and Joseph Boone are among several who employ a postcolonial approach in their analyses of this text.¹⁵ The current study follows this trajectory.

The conditions of the composition of the *Quartet* bear directly upon the narrative of *Mountolive* and my analysis of its refurbished orientalism. First, Durrell wrote the *Quartet* more than ten years after leaving Alexandria, taking his knowledge about Egypt and Alexandria from Edward William Lane's *The Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* (1836) and E.M. Forster's travel guide on Alexandria published in 1922. That is, like 19th-century European travelers who ignored their individual experiences of the country choosing instead to regurgitate material read in other books (Mitchell 31), Durrell depended more on his sources than on his own experience in Egypt.¹⁶ In fact he refers to both books as invaluable companions during his stay in Egypt adding that he read them multiple times (Durrell, "Introduction" XI).

Durrell published the *Quartet* as separate novels between 1957 and 1960, at a time when

¹⁵ See Tawfik, where the author analyzes the depiction of Egyptians in terms of corruption and deformity. For Durrell's depiction of Christian Egyptians see Hamouda. For an examination of the orientalist depiction of Egyptians in relation to Europeans, see Mones. She also analyzes character interactions between English and other European characters and Egyptian ones. Hasan focuses on the emphasis on the alterity of Egypt and Egyptians. He discusses descriptions of Egypt and Egyptians in terms of ugliness, perversity, and animality. For other critiques, see Bowen and Diboll, *Lawrence*. Diboll relates Durrell's focus on the Hellenistic elements of Alexandria to the Wafd's secularist nationalism with its focus on Mediterranean belonging. Kaczvinsky discusses the significance of ornamentalism to colonial and native administration. And, finally, Boone discusses Victorian writers who traveled to Egypt, analyzing the picture of Egypt and North Africa as a site of pleasure/ enjoyment of homoerotic fantasy. The author looks at E.M. Forster and T. E. Lawrence's sexual fantasies.

¹⁶ For sources that Durrell relied on for the composition of the *Quartet*, see Bowker 145. See also Godshalk 158-71. For Durrell's borrowings from Lane's *Manners*, see Gwynne 92-102.

he was impoverished (Friedman, “Introduction” 1) and needed money to pay for his divorce. Anna Lillios writes that his second wife, Eve Cohen, left him responsible for their baby-daughter, Sappho. He had resigned from the British Foreign Office in December 1952 and was living in Cyprus. In the mornings he taught at the Greek School and at night he wrote after his baby went to bed (Lillios, “Introduction” 25). According to Harry Moore, Durrell wrote *Justine* and *Mountolive* each in about 12 weeks while *Balthazar* took only 6 weeks and *Clea* was written in 8 weeks (Moore, “Introduction” X). Describing the writing process in an interview, Durrell says: “ ‘you see, the beauty of it is, that when you are really frantic and worried about money, you find that if it’s going to be a question of writing to live, why, you just damn well buckle to and do it’ ” (Lillios, “Introduction” 26). This is important as it identifies the *Quartet* as a commercial production whose goal is money.

Commenting on the Coptic conspiracy, Kenneth Rexroth reveals that Durrell sold *Justine* before the rest of the work was completed pointing out that he had to produce a novel each year to meet a deadline. As a result:

Plotting, which at the start was careful and wise, became sensational. It not only became sensational, it became frivolous and irresponsible. Perhaps it makes a good hot item for the paperbacks to suggest that the Egyptian Copts and the Jews are in a plot with the Nazis to betray the Arabs and British in Egypt and Palestine – but this is the kind of yarn we associate with Talbot Mundy, not with a serious writer. It is all too easy to envisage a young Egyptian officer in charge of a border post reading that book between hours of duty. This kind of childish meddling with the lives of the innocent should be left to “Steve Canyon” and “Terry and the Pirates.” The word for it is cheap – as well as dangerous. One step more and the word is malicious. 24

A more capacious term is “orientalist,” a highly marketable discourse to which Durrell subscribed. He also held Egyptians in contempt. Gordon Bowker explains that “he did not warm to Egyptians as he did to Greeks” (143). Writing to Henry Miller from Rhodes in 1946, Durrell expresses his hatred of Egypt declaring that he would “ ‘gladly put an army corps into the

country and slaughter the lot of those bigoted, filthy, leprous bastards!’ ” (Gwynne 94). Because Greece and Egypt were constantly in a state of comparison in Durrell’s mind with the former always winning, the setting for the *Quartet* was accidental yet calculated. Perhaps wanting to preserve his romantic image of Greece as a world of picturesque beauty, intellectual fecundity, and healthy sexuality, Durrell thought that if he set the narrative in Athens he would not be able to live there any longer (Lillios, “Introduction” 24).

Additionally, Durrell’s less than complementary opinion about Egypt may have been the result of his personal life. Commenting on the *Quartet*, he explains that Alexandria figures as a place for “ ‘dramatic partings, irrevocable decisions, last thoughts; everyone feels pushed to the extreme, to the end of his bent.’ ” Undergoing a separation from his first wife, Nancy Myers, Durrell, in Lillios’ words, “personally was pushed to the extreme,” choosing promiscuous sex as a means of therapy. Writing to Henry Miller Durrell boasts “ ‘it’s funny the way you get woman after woman ... each more superficial than the last Gaby, Simone, Arlette, Dawn, Penelope.’ ” Busy enjoying various sexual encounters, Durrell could not write. Yet, he blamed this on Egypt. Writing to T. S. Eliot, he declares: “ ‘Egypt is simply lousy with material for good books,’ leading one to succumb to “ ‘apathy and boredom’ ” (Lillios, “Introduction” 22-3). Displacing his own feelings of loss, separation, and sexual abandon on Egypt, Durrell turns it into a location for sheer animal, sexual, orgiastic existence. In short, the image of Egypt as an intellectual wasteland, which Pursewarden, a poet in the novel, expresses in *Mountolive*, is another projection of Durrell’s own lack of productivity.

Equally important is Durrell’s essentialist notion of culture, where, what he called the “spirit of place”: that is, where a person lives, determines who he/ she is. Therefore, according to him, one should also plant oneself in an agreeable environment (Kaczvinsky, “Introduction” 16).

In his opinion, cultures produce the same type of people: “ ‘just as one particular vineyard will always give you a special wine with discernible characteristics so a Spain, an Italy, a Greece, will always give you the same type of culture – will express itself through the human being just as it does through its wild flowers’ ” (Kaczvinsky, “Introduction” 16-17).¹⁷ If one adds to Durrell’s hatred of Egypt his statement that *Mountolive* is meant to be a “straight naturalistic novel” (Bode 136) one begins to see how he formed his picture of Egypt.

Of equal relevance is Egypt’s war-time state compared to Britain’s at the time Durrell lived there. Bowker states that while Durrell’s first impression of Cairo is of dead bodies and swarming flies, it later stood in contrast to Alexandria whose harbor was bombed. According to Bowker, the city offered wealth and plenty to the exhausted English soldiers and visitors: “Shops were full, restaurants offered every delicacy and the nightclubs flourished. Visitors from an England suffering from air-raids and shortages were shocked, while the contrast was even greater for the battle-stained soldiers on leave from the desert”¹⁸ If we add to that Diboll’s statement that “at the time of the Armistice Egypt could boast a Europeanised intellectual elite that rivalled that of Europe itself” (Diboll, *Lawrence* 185), we see a different Egypt from the one that pervades *Mountolive*. But, it is useful to remember that Durrell was not after social realism. As he explains in an interview, “I always want to get a reality which is either grotesque or sinister – perhaps a bit theatrical” (Markle 100). The image of Egypt that *Mountolive* paints is indeed grotesque.

Finally, it is important to note that Durrell composed and published *Mountolive* in France which, two years earlier, had joined Britain and Israel in an attack on Egypt after the

¹⁷ Scholars such as Etienne Balibar identify this as “neoracism” explaining that while it is no longer fashionable – much less intellectually respectable – to ground race in biology, it is acceptable to speak of admirable cultural differences and their hierarchical order assigning the white West to the top rung (Balibar 17-28).

¹⁸ See Bowker 139-66 for Durrell’s experience in Egypt.

nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, which some newspapers, such as the British *Manchester Guardian*, described as an action born of a “nationalist and expansionist spirit.”¹⁹ With Durrell’s need for money in mind, such plotting guarantees him high sales.

The Leila-Mountolive Affair: Re-creating the Myth of the Fantastic Other

Mountolive follows the story of David Mountolive who first visits Egypt in 1918 as a junior officer in the High Commission (Diboll, *Lawrence* 83).²⁰ In order to improve his Arabic, he stays with the prominent Coptic Hosnani family with whom he keeps in touch even after he is assigned postings in other parts of the world. In 1934 he returns to Egypt as British ambassador with limited power only to discover that the Hosnanis are involved in an anti-British conspiracy to establish a Jewish state in Palestine.

Durrell’s use of the *Bildungsroman* to record Mountolive’s education is inextricably tangled with the author’s employment of the *fantastic*, an element usually found in gothic fiction. Todorov defines the *fantastic* as events that defy rational explanation. Because a character cannot ascertain the truth of events, the fantastic is characterized by hesitance. He explains: “the fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.” The fantastic lasts for this period of uncertainty after which the character is faced with two choices. Either he/ she finds a logical explanation, deeming strange events to be illusions, or tricks played upon the character by a drugged mind or a mischievous person – in which case the fantastic becomes *uncanny* – or accepts said supernatural events as real, in Todorov’s words, a reality that is “controlled by laws unknown to us,” thus embracing the *marvelous* (Todorov 25). In addition to the term “marvelous,” I will use

¹⁹ *The Manchester Guardian*.

²⁰ For a *Quartet* chronology see Kaczvinsky, “When was Darley?”

“fantasy” to denote the magical, imaginary image or narrative that reflects Mountolive’s infatuation with an exotic Egypt.

Appearing in gothic fiction to address the *unheimlich* (unfamiliar) in a society that was experiencing new scientific changes or reacting to foreign elements within, the fantastic in *Mountolive* serves two functions. First, it validates the *Bildungsroman* as a traditionalist genre in which the individual cannot locate his or her voice outside the social order, but rather has to reconcile with it. In Durrell’s text, this reconciliation marks Mountolive’s attainment of education. Second, in reinforcing the *Bildungsroman* the fantastic validates orientalist, colonialist discourse forcing Mountolive to accept the colonial binary. In the end he views Egyptians as dangerous, threatening, and *unheimlich*. Mountolive’s experience of two important periods of British history in Egypt, 1918 and 1934-36, allows him to live the colonial fantasy and eventually outgrow it, resulting in an embrace of the English social order.

While few of the events in *Mountolive* are supernatural or fantastic per se, they carry a semblance of the fantastic because Mountolive approaches Egypt through colonial fantasy. In his discussion of 19th and 20th century French and British imperialism in the Near East, Edward Said delineates the dichotomous logic through which these two colonial powers viewed themselves in relation to the region and its inhabitants, the Other. Setting up the Self, Europe, and the Other on oppositional planes, colonial discourse re-appropriated already existing orientalist discourse – available in travelogues and other forms of writing – to prescribe rather than describe that relationship. Assigning Self and Other polar attributes, colonial discourse ascribed rationality, modernity, and civilization to the former while representing the latter as irrational, pre-modern, and uncivilized. This produced a complex relationship where the Self posed as a paternalistic figure guiding the childish other to civilization and at the same time as a masculine force desiring

a passive feminized other. Said uses the example of Gustave Flaubert's travelogue on Egypt to illustrate the objectification of the Eastern woman who, representing the region, figures as a passionate, exotic, sexually wild, yet passive, object available for the European male's sexual gratification.²¹

One could say that orientalist discourse relies on the fantastic in the way it hesitates between describing the Other as exotic, or marvelous, on the one hand, and placing the Other in the realm of the uncanny, on the other hand, by rationally outlining his/ her difference. Oftentimes orientalist discourse falls into the grotesque when it provides contradictory descriptions of the Other representing him/ her, for example, as irrational yet possessing intuitive wisdom. This is the picture of Egypt that *Mountolive* disseminates through sexualized fantasies of its protagonist.

Mountolive approaches Egypt through a colonialist framework that is enthralled with the country's magical difference. Having read Lane's *Manners* as the "true Gospel on Egypt" (44), he expects to re-live the marvelous experience which Lane describes, embracing it as real. He re-enacts the colonial fantasy in his sexual relationship with Leila, which itself mirrors his changing relationship with Egypt. His perception of Egypt begins with the fantastic, where he is perplexed by his new feelings; it shifts to the marvelous, where he decides to accept unquestioned the exoticism of Egyptian life and believe in its magical difference; and then to the uncanny, within which he embraces the English colonialist social order, accepting its "rational" classification of the Other as incapable of self-governance. In the end he places Egypt in the grotesque, defining it as neither uncanny nor marvelous, but somewhere in between. Durrell achieves this by rejecting

²¹ For Flaubert's account of his travels in Egypt, see Flaubert. In many cases the Eastern male is represented in feminized terms figuring as the object of homoerotic desires. See Boone for a discussion of Durrell's investigation of homoerotic sexuality in the *Quartet*.

Egypt's marvelous charms which lure Mountolive at first and replacing them with a disenchanted, and thus ostensibly rational perspective that exposes Egyptians as corrupt, irrational beings ruled by mysterious religious forces that are rightly incomprehensible to a civilized man.

While Mountolive is no longer sure of Egypt's position on the uncanny-marvelous continuum, the novel's identification of Egyptians as grotesque – the midpoint that supposedly corresponds with the fantastic – shifts the hesitation from Mountolive's mind, that is from his inability to see Egyptians for what they are at the beginning, to the inscrutability of Egyptians – their amorphousness which renders them sometimes uncanny and sometimes marvelous while in reality they are dangerous. This inscrutability defies both a rational explanation of Egypt's difference as well as an embrace of a magical culture.

Mountolive's journey reflects Durrell's own vacillation between exposing the moral corruption of Empire and embracing its discourse about exotic, debased Egyptians. Thus, his choice of 1934-36 as setting is highly significant as these years are a shifting point in Britain's imperial relationship with Egypt. That is, while the 1919 Revolution marks the onset of British imperial decline in Egypt, for Durrell it is not the prime cause of the demise of the British Empire in the country. Instead, it is the period leading up to the 1936 Treaty which begins the process by granting Egypt more liberties and constricting those of Britain.

Mountolive's fantasies about Egypt and Leila combine to form an argument that validates and repudiates Empire at the same time. Through fantasy Durrell investigates the state of the British official in the ex-colony. Rather than exploring the situation from the point of view of the Other, as Ken Seigneurie argues (85-108), the novel evokes pity for a diplomat whose days of glory are long gone, and who is helpless in the face of a politically and morally corrupt native

government. A dwarfed image of earlier diplomats, he is naïve enough to believe in the ideology of the civilizing mission. Mountolive, with his second-hand uniform, his small, indifferent dog given to him by the Chancery wives to keep him company, his unrealistically romantic ideas of Egypt and Leila, and, finally, his loneliness incite both laughter and pity at the same time. Durrell shows that in the end Mountolive learns his lesson as he realizes that Egypt is deceitful and decides to leave forever.

Historically, Sir Miles Lampson, later Lord Killearn was the real holder of David Mountolive's job. He arrived in Egypt in summer 1934 as "the last colonial British High Commissioner to Egypt and became Britain's first Ambassador to a supposedly free Egypt in 1936." He continued in this post until 1946. Quite unlike Mountolive, Lampson was an imposing imperialist who was disdainful towards Egyptians, very much in the manner of Lord Cromer, British High Commissioner in Egypt from 1883-1907 (Diboll, *Lawrence* 180-81). As Kaczvinsky notes, Durrell makes Mountolive ambassador when, arriving in Egypt in 1934, he would still have been High Commissioner until the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty (Kaczvinsky, "When was Darley?").

Anne Ricketson Zahlan believes that creating Mountolive as the polar opposite of the high-handed Lampson conveys the "real impotence of England in a rapidly-changing world, the actual inevitability of the deconstructing of the imperial self" (10) To Zahlan's point, I would add that Durrell's lamentation of Britain's receding power, with its underlying argument that Britain's departure is causing Egyptians to revert to their corrupt, barbaric ways, advocates for the Western power's continued presence in Egypt. Seen in the immediate historical context of the novel – Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal and the failed Tripartite Invasion of 1956 – Durrell's liberties with Lampson's character further elicit sympathy for the colonial officer

who is putatively threatened, if not out-manuevered, by recently empowered corrupt, backward Egyptians.

Durrell's ambivalence or, in Todorovian terms, his indecisiveness about how to interpret his life in Egypt, manifests itself in several instances, such as the fish drive with which the novel opens, Faltaus Hosnani's speech about Britain's divisive policies in Egypt, Mountolive's adventure in the child brothel, and, most prominently, Mountolive's relationship with Leila Hosnani whose Europeanized sons are incriminated in the fictional anti-British Coptic conspiracy. In the following I will discuss these episodes, all of which except Faltaus' speech receive marvelous dramatizations. Then I will explain how, through the Leila-Mountolive affair, Durrell resolves his ambivalence through orientalist discourse.

The opening chapter relates Mountolive's first visit to Egypt as a junior diplomat and the start of his affair with Leila. The fish drive is significant for an understanding of the image of Egypt that the text creates. First, this episode establishes the marvelous image of Egypt that the novel contests and confirms at the same time. Second, it outlines the beauty of this world as one that is tempered with ugliness, thus emphasizing its "otherliness" and foreshadowing Mountolive's discovery of Leila as just a fattish Egyptian woman reeking of sesame, mint, and whisky – a "pitiable grotesque" (281). Finally, since Mountolive reflects on how Leila has unleashed his emotions, the episode stresses the idea of the female Other as wild and passionate.

The narrator, a stand-in for Durrell, imposes an exotic atmosphere on Egypt. Immediately propelling readers into an exciting, magical world reminiscent of the *One Thousand and One Nights*, the fishing scene emphasizes Egypt's difference. This magical world, of whose existence Mountolive is unsure, evokes the fantastic. It is beautiful but unfamiliar: "the Egyptian night fell – the sudden reduction of all objects to bas-reliefs upon a screen of gold and violet. The land has

become dense as tapestry in the lilac afterglow, quivering here and there with water-mirages from the rising damp, expanding and contracting horizons, until one thought of the world as being mirrored in a soap-bubble trembling on the edge of disappearance” (11). Mountolive’s musings conjure up an exotic Egypt. The word “tapestry” evokes 19th century orientalist paintings that exoticized the Orient. The passage paints Egypt as a world that plays magical tricks on one’s senses leaving one wondering about its reality. Mountolive’s impressions point to the tension between the Egypt that Mountolive and Durrell create, on the one hand, and the actual Egypt they experience, on the other hand. Both figures impose a magical atmosphere that disappears upon contact with the real world. The Egypt that they create is a mirage like the water mirages that Mountolive sees during the fish drive. Very significantly, the image of this world as a “soap-bubble” captures Durrell’s argument about Egypt and the civilizing mission in the novel.

Ultimately, this ambivalence is resolved by the embrace of Britain as a superior, rational force. Although Mountolive sometimes resists colonial discourse, as in his complex relationship with Leila, he affirms it by attributing the failure of the imperial mission to widespread and intransigent Egyptian corruption. In this sense, both the civilized Egypt that Britain is allegedly trying to create and the spectacular Egypt that Mountolive is creating in his mind are mirages – soap-bubbles that will explode upon contact. In clearer terms, Mountolive, in the end, identifies the magical Egypt, the “magic lantern” (14), as an unreal world, therefore rejecting the marvelous. Although on the surface Mountolive appears to settle for the uncanny when he reconciles with colonial ideology which condemns incorrigible Egyptians, in reality he opts for a middle ground, which I identify as the grotesque. According to the narrator, despite exposure to progressive British ideals, Egyptians have not only clung to their mysterious, pre-modern ways, as in Memlik’s fraudulent spirituality, but have also regressed to a much earlier evil spirituality

epitomized by Narouz, whom I will discuss later. Egyptian society as seen in the novel poses a quandary as it exposes the failure of the British occupation to turn Egyptians into “civilized” people. Mountolive rejects the dream of the romantic, exotic Egypt in favor of the delusion of the grotesque Egypt that cannot be rationally explained.

During the fish drive, Mountolive projects a romantic image of a magical Egypt acquired from orientalist texts such as Lane’s *Manners*. He describes a scene of wild excited birds dashing to obtain a share in the fish that the fishers have just caught. This vivid scene contains loud noises, speedy movement, and a communion between natives and birds that subtly links 1936 Egypt to ancient Egypt in uninterrupted continuity:

... while the larger waders of the lake folded and unfolded awkward wings like old-fashioned painted parasols, or hovered in ungainly parcels above the snapping, leaping water, the kingfishers and herring-gulls came in from every direction at the speed of thunderbolts, half mad with greed and excitement, flying on suicidal courses, some to break their necks outright upon the decks of the boats, some to flash beak forward into the dark body of a fisherman to split open a cheek or a thigh in their terrifying cupidity. The splash of water, the hoarse cries, the snapping of beaks and wings, and the mad tattoo of the finger-drums gave the whole scene an unforgettable splendour, vaguely recalling to the mind of Mountolive forgotten Pharaonic frescoes of light and darkness. (16-17)

The scene presents a picture of a breathless race in wild nature where natives blend with their environment to become part of the landscape. 1918-Egypt, the scene suggests, has remained unchanged since ancient times. Anticipating the implied violence that the novel portrays – for example Memlik Pasha’s²² joy at hearing the sounds of tortured prisoners – the scene depicts birds breaking their necks and injuring fishermen. At the end of the novel, ancient Egypt becomes an evil force that controls its Coptic descendants pushing them to fanaticism. This and other descriptions of Egyptians as ankle-deep in the squirming catch (16), blend Egyptians and

²² Pasha was an honorary title bestowed upon the aristocracy and members of the native elite who provided valuable services to the state.

animals in an image portraying natives in communion with bare nature, emphasizing Egyptians' animality by eliminating the difference between the two. It also recalls 19th century travel writing on Egypt that links natives to soil and excrement (Barrell 97-127).

Mountolive romanticizes Egyptian landscape as well as Egyptians themselves, as seen in his reference to Nessim's "flawless head" and "Byzantine face such as one might find among the frescoes of Ravenna – almond-shaped, dark-eyed, clear-featured" (17). In his analysis of the *Quartet* Michael Diboll chooses to see this as Durrell's tracing of the Mediterranean/ Byzantine elements of Western culture in Egypt (Diboll. *Lawrence*). On the contrary, I argue that Durrell exoticizes both Greece and Egypt albeit in different ways, celebrating the free sexuality of ancient Greece while condemning sexuality in Egypt as excessive and diseased.²³

Mountolive's beautiful picture of the fish drive is marred by ugliness. For example, the lake waters are "turbid" (11). His perceptions of Egypt impart a picture of primitive sensuality. Mountolive sees the "Arabs with their long white robes tucked up to the waist. ... The light gleamed on their dark thighs. The darkness was full of their barbaric blitheness" (16). Describing the scene at the lake "It was all beautiful, but it stank so: yet to his surprise he found he rather enjoyed the rotting smells of the estuary" (12), the narrator renders Egypt as grotesquely beautiful, to be appreciated despite or because of its ugliness and marks Mountolive's embrace of the marvelous.

At the end of the very first paragraph of the novel, readers are told that Egypt appeals to the senses rather than to reason. It is a place that unleashes one's passion and contaminates Mountolive for whom "somehow today it was rather more difficult than usual to be reserved, so

²³ In a letter to Henry Miller Durrell links his sexuality to the ancient Greeks whom he describes as "sturdy and lustful" and suggests that he could be their descendent (Lillios, "Introduction" 20).

exciting had the fish-drive become” (11). The narrator immediately juxtaposes two Mountolives; the British and the Egyptianized who “had in fact quite forgotten about his once-crisp tennis flannels and college blazer and the fact that the wash of bilge rising through the floor-boards had toe-capped his white plimsolls with a black stain. *In Egypt one seemed to forget oneself continually like this*” (11, my emphasis). Mountolive is introduced to a world beyond his imagination. He embraces this magical world to the extent that he sheds his English reserve and forgets about his appearance, becoming a different person.

His reflections on his residence at the Hosnani mansion summarize both his and Durrell’s conflicted feelings about Egypt: the dilemma between seeing it as “normal,” to use Mountolive’s words, and as exotic. Mountolive reflects on the strangeness of a life

based in and nourished by the unconscious pageantry of a feudalism which stretched back certainly as far as the Middle Ages, and perhaps beyond. The world of Burton, Beckford, Lady Hester. ... Did they then still exist? But here, seen from the vantage point of someone inside the canvas his own imagination had painted, he had suddenly found the exotic becoming completely normal. Its poetry was irradiated by the unconsciousness with which it was lived. Mountolive who had already found the open sesame of language ready to hand, suddenly began to feel himself really penetrating a foreign country, foreign *moeurs*, for the first time. (22)

Mountolive struggles between attraction to and repulsion by Egypt with attraction winning out.

The narrator exposes Mountolive’s arrogance in thinking that through his knowledge of Arabic he has penetrated Egypt, while foreshadowing his bitter disappointment as he later finds out that indeed he has not. Egyptian culture ceases to be exotic as Mountolive lives its daily realities.

Yet, words such as “canvas” reveal the narrator’s insistence on keeping the myth of the exotic alive. He admits that his imagination painted the canvas, yet his reference to the “open sesame of language” shows that he continues to think about life in Egypt in fairy-tale terms.

The narrator²⁴ ridicules Mountolive for believing that he could understand Egypt. Pages later Mountolive admits that “through [Leila’s] eyes he began to see Egypt once more – but extended through a new dimension. To have a grasp of the language was nothing, he now realized; for Leila exposed the hollowness of the knowledge when pitted against understanding” (31). Here, Mountolive views his understanding of Egypt as concomitant to his penetration of Leila. The irony is that Leila herself turns out to be a mirage. This is precisely what Mountolive discovers when, at the end of the novel, he heads to the Arab quarter wearing the garb of a Syrian businessman. Thinking that his knowledge of the culture will allow him to pass as Arab, he attempts to re-create the illusion of the magical Egypt one final time and fails.

Mountolive recasts Egypt’s distasteful aspects into fanciful representations of it, succumbing to competing fantasies about Leila. This ambivalence strongly surfaces in his relationship with Leila whose exotic and monstrous images are themselves Mountolive’s fantasy. The Mountolive-Leila affair is both a confirmation and a reversal of the colonialist narrative. On the one hand, *Mountolive* depicts the Egyptian woman as a passive object available for the white man’s pleasure.²⁵ On the other hand, receiving a sentimental education from Leila, Mountolive becomes the “brown woman’s burden,” as Michael Diboll notes (Diboll, “The Secret” 92). During Mountolive’s first visit to Egypt and over the course of the following years, Leila teaches him to appreciate poetry, the arts, and love. Yet, despite this reversal, because an Egyptian woman is teaching a male British subject how to feel, the novel becomes a subtle confirmation of orientalist discourse which represents the Other, specifically the female Other, as emotional and

²⁴ Hollahan argues that Darley, a *Quartet* writer-in-training, is the narrator of this volume. For the various views on *Mountolive*’s narrator, see Hollahan.

²⁵ For an analysis of the image of the sexually available Eastern woman in orientalist writing, see Said’s discussion of Flaubert’s account of his relationship with the dancer/prostitute Kuchuk Hanem in Egypt.

the Self as more rational.

Mountolive views Leila as a passionate, exotic, foreign creature. Ruminating on her impact on him, he reflects that “he had been formally educated in England, educated not to wish to feel” (18). Contrasting his earlier self with the current one, he discovers that Leila’s passion overwhelms him:

At the outset his own feelings somewhat confused him, but he was unused to introspection, unfamiliar so to speak with the entail of his own personality He went over the whole business obsessively time and again, as if vicariously to provoke and master the whole new range of emotions which Leila had liberated in him. ... It was unpleasant to be forced to grow. It was thrilling to grow. He gravitated between fear and *grotesque* elation [...]” (27-8, my emphasis)

Mountolive insists on forcing an exotic framework on his relationship with Leila. He draws a picture of an Egypt that appeals to his wild passion. He feels himself going through an initiation that causes the emotional side growing in him to overpower the rational side. Noticeable here is Mountolive’s identification of his new emotions as non-English feelings that Leila has awakened in him introducing him to a world of grotesque happiness.

Leila and the Hosnanis are initially figured as “mimic men,” Homi Bhabha’s phrase for colonized subjects whom their colonizers deem to be “*almost the same, but not quite,*” on par with themselves. Their Europeanized ways notwithstanding, they are essentially different from civilized man: innately flawed or incomplete copies of the West’s idealized Self. Characteristic of the mimicry of colonialist discourse is ambivalence which, in its indecisiveness and contradictory depictions of the Other, evokes the inscrutable, grotesque Other that forever inhabits the fantastic. Ambivalence, then, is a state which locates the Other on a continuum between the uncanny mimic – almost the same but not quite – and the menace – utterly different and even threatening. It is born out of a contradiction which highlights the difference that prevents the Other from becoming completely the same even as it recognizes the similarity

between Self and Other (Bhabha 82-89, emphasis in original). This mimicry allows the Other room for resistance, which Bhabha terms sly civility and which sometimes escapes the colonizer.²⁶

In the world of the novel, however, the picture of the Other as menace lurks beneath his/her fantastic surface insidiously conveying itself in their mimicry and quite dangerously so because it goes undetected due to their hybridity. This hybridity, the Other's remarkable sameness and his/ her defiance of classification under only one cultural group, renders him/ her difficult to read and, therefore, masks the menace beneath the mimicry. Because of hybridity, to adapt Bhabha, "a contingent, borderline experience opens up *in-between* colonizer and colonized. This is a space of cultural and interpretive undecidability produced in the 'present' of the colonial moment" (Bhabha 206, emphasis in original). The Hosnani's hybridity – their mimicry which renders them fantastic – deceives Mountolive causing first his enthrallment, then his uncertainty and, finally, his enlightenment. Mountolive's initial fascination with the reeking Egypt, while conveying his innocence, poignantly captures the ambivalence of colonial discourse which paints the Other as at once beautiful and ugly; the same and different; mimic and menace, and ultimately exaggerates the menace because of the potential danger that lies in the ambiguity of the exotic.

The narrative portrays Leila as a mimic who idealizes Britain. However, the character's occasional over performance mocks Mountolive's innocence. One such example is in the conversation between her and Mountolive where she quotes John Ruskin's 1870 inaugural lecture at Oxford University extolling Britain's imperial duty (Ruskin 1-40). While Diboll sees this as proof of Leila's characterization as a perfectly colonized subject who idolizes Britain

²⁶ See Bhabha's explanation of sly civility 93-101.

(Diboll, "The Secret" 92), Mohamed Yehia Mohamed Hasan comes closer to the point when he argues that Mountolive falls in love with the Self that he sees in the Other. Thus, Leila reflects the identity of the Self that has been lost (319). I favor Hasan's analysis because rather than seeing Leila as a blind admirer of Britain, it acknowledges her character as Mountolive's creation. To take Hasan's words a step further, Mountolive uses Leila as a screen on which to project his love of Britain. In other words, wishing to revive the past world of Empire, he creates an exotic image of Egypt, missing the menace that she poses to Britain's civilizational discourse. Mountolive falls in love with the discourse of the civilizing mission which Leila represents.

However, this is one of the moments where the text mocks Mountolive's conviction that Egypt can be civilized. Struggling to preserve the romantic ideas he has read in Lane's *Manners*, Mountolive insists on projecting onto Leila the stereotype of an exotic Egypt that is fascinated by the greatness of Britain. Not only does he want to believe that she adores him because he represents an ideal Britain, but he also tries to elicit an affirming statement by asking: " 'But why me, Leila?' as if there was all the choice in the wide world before her, and was astonished when she lay back and repeated the words after him with what seemed like a musical *contempt*; the puerility of his question indeed annoyed her" (28, my emphasis). What many critics miss is the word "contempt."

Mountolive mistakes contempt and sly civility for infatuation. When Leila recites part of Ruskin's speech glorifying England's duty to civilize the world he takes that for adoration. In his mind, Leila sees in him "something like a prototype of a nation which existed now only in her imagination. She was kissing and cherishing a painted image of England" (29). However, Leila's mimicry denotes sarcasm rather than adoration. As the narrative goes, she varies her tone of voice "to the melody of the prose" (29, my emphasis). When Mountolive asks her if she can fall

in love “with the stone effigy of a dead crusader,” she delivers a mocking response: “ ‘You asked me *why*,’ she said, *still with contempt*. ‘Because,’ with a sigh, ‘you are English, *I suppose*,’ ” (30, only the first emphasis is in the original). Leila’s answer to Mountolive is one that he desires, but her contempt coupled with her use of the words “I suppose” indicate awareness of her lover’s dream of falling in love with a reflection of Britain. In short, where Mountolive insists on casting Leila in the role of an oriental femme-fatale, in instances such as this one, the text mocks him.

Although Mountolive recognizes what he thinks is Leila’s “absurd book-fed dream” (29) he persists in pursuing his own ridiculous book-fed dream. Earlier during the fish drive, he dreams about Egypt; the rotting Egypt which stinks yet which he loves: “ ‘Egypt,’ he said to himself as one might repeat the name of a woman. ‘Egypt’ ” (12). After Leila picks a crumb on his lip with her tongue he feels “the small warm tongue of an Egyptian cat upon his underlip for a moment” (28). Leila’s assertion that it is her husband who, in his wisdom, has suggested that she take Mountolive for a lover (30) feeds the latter’s fantasies and conjures up orientalist writing maintaining that when in the company of Arabs the host might even offer his wife, or daughters for the foreign visitor’s sexual enjoyment (Patai). The novel presents this as part of the irrationality and immorality of Egypt: “what on earth was an Englishman to make of these strange patterns of thought, these confused and contending loyalties?” (30). It is this same kind of irrationality that permeates Durrell’s rendition of Egyptian political life.

While Diboll reads the Leila-Mountolive affair through the *Wafd* Party’s relationship with Britain,²⁷ adding that Leila’s “enthusiastic endorsement of Ruskin’s Imperialism illustrates the depth of the *Wafd*’s Europeanism,” (Diboll, *Lawrence* 203) I wish to extend this reading.

²⁷ For an allegorical reading of the Mountolive-Leila Hosnani affair and its correspondence to the relationship between the *Wafd* Party and Britain, see Diboll, “The Secret” 90-8.

Their affair mirrors Durrell's interpretation of Egypt's political life which mixes brief praise with condemnation of moral corruption, claiming that although Egyptian nationalism might seem sincere and beautiful, in reality it is grotesque. Even though at this moment the text ridicules Mountolive's naïveté in thinking that Leila had a wide range of lovers to choose from, it reaffirms another stereotype of the Orient – that of the secluded woman.

While at first Mountolive views Leila as an aesthetic object, at the end of the novel he substitutes another art object, a grotesque one this time, for the earlier marvel. Suddenly, seeing her in animal terms, he describes Leila's eyes as "the mutinous sad eyes of some clumsy cartoon creature: a cartoon of animals dressed up and acting as human beings" (281). He continues to ponder Leila's appearance which "had a rakish and impoverished air," her skin, disfigured by small pox, looking "coarse as the skin of an elephant" (281). The repetition of grotesque descriptions cement the new bestial image of both Leila and Egypt: "each time the lamps came up he looked again, and each time he saw himself confronting something like an animal cartoon figure – an elephant, say" (281).

Leila's harsh reality shatters the romantic dreams of the former colonizer. Mountolive's awakening to the "real" Leila, a stand-in for Egypt, frames Egyptian political life in brutish as well as brutal terms. His meeting with her comes after he has heard of her sons' involvement in the Coptic conspiracy. It also occurs after various descriptions of Egyptian violence; Muslims cutting camels alive, Narouz's new pastime killing bats with a whip, as well as Memlik Pasha's reported pleasure at telephoning the prison in order to hear the cries of prisoners being tortured. Thus, Mountolive's conceptualization of Leila is also a framing of Egyptian political life as deformed and grotesquely violent.

While continuing to focus on the experience of the current-day colonial official, Durrell

shifts the reader's attention from the grotesque Leila to the suffering Mountolive:

Leila had suddenly left him face to face with a reality which, he supposed, had always lain lurking behind the dusty tapestry of his romantic notions. In a sense, she had *been* Egypt, his own private Egypt of the mind; and now this old image had been husked, stripped bare. ... He had never been ... natural, outward-going in his attitude to life. He had always hidden behind measure and compromise; and this defection had somehow lost him the picture of the Egypt which had nourished him for so long. Was it, then, all a lie? (284-85, emphasis in original)

Mountolive's thoughts point to his mistake: shedding English reserve and involvement with Egypt brings one face to face with its ugly reality. He realizes that the fascinating picture of Egypt is a fallacy and that, equally, the civilizing mission is another fallacy because Egyptians are not capable of change. Restored to his English sensibilities, he decides that "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. He did not even think of Leila now ... it was as if she had never existed" (295). Mountolive has "reached a new frontier in himself; life was going to be something completely different from now on. He had been in some sort of bondage all this time; now the links had snapped" (295).

The gradually shrinking distance between the author and Mountolive marks the latter's progress from ignorant, unreliable *Bildungsheld* to mature protagonist. The text moves from indulging his fantasy of an exotic Egypt, to distancing him for naïvely embracing its rotting, stinking beauty, as in the fishing scene above, to validating the epiphany of a now-educated *Bildungsheld* whose point of view converges with that of the author. He concludes that the beauty, rationality – in a word, "civilization" – that Egypt offers is a dream, and that beneath this mimicry lies a real menace. Consequently, Durrell absolves Britain of guilt for occupying Egypt and in an amusing reversal of the situation, Britain poses as the victim of this colonial project, finally gaining freedom from Egypt's shackles. Durrell casts the British occupation as the "white

man's burden" – a duty that the white man endures in return for which he only receives ingratitude.

Nostalgia and the Child Brothel that is Egypt

Durrell's text manifests a complex attitude towards imperial nostalgia where the author longs for empire and rejects it at the same time. In his article on imperial nostalgia Renato Rosaldo explains that it hinges on the former colonizer's recognition of the Other's maturation. Nostalgic texts invoke the Other's pre-colonial past in order to emphasize the civilizing changes that the colonizing power instituted. Such an invocation, Rosaldo adds, betrays, first, the colonizer's regret for civilizing the Other and, second, a wish for the return of the native's "savage" state necessitating a re-enactment of the colonial moment (Rosaldo 107-22).

Durrell's nostalgia is ambiguous. On the one hand, *Mountolive* does not acknowledge the success of the civilizing mission, depicting Egypt as in need of Britain's constant vigilance to keep it from lapsing into a state of abjection. Moreover, it departs from the imperialist, colonialist ideology by showing that Britain's civilizing efforts will only bring forth the grotesque in Egyptians. Nonetheless, and despite his exposure of the imperial mission's futility, Durrell legitimates Empire by attributing the failure to Egypt's intractable primitivism. When evoking pity for the now powerless British official in Egypt, Durrell exhibits nostalgia for the heyday of Empire. In this sense, he arguably longs for the once enchanted Mountolive in himself. This constitutes nostalgia for an earlier, simpler time when personally Durrell might have thought that Empire could work. On the other hand, one can read his text as quite the opposite of nostalgia – as a rejection, but not a condemnation, of Empire. The bottom line is that his depiction of powerless British officials is counterfactual. In reality, Britain continued to

intervene in Egypt's affairs to the point of surrounding the King's palace with tanks in 1942 in order to force him to appoint a pro-British prime minister (Rafi, *Fi A 'qab*, Vol. 3 101-20).

Mountolive's grotesque experience at the child brothel eliminates the text's punctuated ambivalence, confirming Durrell's depiction of Egypt as grotesque, and constitutes both his and the *Bildungsheld's* final disillusionment. Mountolive's trip to the native quarter at the end of the novel is his and the author's final, desperate attempt at reviving the illusion of a marvelous Egypt. In this scene, gothic elements combine to foreground the mimicry of Egyptians placing them in a third space between the uncanny and the marvelous. Unlike Bhabha's potentially freeing third space which allows the Other to combine various cultural values and practices,²⁸ this space identifies Egyptians as grotesque, Cali ban-like figures who, neither conforming to Britain's illusion of a magical East nor following the British model of rational governance, are incapable of copying what is implied to be a rational British system.

Following in the footsteps of 19th century orientalist travelers, Mountolive dresses as a Syrian businessman²⁹ and, confident that his dress and command of Arabic confer authenticity on him, orders a meal and drinks in the Arab quarter. He is approached by an Egyptian whose "face had all the candour and purity of some desert saint" (289). Mountolive believes this man to be a venerable sheikh about to reveal to him secrets about his future, whereas in fact the Egyptian takes him to a child brothel. In a reversal of the gothic novel formula, where a damsel in distress is rescued by a brave hero, it is the former British colonial officer who is abducted, locked up in an unknown location and subjected to frightening trials before he is mysteriously

²⁸ On hybridity, see Bhabha 36-9.

²⁹ For example, in the 19th century Lane went native when in Egypt and used his Arabic name Mansur Effendi. See Kararah, "Introduction" IX. For an interesting study of cross-cultural dressing in the life of 19th century female European travelers to the Middle East, see Lewis.

released.

The episode delivers a harsh lesson to Mountolive who still believes that by simply going native and demonstrating his fluency in Arabic he can pass, in his words, for “a Moslem,” and unlock the mysteries of the country reviving the mirage of a mysterious, magical Egypt. Because he cannot remember or explain certain details of his experience, his account of the incident leans towards the fantastic depicting the episode, or parts of it, as somewhat doubtful. For example, upon entering the child brothel Mountolive says that he “felt rather than saw the worm-eaten staircases” (290). Sometime during his ordeal he falls unconscious and dreams of his mother reading *Gulliver’s Travels* to him as a child. He is riveted by the fantastic image of Gulliver fixed to the ground by Lilliputians who, like the child prostitutes, are crawling over his body.

In his eagerness to recreate the myth of exotic Egypt, Mountolive almost sets the stage for his own delirious experience. He goes to the Arab quarter having already had two glasses of whiskey. Once there, he orders *arak* “his first drink of the Levant” (288) then “forgetting also how strong it was, and overcome with nostalgia ... [he] ordered himself a second glass” (288). The *arak* transports him to a mythical world: “he was in the seventh heaven of delight now. He was on the way to recovering, to restoring the blurred image of an Egypt which the meeting with Leila had damaged or somehow stolen from him” (288). Mountolive heads to the brothel already intoxicated with nostalgia. Yet, instead of recovering the magical Egypt he encounters grotesque Egypt.

The resolution of the brothel scene defies classification as either wholly marvelous or wholly uncanny. Mountolive knows that he has been subjected to a harrowing experience from which he managed to escape but does not know how – “he found himself (though he had no idea how he had finally escaped) leaning upon the icy stone embankment of the Corniche with the

dawn sea beneath him” (293). He realizes that the sheikh played a trick on him – an explanation which, despite its logic, does not explain why the man assumes that Mountolive is looking for a prostitute, whether or not he recognizes him as an Englishman, whether he takes him to the brothel out of sheer vengeance or out of depravity, and whether he is a sheikh to begin with. Mountolive finally realizes that in its squalor and grotesqueness, the child brothel is Egypt and decides to leave the country.

Mountolive’s epiphany – that Egypt is a grotesque dream – validates colonialist discourse by reinforcing the *Bildungsroman* as a genre that equates the *Bildungsheld*’s maturity with his/her recognition of and reconciliation with the established social order. After the child brothel episode, Mountolive, now sullied by his initiation into an ugly, mature world, “seething with self-contempt and disgust” (294) experiences the sadness that comes with maturity. Mountolive, who is not saved through any heroic acts of his own, but instead inexplicably finds himself next to his car with no recollection of the details of his escape, reflects the frailty of Britain and its alleged loss of power and grandeur. Feeling like a “mummy” in “the splendours of [his] second-hand uniform” Durrell, through Mountolive, mourns Britain’s loss of limitless power that Cromer and other High Commissioners once had in Egypt. Durrell argues that this power was benign because the British used it to control a corrupt people. This is the image that frames Egyptian national life in the novel.

Reading the 1919 Legacy through Religious Zeal

Durrell’s portrayal of political life in 1934-1936 Egypt is inextricably tied to his understanding of the role of Islam in Egypt and its effects on Muslims and Christians. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s discussion of the role of religion in writing history is pertinent here. He explains

that imperialist histories of the Other dismiss religious feeling as an anachronism – a sign of the nationalist’s delayed evolution, his lack of rationality (97-113). To adapt Chakrabarty and Bhabha’s readings to *Mountolive*, it is Egypt’s religion or, rather, its religiosity which marks it as pre-modern and, therefore, different. To follow Bhabha’s elaboration on mimicry, Egyptians in the novel cross the path from “*mimicry* – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to *menace* – a difference that is almost total but not quite” (91, emphasis in original). Their transformation corresponds to Mountolive’s progressive enlightenment.

According to the novel, the proneness of Egyptians to mysterious spiritual feeling makes them impervious to “modern” democratic ways. They are a threat because not only do they plot against Britain instead of copying its putatively ideal political system, but they also conceal their seditiousness through immoral means, as seen in the bribery scene discussed below. Durrell’s view of Egyptians as mimics is conveyed also through Mountolive’s relationship with Leila.

The novel’s critique of Empire occurs at a point where Mountolive’s infatuation with Egypt is sustained by a blossoming affair with Leila. In his innocence, he is willing to accept a rosy, romantic picture of the country. Following a *faux pas* in which Mountolive mistakenly refers to the Hosnanis as Muslim, Faltaus Hosnani, the head of the family, delivers a pointed critique of Britain’s imperial practice in Egypt. His lecture and the subsequent epilogue by his wife, Leila, and their son, Nessim, appear at the start of the novel. Over six pages (40-6), Durrell delivers his strongest critique of imperialism, and through a juxtaposition of the position of the Copts in Egypt before and under the British, blames Britain for sowing the seeds of hatred between Christians and Muslims.

Historically, Lord Evelyn Baring Cromer, British High Commissioner in Egypt from 1883-1907, initiated a policy that favored Syrian Christians over Egyptians, whether Christian or

Muslim, claiming that the former possessed superior mathematical knowledge. When Christian Egyptians complained that they had limited access to government jobs, the British used this as an opportunity to demonize the Egyptian government as a persecutor of Christians. In reality, both Christian and Muslim Egyptians were under-employed (Sulayman 32-41).

In contrast to unjust British policies, the Hosnanis cite examples of Copts occupying positions of power at various points under Mohammed Ali (r. 1805-1848) and his successors.³⁰ Faltaus adds that the “British have taught the Moslems to hate the Copts and to discriminate against them” (40); that the Copts’ Christianity “has always been respected. *Here* in Egypt, not *there* in Europe” (41); that “the Moslems knew us, they knew we were Egyptians first and Christians afterwards. *Christian Egyptians ... the only Christian Orientals* fully integrated into a Moslem state” (42); and finally that “the Moslem was never a persecutor of the Copts on religious grounds” (45 all emphases in original text).

Durrell’s critique of divisive British policies resonates with the discourse of national unity created by the 1919 Revolution. The most direct allusion to 1919 is in Nessim’s comment that “for us there was no real war between Cross and Crescent [.] That was entirely a Western European creation” (45). What Nessim is prematurely alluding to is the slogan of the 1919 Revolution: “Long Live the Crescent with the Cross.” Much like his father who emphasizes Christian-Muslim harmony prior to the British occupation by citing examples of Coptic political appointments under Ahmed Urabi, the leader of the 1881-1882 Revolution,³¹ Nessim affirms that, despite British attempts to divide them, Christians and Muslims remain Egyptians united by

³⁰ On the integration of Egyptian Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Egyptian socio-political life under Mohammed Ali and until the British occupation see Sulayman 13-19.

³¹ On the roles of the Copts and Jews in the Urabi Revolution of 1881-82, see Sulayman 35-7.

their territory and history.³²

Nessim's critique is rooted in his father's analysis of modern British rule as an extension of the pre-modern Crusades which manipulated Christianity as the signifier of civilization to justify seizure of Eastern land and wealth. His speech, and subsequent comments by Leila and Nessim contrast Western Christian intolerance of Eastern Christians to cases of complete religious integration of Christians under 19th century Muslim rulers in Egypt. He reminds Mountolive that the Crusaders massacred Eastern Christians (41) and that after the capture of Jerusalem following the first Crusade, Copts, whom Faltaus describes as the "only branch of the Christian Church which was thoroughly integrated into the Orient," were debarred from entering the city (41). Faltaus' analogy ends when Nessim, equating the British occupation with the Crusades, tells Mountolive "you have remained Crusaders at heart" (46).

This brief history lesson constitutes Durrell's only critique of Empire. In light of ensuing events, such as the Coptic plot or Nessim's delirious sermon, it is clear that this episode serves to mock Mountolive's original naïveté attributing his embrace of the Hosnanis' critique to his infatuation with Leila and, by extension, her family. The enchantment fades as Durrell moves from a depiction of Islam as a tolerant religion to a view of the religion itself as naturally flawed, preventing Muslims from following a "modern" form of rational government. Mountolive's willingness to accept an alternative view of Islam is further compromised by Faltaus' portrayal of Christians as the Muslims' intellectual superiors. In particular, when Faltaus identifies Copts as "the brains of Egypt," (41) he assigns Muslims to the lower rungs of the intellectual ladder, where they presumably perch as bodies contributing their brawn to the work of nation building.

³² For the *Wafd's* relation with Christian Egyptians see Terry. See also Sulayman 283-352 for the role of Christian and Muslim intellectuals in fostering religious unity.

As does colonial discourse, his speech invests religious affiliation with moral and intellectual qualities.

The novel reinforces this investment. For example, the narrator explains that Donkin, a junior diplomat in the embassy, is familiar with certain characteristics of Egypt: “his own affection for the Moslem had taught him to see clearly into his motives, to discern the play of childish cupidities underneath the histrionic silence of a Minister, under his facile promises” (272). In another instance, the narrator confides “to register an idea in a Moslem mind is like trying to paint a wall: one must wait for the first coat to dry (the first idea) before applying a second” (273). References such as these construct Muslims as backward. They are seen to inherit this backwardness from their religion which prevents them from being “modern,” justifying Egypt’s need for continued British intervention.

One of Durrell’s most direct indictments of all Egyptians occurs in the novel’s bribery scene which locates Islam as a source of pestilence that has infected Egypt’s Copts. In this telling scene, the Quran becomes the very medium and the symbol of the supposedly corrupting nature of Islam, through which Christians are defiled. Nessim, a Coptic character, visits the home of Memlik Pasha, the Muslim Minister of Interior,³³ as a Quran recital is about to start. He is there to bribe Memlik Pasha to overlook Nessim’s role in a plot to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, a plot which has no basis in history. Of importance is the fact that the Christian delivers to the expectant Muslim a copy of the Quran with money hidden in its pages at a Quran recitation. His participation in this process marks his seduction by Muslim corruption, which is completed when he stays to listen to the reading:

Nessim’s own constraint and unease gave place to a warmth about the heart, for

³³ On Memlik Pasha as the Egyptian Sidqi Pasha, prime minister of Egypt from 1930-1935, see Kaczvinsky, “Memlik’s”

he too loved the *suras*, and the old preacher had a magnificent speaking voice, although the tone was as yet furry and unaccentuated. But it was a “voice of the inmost heart” – his whole spiritual presence coursed like a blood-stream in the magnificent verses filling them with his own ardour; and one could feel his audience tremble and respond, like the rigging of a ship in the wind. 265

In these lines, Durrell paints a picture of a mysterious religious force flowing into Nessim replacing a receding rationality until Nessim, along with the whole audience, becomes a pliant object moving easily under the spell of this mysterious feeling. Nessim’s full incorporation into this “corrupt” Muslim life is reflected in his joy while listening to the Quran. In this instance it is the harmonious co-existence between Christian and Muslim Egyptians, this closeness which causes the presumably infectious spirit of Islam to affect Copts. As a result, both Muslims and Copts pose as equally dangerous, uncivilized, corrupt, and, in short, irredeemably other.

In passages such as these, Westerners are sustained in and congratulated on their belief that all Egyptians are vulnerable to mysterious religious forces regardless of their source or of the audience’s religious beliefs. The fact that a Copt enjoys a Quran recital testifies to the dangerously hypnotic power of Islam over both groups. This is seen in Nessim’s state as he “listened to [the preacher] with tenderness and admiration, staring down upon the carpet, half-entranced by the ebb and flow of the poetry [of the Quran]” (266). Nessim, who in Diboll’s view represents the new generation of Egyptians post-1934 who is exceedingly anti-British (Diboll, *Lawrence* 96), is almost captivated by the Quran. This scene counterfactually depicts Egyptians’ vulnerability to mysterious religious forces and their proneness to religious fervor attributing nationalist, anti-colonialist feelings to religion. Because the goal of the bribe is to cover for the Hosnani boys’ implication in the Coptic plot, the scene identifies religion as seditious.

Historically, Durrell could be indirectly referring to the Muslim Brothers’ participation in guerrilla activities in the Suez Canal zone alongside other Egyptian freedom fighters from 1951-

52, which the British must have certainly viewed as seditious (Helbawy 75). Dominant historical representations of the 1919 Revolution presented a similar view. George Lloyd describes the 1919 Revolution in terms of religious excitement declaring, for instance, that “Mahomedan feeling was excited by the possibility of absorption at such a juncture in a Christian Empire” (289). *Mountolive* re-activates contemporary depictions of the *Wafd* and the 1919 Revolution in terms of religious mania, echoing accounts such as Chirol’s, who reports that it was born out of religious zeal (149-55).

By the end of the novel, a more mature Mountolive refigures Islam as a violent religion, whose symbols are drenched in blood. A telling instance of this refiguration occurs on his drive into Alexandria for a final meeting with Leila. Mountolive sees a “blood-stained cloud” (277) deflowered by the phallic minarets, highlighting the alleged bloodiness and violence of Islam that caused Egypt to lose her innocence and predicting his own imminent loss of innocence after the child brothel scene. After his escape from the brothel, Mountolive looks “back once [at Alexandria], with a shudder of disgust, at the pearly mirage of minarets rising from the smoke of the lake, the dawn mist” (295). His disgust marks his initiation into world of the mature. His exotic image of Egypt is shattered and replaced by an image of an oppressive Eastern religion that destroys even nature.

Mountolive’s colonial education is now complete. In the dawn, which tropes his awakened consciousness, he perceives the true face of Islam to be a barbaric religion that is incompatible with the rational social, political life of the European Enlightenment imaginary. He embraces the English social order which argues that the Egyptians are incapable of self-rule because Islam is inimical to progress, an argument which, in the 19th century, Cromer used to justify the British occupation of Egypt (Hopwood 113).

This incapacity extends to Coptic Egyptians who are increasingly portrayed as doubly dangerous: first, because they have been seduced into a Muslim lifestyle and, second, because they are particularly susceptible to outbreaks of religious fervor. The novel codes this susceptibility as an intergenerational pathology active in and passed on by ancient Egyptian ancestors. The Hosnani family, the Coptic conspiracy, and Narouz's speech best illustrate this menace. Narouz, Nessim's brother and the peasant in the family, embodies the lack that the Hosnani family signifies. From the very beginning Durrell refers to Narouz in animal terms. During the fish drive Narouz "grunt[s]" and "yelp[s]" (14). He waits for his father as "patiently as a dog" (36) and basks "like a serpent" in his father's approval (42). Narouz is also a Mephistopheles (18) who talks to one of the servants with a "diabolical hiss" (34). During his stay in Egypt in 1918, Mountolive witnesses Narouz cut part of a servant's ear lobe in punishment then walk into the house whistling, which he takes to be "representative of the *moeurs* of Egypt" (34). By the end of the novel, Narouz is gleefully killing bats with a whip in the family's country estate (222-34). Faltaus' lecture, mentioned above, itself anticipates this demonization of the Copts as the narrator describes Faltaus in almost diabolical, sometimes animal, terms with such characterizing phrases as: as "an expression of bitterness translated into a *cruel smile* lit up his features for a moment" (41), his "customary *morose hangdog expression*" (41, my emphasis) and the presentation of Faltaus as a croaking invalid (20).

These descriptions compromise – if they do not completely undermine – the initially sympathetic image of Egyptian political life prior to British intervention even as they foreshadow the characterization of Egypt as politically underdeveloped. In an abrupt departure from its qualified embrace of Copts as mimic men, the novel shifts to highlight their menace seen in Narouz's brutal manner of disciplining his servant. Presenting Narouz as a cold-blooded animal

and describing his act as “representative of the *moeurs* of Egypt,” rather than those of a delinquent, establishes not only him but also Egyptians as inhuman. As a result, and despite the initial description of Narouz as the antithesis of his brother, Nessim, the elegant, tactful banker, the text sets up all Egyptians as a Narouz in disguise and questions their ability to establish a just government. By stressing the animality and barbarity of Egyptians, Durrell argues that 1934-36, and by extension 1958, Egypt lacks the tools to establish a rational form of government.

Narouz’s speech is the turning point at which Copts, and by implication all Egyptians since Memlik Pasha conceals the conspiracy, cross the line from mimic to menace – from marvelous and/ or fantastic to grotesque. This representation of the Coptic conspiracy solidifies Copts as equally corrupt, mourns the loss of Empire, and highlights the weakened influence that Britain exerts over Egypt. Ian MacNiven, American writer and Durrell’s official biographer, explains that Nessim’s involvement in smuggling armaments into Palestine echoes anti-British resistance in Cyprus and its role in smuggling guns into Israel. Diboll rejects this idea preferring to see in it, the 1930s and 1940s Maronite Christian campaigns to separate Lebanon from Greater Syria and suggests that it reflects British fears of Christian secularist movements in Egypt (Diboll, *Lawrence* 85, 121, 126).³⁴ Diboll explains that “given the prominence of Copts in the *Wafd*, to some of the astute among Britain’s colonial administrators, the *Wafd* may well have seemed to be ‘A Conspiracy Among the Copts,’ the title of Brigadier Maskelyne’s intelligence report into the activities of Nessim Hosnani” (Diboll, *Lawrence* 83). Rather than see the Coptic plot and the *Quartet*’s religious othering as an elegy for Empire, Egyptian scholar Sahar Hamouda sees the tetralogy as an attempt to preserve Empire by “giving the West an idea that is

³⁴ In another source, Diboll argues that Durrell uses this plot to critique Britain’s treatment of Egyptian nationalism adding that the conspiracy “can as easily be based on what Durrell had heard of distorted British perceptions of the *Wafd* while he was working for the British administration in wartime Egypt” (Diboll, “The Secret ” 85-6).

more feasible with the new Egyptian regime: that sowing the seeds of religious strife and arousing fanaticism can foment civil war in Egypt” (104).

To these views, I would add that the novel’s demonization of Copts reflects Durrell’s vision of them as traitors since, for the first time in decades, Copts deserted Britain and instead allied themselves with the Egyptian nationalist cause in 1919. Leila’s defense addressed to Mountolive, “ ‘to do something against the British! How could I!’ ” (283), is in fact Durrell’s remonstrance. The conspiracy evokes the then recent violent events in Egypt, which were later discovered to be part of an undercover operation earning the name the Lavon Affair. Known in Egypt as the Lavon Scandal, the operation consisted of a series of bombings in Egypt carried out against British, Egyptian, and American targets by undercover Israeli operatives in 1954 and blamed on “the Muslim Brotherhood, the Communists, ‘unspecified malcontents,’ or ‘local nationalists.’ ”³⁵ It was an orchestrated Western attempt to manufacture an illusion of religious strife – and more so Islamic oppression within Egypt – that would dissuade western nations – and more eminently the United States given its post-World War II hegemony – from supporting the Egyptian nationalist cause.

Through Nessim, Durrell expresses a wish to regain Egypt. Explaining the goals of the Coptic plot to Pursewarden, Nessim says: “our only hope is that there is some respite, like a war, which will enable you [England and France] to come back and retake the lost ground. Otherwise, we will be expropriated, enslaved. But we still place our faith in you both” (117). Nessim is speaking for Durrell: “*we are your fifth column in Egypt, fellow Christians. ... England should see in us a bridgehead to the East, a friendly enclave in an area which daily becomes more hostile, to you*” (117, emphasis in original).

³⁵ For the details of the Lavon Affair see Teveth.

Narouz's sermon, which Pursewarden attends, supplants the Coptic history recounted by the Hosnani family. Gone is the highly intelligent, persecuted minority. In its place stands the fanatic Copt, directed by the primitive religion of his ancestors, the Pharaohs. In a trance, Narouz delivers a mesmerizing speech. His possession starts abruptly and ends abruptly "suddenly, inexplicably, the current was cut off, the speaker was snuffed out. Narouz stood there gasping like a fish before us. ... it was as abrupt as a metal shutter coming down" (125). When the speech ends, Pursewarden notes that "the preacher had vanished altogether by now; the simple-minded second son had returned" (127). Pursewarden thinks to himself "he could lead a great religious movement" (126).

Pursewarden's report on the speech has fantastical dimensions that both confirm and contest his romantic picture of the Coptic meeting. Since he arrives to the meeting sun-stricken and raving of orientalist images such as Vathek (119), he is an unreliable narrator. He also listens to Narouz's trance in Arabic and confesses his captivation despite his insufficient knowledge of the language (125). Similar to the Quran recitation which Nessim attends, this episode testifies to the hypnotizing power, and therefore the danger, of any type of religious discourse, to which Egyptians are susceptible. Pursewarden's account of the speech evokes the marvelous in casting Narouz as possessed by an ancient Egyptian spirit. Pursewarden sets Egyptian nationalism in idyllic, pastoral terms where Egyptians have no agency as they are simply inhabited by their ancestors' spirits – spirits that prove to be evil as Narouz becomes so violent in the end that his fellow Copts cast him off. Pursewarden romantically paints Narouz as an incarnation of the spirit of ancient Egypt saying that the words issued from him like "the brilliant spontaneous flight of drunkards, ballad singers, or these professional mourners who follow burial processions with their shrieks of death-divining poetry" (124). Narouz seems to have nothing prepared, but as

soon as he invokes Egypt, the Nile, and the ancient Egyptian god, Ra, a spirit seems to possess him robbing him of agency. Pursewarden embraces the marvelous before settling for the grotesque.

His situation is different from Mountolive's incident at the child brothel as Pursewarden's intoxication and his sunstroke clearly play tricks on him. But, unlike Mountolive, Pursewarden's infatuation with Egypt is a brief aberration. Much earlier he emphasizes the grotesqueness of Egypt describing it as a "rabble-ridden grotesque which we now apparently regard as a sovereign state" (105). Pursewarden appears to be more aware of Egypt's presumed reality describing Egyptian nationalism as "based in a fanatical religion" (104). His proclamations inaccurately claim that, since the 1922 independence, Egypt has not acted as a responsible sovereign state omitting the fact that Britain's continued interference in the country's internal affairs encroached on its sovereignty rendering the 1922 independence only nominal (Rafi, *Fi A'qab*, Vol. 2, 174-90 and Vol. 3, 101-20).

Mountolive frames the revolution as a misguided, zealous move that resulted in a corrupt government. According to Michael Diboll,

The *Wafd* presented the British with both a dilemma and an opportunity. The dilemma was that after forty years of occupying Egypt they were faced with an Egyptian independence movement which had wide popular support among Egyptians of all religious affiliations, occupations and social classes. The movement had among its founding fathers not romantics, rabble-rousers, demagogues or fanatics, but the very finest minds in Egypt, many of whom had been educated in Europe to the very highest levels; moreover, the *Wafd* enjoyed the enthusiastic financial support of Egypt's new, indigenous mercantile class. Diboll, *Lawrence* 195-96

Mountolive refuses to see Egyptians – Muslims or Christians – on other than religious terms. The text creates an imperialist image of an imaginary Egypt whose religion, with its putative brutality, lethargy, and irrationality, controls it. To invoke Chakrabarty, because religion controls Egyptians they are identified as at odds with modernity. This lack is what marks them as menace.

The novel suggests that religion, or religious sentiment, is the stage that once Egyptians outgrow, will allow them to join advanced western nations who have presumably moved beyond religion. *Mountolive* fails to note the British government's support of corruption and disruption of a healthy constitutional life as long as this furthered British interests (Rafi, *Fi A 'qab*, Vol. 2, 174-90 and Vol. 3, 101-20).

In *Mountolive*, Egyptians' mysterious, religious proclivities are cast as primary, intractable obstacles to rational political life. To be fair, Durrell's personal opinions of both Islam and Christianity were low. Gordon Bowker notes that Durrell found the dominance of Islamic culture in Egypt oppressive: "if he already hated 'cannibalistic' Christianity, he found Islam suffocating and beastly" (143) Although Diboll sees Durrell as a pro-Copt whose interest in ancient Egyptian religion extended to the Coptic Church (Diboll, "The Secret" 95), images of plotting or of possessed Copts challenge this. The novel equates both Muslims and Christians once in the bribery scene and again when, fearful of the Egyptian government's response to their meetings, a Coptic character asks Nessim if he has intended to invoke a "jihad" against the government (218).

Finally, in his portrayal of Egyptians Durrell creates a racialized, religion-based Egyptian national identity that transforms religious difference into different national belongings absolving Empire of guilt. As a justification of British presence in Egypt, 19th-century imperialists such as Cromer denied the existence of such a thing as an Egyptian race claiming Egyptians to be racial hybrids (Taher, *Abnaa* 54-6). Durrell destabilizes the category "Egyptian" sometimes using "Egyptians" and "Moslems" interchangeably to refer to Muslim Egyptians while other times referring to them as the "Arabs," but almost never referring to Copts as "Egyptians." Even more, the novel refers to other European nationals residing in Alexandria as "Alexandrians." In the end,

echoing Cromer's argument, *Mountolive* contends that Egyptian nationalism, if the concept even exists, cannot succeed because the Egyptian people cannot easily be defined under a clear national category. By the same token, Durrell argues that only experienced British administration guarantees the success of such a diverse State.

Conclusion: Nostalgia and Grotesque, Noseless Semira

Mountolive represents Egypt and Egyptians as grotesque and *Mountolive*'s epiphany occurs when, disabused of his naïve enthrallment with Leila and Egypt, he finally realizes that he has been oblivious to the country's grotesqueness. Durrell's descriptions of Egypt and Egyptians cross over from an interest in the aberrant grotesque to setting the grotesque as the order of being to which all Egyptians, Muslims and Copts, belong. This ontology is exemplified by the case of Semira, Dr. Amaril's fiancée. Noseless Semira³⁶ descends from a now decaying Ottoman family which has become a caricature of itself. She lives with a half-mad father who imprisons her in the house and from which the French Amaril will rescue her. She has a "beautiful, horrible face" (153). Mirroring grotesque Egypt, "she has wonderful dark eyes like an odalisque and a shapely mouth and well-modelled chin: and then the gills of a fish!" Her only hope is Amaril, who like Pygmalion, will fashion her in his own image after finding a fitting nose for her (154).

Although he gives her the freedom to choose, she is expected to choose her future look from the catalogue he provides. The fact that he is fashioning Semira and Egypt along European lines is not only manifested in the "nose of a soldier in a Theban fresco" which "they" choose (150), but also in the fact that Amaril, who will operate on her himself, is going to England to "perfect the operative technique under the best masters" (154). About to import from Britain the

³⁶ On the prevalence of disease and deformity in the *Quartet*, see Tawfik.

cutting edge knowledge needed to reconstruct Egypt's face, Amaril's relationship with Semira replicates Britain's conception of its relationship with Egypt. Britain has supposedly rescued the latter from an oppressive, decaying Ottoman Empire and, along with France, has embarked upon beautifying Egypt. Although posing as guides, in reality these European powers, and more specifically Britain, dictated choices pre-approved by their respective governments. In the end, the implication is that just as Semira's new nose can only materialize with Amaril's help – itself facilitated by British expertise – Egypt's only hope for a rational government is through Britain and its resources. In a word, according to *Mountolive*, Egypt without Britain is grotesque.

Chapter Two: Two Roads Diverged:

The National Intellectual between Mimicry and Petrification after the 1919 Revolution in Naguib

Mahfouz's *Sugar Street*

Introduction

Reminiscing on his youth Naguib Mahfouz states “ ‘the one thing which most shook the security of my childhood was the 1919 revolution.’ ” From a roof-top room in his family home the seven-year-old Mahfouz was able to follow the demonstrations despite his mother’s constant efforts to pull him away from the window. He saw “ ‘women take part in the demonstrations on donkey-drawn carts ... [and] often saw English soldiers firing at the demonstrators.’ ” His elementary school opposite al-Husayn Mosque afforded him views of “the bodies of the dead and the wounded laid on the ground.” For this reason, according to Egyptian scholar Rasheed El-Enany, Mahfouz constantly recreates the revolution in his works and remains a “spiritual follower of the liberal, democratic principles of the *Wafd* Party which inherited the revolution” (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit* 3-4).

Like Mahfouz, the young Kamal Ahmad Abd al-Jawad witnesses the 1919 demonstrations in *Palace Walk*, the first book of *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-57)³⁷ and when the English set up camp in their neighborhood, he strikes up a friendship with the soldiers declaring them to be more beautiful than Saad Zaghoul, the leader of the revolution. Over the period of 28 years, from 1917-1944, Mahfouz interweaves Egypt’s 1919 Revolution, life under two world wars, and constant struggle with the British over governance with changes in Al-Sayyid³⁸ Abd al-Jawad’s family – the patriarch who reigns strictly at home but spends his nights in

³⁷ The *Cairo Trilogy* is comprised of *Palace Walk* (1956); *Palace of Desire* (1957); and *Sugar Street* (1957).

³⁸ Al-Sayyid is an Arabic title meaning Master.

drunken revelry, cavorting with Cairo's female entertainers. The series ends in 1944 shortly after his death following a German air raid.

This chapter reads *Sugar Street* (1957), the last volume of the *Trilogy*, as a *Bildungsroman* focusing on Kamal and his nephews, and antitheses, Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm. Kamal is, at the risk of making a trite statement, torn between a foreign social order that places European models as the only possible routes to modernity, and an early 20th-century native Egyptian culture that is influenced by a classical Arabic poetic tradition of *al hubb al udhri*, unrequited, romantic love. His attempts at reaching an epiphany are constantly thwarted not because these two paradigms are mutually exclusive, but because he treats them as such. His complete submission to the Western Enlightenment model and enchantment with an Egyptian cultural tradition leaves him at a perpetual cultural crossroads thinking that taking one road entails complete abandonment of the other, unaware that he can carve out a personalized third space. I argue that *Sugar Street* rejects the classic *Bildungsroman* (pl. *Bildungsromane*) as a fit vehicle for the Other's self-realization and at the same time repudiates *al hubb al udhri*, presenting both as models that produce flawed protagonists. Offering two alternate *Bildungsromane*, Mahfouz favors one which revises European models to accommodate Egyptian society.

The 1919 Revolution: A History

Saad Zaghloul and the 1919 Revolution are closely intertwined in Egyptian nationalist memory. Although Zaghloul was not in Egypt when the revolution started, the fact that he dared ask Britain for independence after its victory in World War I, in addition to his subsequent banishment to Malta, transformed him into a legendary figure. To this day, Zaghloul is

commemorated in various street, square, and subway station names across Egypt, his figure invoked, through re-appropriation and re-mobilization of the image of a cross nestled into a crescent during the 2011 Revolution, and his revolution celebrated as the archetypal Egyptian revolution much in the same way that the French Revolution is held by many historians to represent the classical revolutionary model.

The 1919 Revolution encapsulates a series of demonstrations that erupted in Egypt after Britain denied an Egyptian delegation, *wafd* – the seedling of the *Wafd* Party – its request for a hearing at the Versailles Peace Conference to discuss Egypt’s situation after World War I despite the fact that other countries such as Syria, Hijaz – present-day Saudi Arabia – and India were invited (Rafi, *Thawrat*, Vol. 1, 36-8). Reacting unilaterally in response to the Ottoman Empire’s decision to side with Germany in World War I, Britain had declared Egypt a British Protectorate in 1914. The British then replaced Egypt’s ruler, Khedive³⁹ Abbas Hilmy who was in Turkey at the time, with his uncle Husayn Kamil giving the latter the title Sultan and, in so doing, making him equal to the Ottoman ruler (Long 7-8). Twentieth-century Egyptian nationalist historian Abdel Rahman al Rafi records that Egyptian officials and ministers did not react to the news of the Protectorate and adds that in 1915 many of them, including Saad Zaghloul – earlier rejected as wartime minister by Acting British Resident Sir Milne Cheetham for his anti-British attitude just before the war (Long 7), – welcomed Sir Henry McMahon, the first British High Commissioner under the Protectorate. Zaghloul who later became the “Father of the Revolution” praised McMahon wishing Egypt prosperity during his tenure (Rafi, *Thawrat*, Vol. 1, 20). During the war, Egypt served as a military base for Britain in the Middle East and as a center for British propaganda, eventually aiding Britain’s victory. Rafi states that the behavior of many

³⁹ Khedive is a Turkish title meaning Viceroy.

soldiers stationed in Egypt from various parts of the Empire, attacking and sometimes killing Egyptians, further alienated the latter from the Protectorate (Rafi, *Thawrat*, Vol. 1, 27-8).

Zaghloul, former Egyptian Cabinet Minister, and Vice-President Elect of the Egyptian Legislative Assembly, went with a small delegation to Sir Reginald Wingate, the British High Commissioner at the time, to request permission to travel to Versailles. According to late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century journalist and British diplomat Valentine Chirol, whereas Wingate was courteous other English ministers were not (142-55). When the British government refused to grant permission to travel, the *Wafd* Party collected signatures from Egyptians authorizing Zaghloul and his companions to speak for the nation. Britain ignored the petition sanctioned by the Egyptian government and signed by multitudes of Egyptians (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 46-9) and, instead, Sir Milne Cheetham, acting as High Commissioner of the Protectorate, exiled *Wafd* leader, Saad Zaghloul, and two other *Wafd* members to Malta (Lloyd 296-97).

Students from colleges of Law, Medicine, Engineering, Al-Azhar University and others, initiated demonstrations. Tram and taxi drivers joined while Cairo shopkeepers closed their shops in support. The protests grew to include the Syndicate of Lawyers, all government officials, railway workers,⁴⁰ and elite women in their veils.⁴¹ Students carried the news as they traveled back to their hometowns spreading the revolution into other parts of the country. Demonstrating Egyptians tampered with railway lines and carriages to abort possible British attempts to suppress the uprisings with troops from India, as was the case after the 1881-82

⁴⁰ For details of the demonstrations and the violent police response to it, see Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 50-1.

⁴¹ On the role of Egypt's female elite in the 1919 Revolution, see Baron 105-213. For an imperialist report on the events by a contemporary journalist as well as a brief, orientalist account of the contribution of females from various social classes: elite, *fallahat* (peasant-women), lower class courtesans, and school girls, see Chirol 177-89 and 167-69.

Urabi Revolution. In rural areas demonstrating Egyptians killed British officials (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 50-1).

The success of the demonstrations surprised both the *Wafd* and the British (Sayyid-Marsot, "Introduction" 4) transforming Zaghloul from a "lackey of the British," as his enemies called him (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 50), to a national hero. He had occupied high positions under the British, including Minister of Education in 1905 under Lord Evelyn Baring Cromer, *Egypt's* British High Consul from 1883-1907. Additionally, his marriage to the daughter of a man that contemporary Egyptian historian Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot describes as "the most pro-British premier Egypt had known" (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 46) fortified his friendly relation with the British. But, al-Sayyid Marsot writes, "by resorting to repressive measures the British authorities catapulted a sick, sixty-three-year-old man with a long history of collaboration with the British into becoming a revolutionary and the *zaim* (leader) of his country" (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 50-1) – a shift which *Palace Walk* records. Whereas Zaghloul's arrest only sparked the revolution, according to Rafi (Rafi, *Thawrat* 39), after the events, and particularly after his first exile to Malta in 1919, Zaghloul became, in al-Sayyid-Marsot's words, "the epitome of popular resistance to the British authorities." Zaghloul, who four years before was criticized for welcoming McMahon at the train station (Long 9), "was enthroned among a pantheon of *awliya*, saints, and for a long time could not be displaced, not even by Nasir" (Sayyid-Marsot, "Introduction" 4).

On April 6, 1919 Britain released Zaghloul and other exiled *Wafdists* giving them permission to go to Paris. However, unrest continued in Egypt until the end of 1919 and over the period of ten months British forces killed 800 Egyptians and wounded 1400 (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 51-2). The *Wafd's* negotiations with Britain continued until Britain's unilateral

Declaration of 1922 ending the Protectorate, granting Egypt nominal independence and elevating the ruler of Egypt from Sultan Fuad to King Fuad.⁴² However, Britain continued to intervene in Egypt's affairs objecting in 1935, for instance, to the restoration of the 1923 constitution (Rafi, *Fi A'qab*, Vol. 2, 174-202), or surrounding the King's palace in 1941 ordering him to choose between abdication and the appointment of a pro-British *Wafdist* as Prime Minister (Rafi, *Fi A'qab*, Vol. 3, 101-20). British scholar Michael Diboll views this incident as the turning point "after which the *Wafd* were seen as a British puppet" (Diboll, "Preface" XXVII). Still, the party continued to lead the national struggle until its dissolution along with other political parties after the 1952 coup (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 57).

Conflicting views of the revolution exist. Whereas Rafi views it as a full-fledged political revolution,⁴³ Ellie Kedourie, a twentieth-century British scholar of Iraqi Jewish origin, and Jacques Berque, a twentieth-century French-Algerian orientalist and sociologist, attribute the success of the revolution to religious fanaticism (Kedourie 139-160, Berque 306-07). Kedouri paints it as a movement that was planned from above and that relied on mobilizing fanatic mobs. Maintaining that ministers sent the petition delegating Zaghoul and the *Wafd* to village notables and other influential citizens who, in turn, encouraged common Egyptians to sign it in support of Zaghoul, he claims that Zaghoul intimidated the Egyptian government into supporting the movement (Kedouri 146). Other imperialist historians, such as Chirol, follow much the same line framing Egypt's reaction to its exclusion from the peace conference as a childish tantrum (142-55).

⁴² For details on the continued negotiations between 1920 and 1922, see Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 55-64. See also Rafi, *Thawrat*, Vol. 2 for the period from 1919-1921 and Rafi, *Fi A'qab*, Vol. 1 and 2 for the periods between 1921-1927 and 1927-1936 respectively.

⁴³ For the political, economic and social reasons behind the revolution, see Rafi *Thawrat*, Vol. 1, 39-68.

In his imperialist account of the events, David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister from 1916-1922 and High Commissioner in Egypt from 1925-1929, refers to the demonstrations as “grave riots.” Denying the legitimacy of the *Wafd* even though it was supported by almost all Egyptians, including Copts who sided with the rest of Egypt for the first time (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 49),⁴⁴ he describes its leaders as “carrying extreme demands” and attributes the conflict to “Mahomedan feeling” and Egypt’s fear of being assimilated in a Christian Empire. Ignoring Egypt’s serious grievances, Lloyd portrays Britain as a victim of Egypt’s ingratitude despite having been “sheltered from the horrors of war by British arms” (289-91). He juxtaposes Egyptian lawlessness to reasonable British law and order, depicting Britain’s attempts at establishing a civilized constitutional government as constantly being thwarted by irrational Orientals. Portraying the revolution as anarchic, he celebrates the end of the turbulence as a chance for Egypt to “return to the development of her true interests” (297-313).

Accounts exist that question the purpose behind Zaghloul’s visit to Wingate after World War I. For example, al-Sayyid Marsot, notes that, according to one story, Zaghloul’s goal behind the meeting was to plead for some degree of autonomy. Although Zaghloul had taken part in the 1881-82 Urabi Revolution, he did not believe in agitating for independence and thought that the British should offer it to Egypt of their own accord. However, both the Allies’ promises of freedom for smaller nations at the conclusion of World War I and President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points Speech fuelled Egypt’s hopes (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 46-9). Kedouri counters that the intention behind the visit to Wingate was not to demand independence, but rather to identify whether Egypt’s relationship with Britain under the Protectorate was an annexation or a

⁴⁴ On the Copts in the *Wafd* see Terry. To this day, prominent Copts, such as Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Mounir Fakhry Abdel Nour, continue to be part of the *Wafd* Party.

“reconciliation of interests” (146).

However, the revolution’s eminence stemmed from the fact that it represented Egyptians’ hope for independence from the British. Further, Zaghoul’s charisma, coupled with his aristocratic looks and *fallah* (peasant) origins, endeared him to Egyptians who could identify with him. Sayyid-Marsot states that Zaghoul “was an orator who made the people identify with him and his cause so that ‘*kulluna Saad*,’ ‘We are all Saad,’ became the slogan of the man in the street” (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 53-4). According to her, “at no time in the period under examination here [1922-36], save when Saad Zaghoul was in power, did the *fallah* feel that those men ruling in the capital were *fallahin* [peasants] like himself. Zaghoul was different; he talked like a *fallah*; he understood the *fallah*; he made the *fallah* understand him and identify with him. No one else had that ability” (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's* 26).

Although in the *Trilogy* Saad Zaghoul, the revolution and Egyptian political life remain on the margins, coming to the forefront only as they intersect with the Abd al-Jawad family life, their impact on the family, whether direct or indirect, makes their presence pervasive. Without question, the fullest treatment of the revolution occurs near the end of the first volume, *Palace Walk*, the most prominent effect of which is the death of Fahmy, second son of Ahmad Abd al-Jawad, during a peaceful demonstration. Its presence fades thereafter. However, Zaghoul, his companions and successors, and the rich intellectual, political life which emerged before and continued to flourish under the revolution remain a source of inspiration for Kamal and his fellow intellectuals, so much so that at the end of the second volume Kamal reacts more strongly to Zaghoul’s death than to the multiple deaths in his own family.

Kamal’s intellectual crisis, discussed below, starting in *Palace of Desire*, reaching its culmination in the third volume, *Sugar Street*, and in which Mahfouz records his own crisis and

that of his generation,⁴⁵ as well as his nephews' attempts to grapple with their socio-political environment, reflect different relationships and/ or reactions to the above-mentioned political struggle. They are either attempts to withdraw into a glorious past – Kamal and Abd al-Muni'm each in his own way – or to continue the struggle using different methods – Abd al-Muni'm and Ahmad, again each in his own way. The two brothers, Abd al-Muni'm and Ahmad, in particular represent the move away from the *Wafd*, whose cooperation with the British drove away many Egyptians. Throughout the *Trilogy*, and particularly in *Sugar Street*, the 1919 Revolution poses as a golden age against which the current political scene is constantly evaluated. This is most apparent in Riyad Qaldas' nostalgic praise for the *Wafd*'s success at including all Egyptians in a democratic parliamentary life by erasing religious divisions. This unification leads Mahfouz to overlook Zaghoul's dictatorial tendencies in the early stages of the revolution. Mahfouz adds that Zaghoul was democratic in later stages (Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 179). Kamal and his nephews' crises are a direct commentary on, or rather an elegy of, 1919. But, where Kamal represents the intellectual's failure to live up to the revolutionary spirit of 1919, Ahmad provides hope.

Naguib Mahfouz: A Sketch

Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), whom contemporary scholar of Modern Arabic literature Samia Mehrez describes as the "godfather of the Arabic novel" and "one of the major underground historians" (Mehrez, "Introduction" 9), was born into a lower middle-class Cairene family. In 1934 he graduated from Cairo University with a degree in philosophy, after which he

⁴⁵ Israeli scholar Sasson Somekh states that at the age of 18 Mahfouz had a religious crisis like Kamal's in *Palace of Desire*, upon which the author temporarily became a non-believer, but not an active atheist (Somekh 39). However, Mahfouz has stated that he only shares with Kamal his intellectual crisis (Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 33, 48).

started, but never finished, a Master's thesis on Aesthetics in Islam (Mahfouz, *Asatidhati*). Leaving the university in 1938, he became a civil servant and published his first short story collection. He continued to work as a civil servant until he retired in 1971 after which he wrote for *Al Ahrām* (Enany, Naguib Mahfouz: *The Pursuit* 27, 30), Egypt's official newspaper. He was dubbed the writer of the petit bourgeoisie, a title which he at first resented then resigned himself to.⁴⁶ After a close competition with the British novelist Lawrence Durrell, Mahfouz was awarded the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature (Diboll 93).

He also worked as a freelance film script writer from the 1940s until the early 1980s, writing 25 scripts for films that are today considered the classics of Egyptian cinema. During Nasser's era, 1954-1970, he occupied several important posts, among them: secretary to the Minister of National Guidance; member of the Directory of the Film Censorship Office; director-general of the Film Support Organization; adviser to the General Organization for Film Industry, Broadcasting and Television; chairman of the board of directors of the same organization; and adviser to the Minister of Culture (Enany, Naguib Mahfouz: *The Pursuit* 30).

Writing in 1993, Enany cites the critical consensus that Mahfouz's works fall into three chronological phases: historical/romantic, realistic/naturalistic, and modernist/experimental, to which a fourth phase was added and named " 'the phase of indigenous or traditional form.' " Enany adds that Mahfouz's realistic phase peaks in *The Cairo Trilogy* (Enany, "Preface," XI-XII) which Roger Allen, contemporary British scholar of Arabic Literature and translator of several Mahfouz works, describes as a transitional work after which Mahfouz realized that social realism was no longer effective in portraying the social and political transformations that

⁴⁶ Egyptian critic Abdel Rahman Abu Awf names Mahfouz the writer who most understood and best analyzed the bourgeoisie in its interaction with, its negotiations and oscillation between loyalty to the high bourgeoisie, the laborers and the peasants as well as what he calls the class's utilitarian cleverness (Abu Awf, *Fusul* 69).

followed the July 1952 Coup d'état (Allen, *Naguib Mahfouz* 8-9).

Mahfouz had already written *The Cairo Trilogy* when the coup took place. He had spent seven years from 1945 to 1952 working on it, in the end producing a 1500-page piece entitled "Palace Walk." His publisher rejected it on account of its length; the first part of the *Cairo Trilogy* was then serialized in the literary magazine *Al-Risala al-Jadida* from April 1954-April 1956. Following its success, the publisher decided to divide the book into three parts with three different titles (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit* 225-26). Mahfouz, whom Allen describes as a foundational figure in the development of the Arabic novel – one who helped the genre advocate and reflect social change as it continues to change itself (Allen, *Naguib Mahfouz* 18) – declares that he stopped writing for five years after the coup, namely between 1952-57. He believed that the new regime had redressed all the social ills that his works addressed, but after his disillusionment with the Nasser regime he produced a series of bitter novels published in the 1960s (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit* 25). However, Mahfouz later confessed that he never knew the reason behind his break from writing, adding that he had a similar experience after the 1967 and the 1973 wars (Ghitani 211).

Enany notes that "almost all the novels of the 1960s can in fact be seen as a barrage of bitter criticism aimed at a revolution⁴⁷ that has abjectly failed to deliver the goods." Pointing to Mahfouz's harsh criticism of the regime, Enany explains that it is commonly known that some of the author's novels of that period would never have been published but for the intervention of Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, Nasser's confidant and editor of the daily *Al Ahram*. Enany also observes that the publication of Mahfouz's and other writers' work may have been a tactic by the regime to create a safety valve through the fiction of tolerance to dissenting voices (Enany,

⁴⁷ The July 1952 military coup is referred to as a revolution in Egypt.

Naguib Mahfouz: *The Pursuit* 25). After 1967 Mahfouz recorded his anger at the regime through symbolism. With the 1970 ascent of Anwar al Sadat as Egypt's third president, a war started on writers and intellectuals as Sadat closed down many prominent magazines and banned Mahfouz and others from writing for several years. By 1967, Mahfouz's deep disillusionment was evident in his novels *Adrift on the Nile* (1966) and *Miramar* (1967). According to Allen, Abd al-Hakim Amir, "the President's right-hand man ... having read *Thartharah Fawq al-Nil* [*Adrift on the Nile*] with its sense of almost total negativity towards the achievements of the Egyptian revolution, insisted that Mahfouz should be imprisoned. It took the personal intervention of the Minister of Culture, Tharwat 'Ukashah, to prevent Mahfouz from joining the vast majority of his novelist-colleagues in prison" (Allen, *Naguib Mahfouz* 11-12).

Because of the profound effect of the 1919 demonstrations on him and his disappointment with the results of the 1952 Coup d'état, Mahfouz remained haunted by 1919 and continued to revisit its events in his fiction. For example, in *Autumn Quail* (1962), he reflects on the corruption of the *Wafd* Party. Further, eight out of the seventy eight tales in *The Fountain and the Tomb* (1975), address the 1919 Revolution while *Mirrors* (1972), briefly hints at it (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit* 4). However, despite his pre-occupation with politics, Mahfouz held no political offices and, according to the writer's account of himself, only participated in general demonstrations. Incidentally, the writer who, in his newspaper articles in the 1980s and 1990s, would go on to call for the use of 1919 as a reference for democracy, religious unity, and national struggle (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Taharrur* 27-8) and who admired Zaghoul and other symbols of the biggest popular revolution in the history of Egypt (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Taharrur* 23-4), commemorating their death regularly in his newspaper articles, expressed his skepticism regarding revolution in his first article publication in 1930. He preferred

“gradual evolutionary progress” since revolution will let down its society by failing to fulfill its promise (qtd in Milson 29-30).⁴⁸

Mahfouz remains Egypt’s most celebrated writer and the *Trilogy* his most well-known work. Menahem Milson writes that when Mahfouz published it “Arab critics felt confident that Arabic literature had finally produced its Dickens, its Balzac, or its Dostoevsky,” adding that literary figures such as Taha Hussein viewed the *Trilogy* as the great modern novel of Arabic and Mahfouz as the most important Egyptian and Arab novelist (Milson 15). Prior to its publication Mahfouz had toiled in near-obscure. As the author notes, even though he started writing in 1929, the first critical writing on his work came in 1948 and 1949 and was by the radical Islamic thinker Sayyid Qutb before his shift from literature to religious ideology. Afterward and despite that, writers either attacked him vehemently or lavished him with adulation. For instance, *al-Gumhuriyya* newspaper constantly maligned him for the socialism of his bourgeois writing. Following the publication of his novel *Karnak* (1974), where he addresses the state of Egypt’s political prisoners, his writing was classified as reactionary literature. Mahfouz adds that, ironically, the same critics who disparaged him for a period of three years were ones to praise him later (Ghitani 212-13 and ‘Atiyah, *Adwaa* 161).

The *Trilogy* was a watershed moment in Mahfouz’s output marking the end of his realist phase and the beginning of his philosophical phase (‘Alim 64-79). On various occasions he has had to defend his choice of social realism in this work. Among his reasons is the irrelevance of the writer’s choice since the topic dictates the form (Badr 28). He refers to *Midaq Alley* as a novel which he wrote in the social realist mode in 1947 despite his familiarity with Joyce, Kafka

⁴⁸ Milson identifies this as the influence of French thinker Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931). One also detects a similarity with Zaghoul who, in his pre-revolutionary era, did not believe in revolution (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt’s* 46-8).

and Proust. He states that in 1959, he started moving to another form in short stories and other works (Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 23-4). Another reason he cites is his distaste for the modern novel, which he finds “boring,” arguing that a novel could still convey the monotony of life beautifully. He goes on to say that since the human brain imposes order on the chaos of life, presenting a chaotic narration is tantamount to dissociating the brain from external life. Additionally, Mahfouz had, at the time, expressed his doubt about the suitability of the stream of consciousness technique and the Absurd for Arabic literature, specifically because the latter runs contrary to belief in society. Yet, he adds that he has used the internal monologue after the *Trilogy* wherever relevant (Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 95, 106-07, 162). Indeed, Mahfouz’s works from 1967-70, following the 1967 War, are in the style of the Absurd (Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 336).⁴⁹

Mahfouz’s main reason for choosing social realism in the *Trilogy*, however, lies in his view of himself and Arabic literature vis-à-vis Western writers and literature. He confides that, although aware that he chose social realism at a time when Virginia Woolf was attacking it and advocating for the psychological mode, had he followed the modernist mode, he would have been a mere copier. Instead, he chose realism which, he argues, was unknown in Arabic literature (Badr 64). Addressing criticism leveled at him by Egyptian scholars, such as Abdel Mohsen Taha Badr, Mahfouz points out that they read him as if he were an English author who had inherited a native novel tradition. Speaking in 1978, Mahfouz declares that these critics failed to take into account the status of the Arabic novel at the time and how he developed it (Ghitani 168). Whereas Western literature had experienced the realist phase and moved beyond it to begin introspection with the stream of consciousness technique, there was no comparable

⁴⁹ On the Absurd in Mahfouz’s fiction after the *Trilogy*, see ‘Atiyah, *Ma’a Najib Mahfuz* 99-112.

tradition in Arabic literature. Thus, while Joyce's choice of the stream of consciousness seemed only logical for an introverted protagonist, the social context about which Mahfouz was writing had not been represented in the realist mode to warrant a move to the modernist phase. Egyptian society, he states, had not been observed from the outside and therefore he could not progress to the inside directly. Further, unlike Western literature, Arabic literature had no novel tradition to build upon. Eminent figures who wrote Arabic novels, such as Taha Hussein or al Aqqad, viewed the genre with disdain and even then their works were closer to biographies than novels.⁵⁰ Working alone, Mahfouz had to explore literature himself and lay some foundation (Ghitani 148-50 and Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 53).

Not all Egyptian scholars, however, recognize Mahfouz's style in the *Trilogy* as realist. Egyptian critic Luwis Awad calls Mahfouz "realism's staunch enemy." He argues that the *Trilogy's* characters belong neither to the classical school, in which characters represent great personae standing for all humanity, nor to the realist mode, where ordinary persons stand for the common man. Awad argues that, instead, characters possess individual emotional and intellectual traits that align them with the romantic tradition. For example, he notes that both Ahmad Abd al-Jawad and Aminah, rather than representing familiar figures in the petit bourgeoisie of the age, are exaggerated images of the father and mother figures. Preferring to see the *Trilogy* as a naturalistic work, Awad concludes that by describing characters and their emotions equally, Mahfouz follows realism and romanticism (Awad 355-62).⁵¹ Although

⁵⁰ Israeli scholar Menahem Milson explains that despite the existence of Arabic fictional narrative works, such as the *One Thousand and One Nights*, these works were not considered literature due to their raunchiness and their use of the vernacular rather than classical Arabic. The emergence of the Arabic novel and short stories are indebted to Western literature (Milson 6-8). See Somekh 1-34 on the emergence of the novel in Egypt.

⁵¹ For Awad's reading of the *Trilogy* as a naturalistic work see 365-73. Egyptian Marxist scholar Ghali Shukri argues that because Mahfouz's vision of problems in Egyptian society dictated the mode which he used, he was selective, at times combining different modes. For this reason, it could be said that Mahfouz had always been pioneering and experimental (Shukri, "Preface" 6-16).

Mahfouz has admitted reading naturalists, such as Emile Zola and H.G. Wells, he is intrigued by the constant attempts linking the *Trilogy* to naturalism since he does not ally himself with this or any specific literary mode (Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 51-2).⁵²

Although the *Trilogy* is most famous for chronicling social and historical changes in early twentieth-century Egypt,⁵³ Mahfouz does not consider it a historical novel. He adds that he has not written a historical novel in the sense of the word. Pointing to the relationship between the novel and history since the former addresses the part of history that historians do not write – daily life with all its complications – he asserts that his works have always depicted the present (Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 57-8). In crafting the multi-volume piece, he primarily set out to write a social realist work concerning himself more with the Abd al-Jawad family than with a historical narration of Egypt's past (Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 63). Consequently, he has had to omit many details about the revolution (Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 178). Believing literature to be a rebellion against the social reality and the novel a documentary record of the writer, not of history or society (Mahfouz, *Najib Mahfuz: Safahat* 17-19), Mahfouz records his and his fellow intellectuals' crisis at a time when he was struggling between mimicry and intellectual independence and as Egypt grappled with its national, intellectual and political identities. Thus, the *Trilogy*, read as a *Bildungsroman*, explores the crisis of both Egypt and the national intellectual as they journey towards self-realization in an attempt to negotiate foreign and indigenous forms. Ultimately, Mahfouz, who confessed that the *Trilogy* represents his interest in

⁵² Like Mahfouz, Egyptian scholar Mahmud A. 'Alim and Somekh refuse to classify the *Trilogy* as a naturalistic work. See 'Alim 58-9 and Somekh 108-10.

⁵³ See Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: His Life* 66-90 on the *Trilogy*'s discussion of time in relation to the individual. See Somekh 127-33 on how the structure of the *Trilogy* reflects the theme of change in Time. Somekh argues that Mahfouz's fascination with the "rapidly changing rhythm of life" shapes the structure and style of the *Trilogy* (112). Mahmud A. 'Alim argues that conflicting opposites in the *Trilogy*, such as communism and Islamism, activism and passivity, nationalism and non-belonging, attempt to understand the change and the current times (58-9).

socialism as a solution ((Mahfouz, *Atahaddath* 45), revises the genre to allow the Egyptian intellectual to fashion a model that fits the native socio-historical context.

To Be or Not to Be: Kamal on the Path of Enlightenment

Sugar Street follows the Abd al-Jawad family from 1935 to 1944. Al-Sayyid Ahmad, the patriarch whose waning power reflects that of Britain, dies shortly after a German air raid during World War II. Kamal, his youngest son, publishes articles in periodicals as he continues to search for the meaning of life, while Al-Sayyid Ahmad's grandchildren, Kamal's nephews, engage in Egyptian political life each in his own way. The novel ends with the death of Aminah the matriarch.

When reading *Sugar Street* as a *Bildungsroman* three main players emerge: Kamal, whose journey of self-discovery remains incomplete until the end of the series, and his nephews Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm – the two brothers who represent his “spiritual schisms” which leave him wavering between past and present, East and West (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: His Life* 91). This section analyzes Kamal's failure to achieve enlightenment within the framework of the traditional European *Bildungsroman* while the rest of the chapter argues that in contrasting Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm, as national intellectuals, to their uncle, the novel provides an alternative Egyptian *Bildungsroman*.

In her book, *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe analyzes the ways in which Asian American writers subvert the *Bildungsroman* and expose the genre's complicity with colonialism by contesting the idea of universal selfhood which the genre presupposes. Examining novels by writers such as Carlos Bulosan and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Lowe argues that these works destabilize a genre that tells of a hero undergoing a journey of education, overcoming adversity

and achieving maturation through reconciliation with the social order. The novels under discussion reveal this order to be an imposed, foreign one whose goal is to suppress the hero rather than allow him or her to live in harmony with society, thus subjecting the *Bildungsheld*, the protagonist of the *Bildungsroman*, to constant conflict (42-101).

Closely intertwined with the discourse of European Enlightenment is the phenomenon of orientalism which Edward Said examines in his landmark study of the same title. Speaking of 18th and 19th-century French and British colonialism in the Near East, Said explains that the discourse of Enlightenment, as a system of thought that advocates rational and scientific thought, was mobilized in the service of colonialism. By identifying reason and scientific advancement as barometers of civilization and by constructing them as properties of Europe, this discourse generated a binarism that placed Self – Europe – and Other – the Near East – on opposite sides of the scale. Thus the Self was assigned rational, paternal qualities while the Other was identified with irrational superstition and childish passion. In the end, this Enlightenment discourse affirms and universalizes Western truths deeming them the only routes to human progress (Said).

The *Bildungsroman*, following Enlightenment thought in constructing Europe as the universal Self – the only model worthy of copying – affirms the power structure upon which orientalism is erected. According to this setup, the Other is expected to discard his/ her outdated ways and adopt a superior European paradigm that values individualism and employs rational thinking and empirical data in place of intuitive knowledge and religious superstition. Postcolonial Marxist scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty further elaborates on this view of the Other by illustrating how Marxism's critique of Capital, through its reliance on the universals of Enlightenment, has helped cement capitalism and modernity as European. Although Marx condemns capitalism's materialism and its tendency to deepen inequalities among individuals, he

embraces it as a necessary stage in the progression to communism. He explains that capitalism's need for constant revolutionizing of the means of production introduces, in addition to new machinery, new social relations that render old ones obsolete. The example he gives is that of the family, which has been restructured around money, instead of sentimental relations. Equally, the bourgeoisie's need for an expanding market and more raw materials facilitates capitalism's global penetration, vanquishing the political economies that precede it, exporting new technologies, values and relations as it draws other "barbarians" into civilization. In short, Marx describes the expansion of capitalism from urban centers to rural areas, from the West to the non-West as a civilizing force. Once capitalism gains a foothold, he explains, workers will demand their rights and capitalism will have created the means for its own demise, paving the way for communism (Marx).

Chakrabarty shows how Marx's language of progress is entangled with the discourse of imperialism, (re)inscribing Otherness by defining modernity according to the model of European individualism versus, purportedly, non-European communalism. Further, as Chakrabarty points out, Marx's conceptualization of notions such as human labor presupposes an individualized, European who possesses certain legal rights. Thus, he institutes Capitalism as the standard that marks the beginning of true history, establishing Europe as the home of modernity, consequently, transforming it into a temporal destination to which the Other must journey. Chakrabarty goes on to say that most imperialist writing on the Other, and even some nationalist writing influenced by Marxism, go so far as to equate the Other's rejection of religious tradition with his/ her induction into selfhood, modernity, in a word Being. Until deemed to be properly enlightened, the Other is relegated to History's "waiting room" (97-113).

Expounding Marxism's notion of Capital Chakrabarty critiques the ways in which

histories of ideologies tend to produce narrowly defined narratives where aspects deemed anomalies within, contradictions to, or precedents of a certain model are identified as anachronisms or relics of pre-modernity. Out of this logic comes the conclusion that continued adherence to such anomalies bars the Other's advent into what is seen as the true history of an ideology or into Being. Chakrabarty labels this distinction History 1 – the approved, narrowly defined paradigm – and History 2 – antecedents of or variations on the paradigm, historical difference; the waiting room of history, which according to Marx must be destroyed by History 1. Needless to say, Chakrabarty adds that these two phases, treated as self-evident and rigidly contoured, are fluid and amorphous. Finding resistance within Marxist thought itself, he calls, first, for destabilizing the ideal of Europe as inhabitant of the modern and, second, for theorizing difference, not to argue for nativism, or cultural relativism, but rather to acknowledge European Enlightenment and Capitalism as historically-specific models, not be applied prescriptively to other regions (Chakrabarty 27-71). This is the epiphany that Ahmed reaches at the end of the Trilogy and which his uncle fails to see.

One might argue that the ambivalence of colonial discourse, by following a narrow definition of modernity which assigns Self and Other temporal, and ostensibly fixed geographical, belongings as well as intellectual and physical attributes, imprisons the Other in an eternal state of waiting. He/ she wholly belongs neither to past nor present, East nor West. By ascribing to the Other contradictory qualities, such as wisdom and childishness, or religiosity and carnality, colonial discourse places the Other in limbo. Subsequently, because Enlightenment discourse relies on constant deferral of its promise to recognize the Other as an individual or an equal, the latter is caught between worlds and historical eras, more specifically so in Mahfouz's *Bildungsroman*, thus causing the conflict which riddles Kamal throughout.

In *Sugar Street*, Kamal oscillates between Western Enlightenment and native tradition, represented in the 7th-century Arab poetic tradition, antecedent to courtly love, known as “*al hubb al udhri*.” He places these traditions in adversarial positions oblivious to the fact that he can create a model of his own. By fully submitting to the discourse of Enlightenment, Kamal reproduces its orientalist aspects causing his own self-othering making it impossible for him to reach the expected closure and reconciliation of a traditional *Bildungsheld*. His inability to create a model that fits Egyptian society, coupled by his insistence on living the experience of *al hubb al udhri*, causes his estrangement from his native scene.

The first chapter of *Sugar Street* presents the *Bildungsheld* during one of his frequent moments of conflict. Sitting in his study one January night in 1935, Kamal, now 28, reflects on the path he has chosen. In *Palace of Desire*, he has renounced religion in favor of skepticism, envisioning himself as an Enlightenment philosopher whose training at the Teachers’ College will, by virtue of exposure to works of literature and philosophy, aid him in answering existentialist questions. Contrary to his expectations, this has not brought him fulfillment. Working as a primary school English teacher by day and translating Western philosophy by night Kamal who, “neither loved nor respected his career,” still searching for the truth, “jokingly accused himself of being a slave, for a slave might have to master work he did not like” (10). Now, living his earlier dream, he contemplates his isolation while consoling himself with reading Spinoza and Schopenhauer:

Yet, this continuous effort did not succeed in disarming the anxiety that tormented him, for truth was a beloved as flirtatious, inaccessible, and coquettish as any human sweetheart. It stirred up doubts and jealousy, awakening a violent desire in people to possess it and to merge with it. Like a human lover, it seemed prone to whims, passions, and disguises. Frequently it appeared cunning, deceitful, harsh, and proud.” (11)

Kamal’s conceptualization of himself in terms of enslavement points to his entrapment in

Enlightenment discourse even as it gestures towards his hopeless love for Aïda Shaddad. His reverence for philosophers of an Enlightenment model which marginalizes him, and his dedication to a beloved who has rejected him, point to his obsession with the unattainable, which is the lifeblood of *al hubb al udhri*. In the above quotation the truth, now equated with an unattainable, tyrannical beloved, is an object that he passively worships and meekly endures its cruel taunts in the same way that he has accepted Aïda's harshness.

Not only is Kamal's application of Enlightenment philosophy selective and outdated, but he seeks to replace one master narrative with another. For example, like Spinoza, he rejects organized and popular religion instilled into him by his mother, but where Spinoza formulated an alternate theory of an infinite God and a pre-determined human, Kamal is reluctant to either form an alternate theory or commit to an already-existing theory. This leaves him searching for a universal Truth until the very end.⁵⁴ He trains himself and his readers in Western sensibility employing the Enlightenment values of doubt and rational thinking against a religious tradition. What is notable about his training is where critical thinking stops. Over time, religious belief, skepticism, atheism, and doubt are assessed and found wanting. What is never interrogated is the value of the Enlightenment itself. Rather than critiquing, negotiating and adapting it to the particularities of Egyptian society, he is duped by its pretense at universality and objectivity expecting to copy it.

As a genre, the *Bildungsroman* relies on a contradiction whereby the *Bildungsheld* can only achieve enlightenment, or agency by repudiating freedom and embracing dominant values. For Kamal this contradiction is more complex since he will be forever viewed in terms of mimicry, which Homi K. Bhabha defines as a state produced by the imposition of the colonial

⁵⁴ On Spinoza see Popkin 373-82 and Della.

culture of the Self, the European colonizer, on the Other, the colonized subject. In this framework, the former produces an Other that is an approximation of the Self. Colonialist discourse casts this subject as a flawed copy of Western man. At bottom, colonial mimicry stems from “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (86, emphasis in the original). In other words, as an Other Kamal is already marginalized and his success as a *Bildungsheld* can only be achieved through self-Othering. Yet, the Other’s education will, against all efforts identify him/ her as almost the same, but not quite. Kamal’s crisis stems from his blind faith in the discourse of Enlightenment which promises that the Other may become the Self’s equal by acquiring the latter’s culture.

Kamal is a mimic man who subscribes to the delusion, or perhaps illusion, that by copying the West he will enter, as one British colonial official writing on India put it, “ ‘a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and intellect’ – in other words a mimic man” (87). Ironically Kamal is an interpreter in both senses of the word. He presents European culture to Egyptians as he translates works of European philosophy. He not only passively submits to a model which forces him within the confines of mimicry, but also tries, without much success, to be an ideal *Bildungsheld*, an ideal skeptic – more European than the Europeans and more Enlightened than the Enlightenment thinkers. This is seen in his lifetime endeavor to summarize Western philosophy without committing to a theory or formulating one of his own, sometimes arguing a point and its opposite. For these very reasons, self-realization proves impossible. An added irony here is that self-realization is another name for maturity, particularly

in the West where the accent falls on individualism.

To re-appropriate Bhabha's explication of the state of the colonized Other, Kamal is less than one but not double! Bhabha observes that because the Other suffers from a split personality that encompasses foreign and native values, he/she is not wholly one thing or another. But because he/she possesses both cultures he/she is also double (97). Kamal who struggles with his double consciousness of Egyptian and European values regards the former as inferior. He is unable, perhaps unwilling, to allow these two sides to communicate, to combine both cultures adeptly in order to enter Bhabha's third-space which accommodates his hybrid character. This bifurcation manifests in contradictory impulses which Mahfouz relays in the following passage:

Kamal was not deeply engaged in politics, but his doubts had not been able to destroy it for him, as they had so many other interests. It retained an emotional vitality for him. His heart believed firmly in the rights of the people, no matter how divided his intellect was on the subject, espousing at times "the rights of man," and on other occasions proclaiming, "It's all a question of the survival of the fittest. The masses are the common herd." It might also wonder, "Isn't Communism an experiment worth exploring?" His heart had not been purged of the populist sentiments with which he had grown up ... (135)

Kamal maintains this ambivalence until the end of the novel, almost relishing uncertainty and seeking to prolong his suffering much like the poets of *al hubb al udhri* who found pleasure in the pain of unrequited love.

Aïda's hold on Kamal best exemplifies *al hubb al udhri* and the seductive power of Enlightenment discourse which operates on a narrative of love and mimetic appeal and which Shaden Tageldin explores in *Disarming Words*. Analyzing French-Egyptian relations at the end of the 18th century and beyond, she argues that France colonized Egypt intellectually through a narrative of love and seduction after failing to subjugate it militarily. Entering Egypt in 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte penned proclamations in French and Arabic appealing to a similarity in disposition between the Egyptians and the French, positioning the latter as Egyptophiles come to

rescue Egypt from the repressive rule of the *Mamalik*⁵⁵ and feigning respect for Islam and Muslim culture. Napoleon even circulated a Janus faced portrait of himself in a French *bicorne* and a *Mamluk* turban respectively. While acknowledging that these claims masked a colonialist discourse which viewed Egyptians as inferior and sought to exploit their resources, Tageldin contends that these professions of love succeeded in winning over many Egyptian intellectuals who, despite their rejection of colonialism, embraced the so-called commonalities that the French presented. She goes on to argue that French imperialist conquest of Egypt mobilized a fiction of love and likeness between Self and Other even as it reinforced the orientalist discourse of separateness and difference. Such a complex relation is best observed in works translating French knowledge to Egyptians where the French pose as objects of love and desire (1-32).

Like the turbaned Napoleon, Aïda Shaddad's relationship with Kamal is Janus faced, figuring not only the charm of Europe but also the tradition of unrequited, romantic love inherited from Arabic poetry. Sometimes erroneously translated as virginal love, because of the similarity of the word "*udhri*" to "chaste," the convention takes its name from the tribe of *banu Udhra*, who lived in various places between the Hijaz and the Levant. They were famous for their strong affection, faithful dedication to the object of their attention, and suffering for the sake of the beloved. The tradition flourished under the Umayyads and, according to Shawqi Dayf, *was* chaste as opposed to other types of erotic *ghazal* (love poetry). *Al hubb al udhri* speaks of the misery of a devoted lover who has been rejected as a husband by the woman's family and/ or displaced by her marriage to another man,⁵⁶ both of which miseries Kamal

⁵⁵ The *Mamalik* (sing. *Mamluk*) were slave warriors who rose to power in the 13th century and governed Egypt until the French occupation.

⁵⁶ See Parry 3-24 for the influence of Arabic and Andalusian love poetry on the troubadours and the tradition of courtly love.

undergoes. Haunted by memories of his idol, the lover continues to love his woman silently, or in some cases goes insane, as in the well-known story of *Majnun Layla*, or dies (Dayf 19-27).⁵⁷ Aïda's last name, Shaddad, evokes the famous ancient Arabic epic romance of Antar and Abla,⁵⁸ which tells of the legendary love of Antar ibn Shaddad – a black, pre-Islamic poet and warrior who lived in 6th-century Arabia – for his cousin Abla, and the trials that he undergoes before he unites with her.⁵⁹ According to the story, Antar is literally born into slavery to a mother who becomes his father's property after a tribal war, and is metaphorically a slave to Abla whom he cannot marry because of his color.

Ensnared by a romantic Europe, Aïda stands for the Self and Other simultaneously. Aïda, whom Kamal envisions as a "Parisian girl," has spent part of her childhood in France and considers herself an authority on European fashion. She reads mostly European literature and, to Kamal's astonishment, behaves according to European fashion, mixing with her brother's friends at their mansion, and occasionally flirting with them. She and her brother, Husayn, perform as Enlightenment luminaries, philosophizing about politics and the human condition. Contrasted to Kamal, who as a merchant's son stands for the old urban middle class, they stand for the new Europeanized Egyptian elite⁶⁰ more so than Kamal in whom they cultivate a love of Europe and who remains torn between Egypt and Europe, however much he devalues the former. They are exemplary colonial mimics – faithful to the West they embrace. Extending the colonizer's view of the Other's religious and cultural values as pre-modern, Aïda and Husayn spurn what they see as outmoded traditional Egyptian, Muslim mores by eating pork and drinking beer which, in one

⁵⁷ For the story of *Majnun Layla* see Daghli 361-97. For characteristics of the poetry of *al hubb al udhri* see Yusuf 34-69.

⁵⁸ See Milson 198-225 for his view on the significance of names in the *Trilogy*.

⁵⁹ For the history of Antar and the transmission of the romance across the ages see Heath and Amin.

⁶⁰ See Gershoni, "Introduction," 7-11 on social classes in 1930s and 1940s Egypt.

instance, they casually offer to their five-year-old sister.

Kamal, completely captivated by Aïda's two faces, submits to the competing foreign and national traditions vying over him. He adores her Europeanization while transforming her into the idealized beloved of *al hubb al udhri*. One could argue that Kamal's passivity is, in itself, a form of agency. That is, his inability and/ or refusal to take a decision *is* a choice not to commit. He assumes the persona of a tormented poet of *al hubb al udhri* wallowing in pain, refusing to spare himself. He spends countless evenings watching her bedroom window and sleepless nights recalling earlier encounters with her re-living various moments of pleasure and humiliation, relishing both the pain and the pleasure. The fact that he makes this his only love experience – his love for Budur cannot count as another love story since in keeping Budur's company he seeks to relive the experience with her sister – is a conscious choice to live a paradox as an agent and a non-agent. Kamal simply enjoys chasing the unattainable, whether it be Aïda or Europe, while remaining blind to the realities of life. His reverence for this "civilized" family bars him from noticing its members' decadence and attending to reports of its miserliness. Like Aïda, Europe is unattainable. Like colonialist discourse, she torments him, promises him equality, then spurns him. Despite friendly relations, Aïda at times derides Kamal as when she pokes fun at his unusually big nose. Like the beloveds of *al hubb al udhri*, she is beyond his grasp.

In a way Europe represents the unattainable beloved of *al hubb al udhri* whom the lover elevates almost to the level of the divine. Therefore becoming the Self, achieving unity with the beloved, is a mirage since both colonialism and *al hubb al udhri* are predicated on a rejection of the lover/ the Other, as is aptly summarized in Bhabha's explanation of colonialist representation of the Other as "the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (87). Therefore, in wooing both Aïda and Enlightenment

discourse, Kamal will always be courting a fantasy because the world of the *Bildungsroman* relegates him to the margins. His education in this context is a mirage since his success as a *Bildungsheld* is contingent upon enacting the imperialist narrative claiming that Egyptians cannot yet transition into modernity because of their loyalty to pre-modern native traditions. His attempts at yoking together both traditions, cause him to live in a perpetual state of mimicry, leaving him “only halfway down the road” (305) by the end of the *Trilogy*. Hence the anxiety with which the novel starts.

The conflict between Enlightenment thought and *al hubb al udhri* as Kamal experiences it, exposes the *Bildungsroman* as an unfit vehicle for the other’s journey to self-discovery not because this tension represents an unequal struggle between modernity and tradition but because, as stated earlier, the *Bildungsroman* presupposes a European social order which advocates conformity deeming dissenting or different voices as deviant, pre-modern – outside history. Kamal’s full indoctrination in the Enlightenment view of the Other as inferior leaves him doubtful that his contribution to the conversation could be worthwhile. His subconscious insistence on *al hubb al udhri* as a means of resisting the repressive powers of Enlightenment discourse, not only marks him as “*not quite*,” but also causes his petrification – according to Frantz Fanon, a state of recalcitrant devotion to tradition in the face of changing and/ or foreign forms (171-72).

Al Wuquf ala al Atlal and a Critique of Native Forms

If *al hubb al udhri* functions as the discordant element which signifies the different tradition to which Kamal belongs and which prevents him from complete submission to a foreign tradition, it also reflects his incapacity to adapt to a different time or a different society – in this

case, early 20th-century Egypt. *Sugar Street* equally critiques native traditions which the novel deems unfit to the historical moment and, as such, reflects the intense debate at the beginning of the century where Egyptian intellectuals such as Taha Hussein called for a reformation in Arabic literary production, which by the late 19th century had deteriorated into meaningless imitation of form⁶¹ and whose writers excelled in what Egyptian scholar of Arabic literature, M. M. Badawi, calls “verbal acrobatics” (Badawi 25).⁶² *Sugar Street* deconstructs *al wuquf ala al atlal*, or standing by the ruins – a pre-Islamic tradition born out of the nomadic culture of the Arabs in which a poet revisits the scene of a now-deserted encampment and, in a sometimes-tearful lamentation, retraces vestiges of an earlier, familiar life while recounting fond memories of the beloved. *Al wuquf ala al atlal* sometimes took up the bulk of the poem and other times opened a poem on *ghazal* (love poetry), or other forms (Izzat and Kilpatrick).

Kamal’s memory of Aïda as a symbol and a ruin both alludes to as well as deconstructs this classical tradition. Ceasing to be a person, she signifies a state of love, up to the point where Kamal muses: “so this was Aïda then. She was not a dream, and he had not imagined his time with her. There had been moments when that part of his past had seemed an illusion” (223). In a departure from the usual key terms used in this context, Mahfouz substitutes other words that destabilize the form. For instance, instead of using the Arabic words for ruins, or ruin (“*atlal*,” or “*talal*”), he uses the word “*kharibah*,” which implies the same meaning of deserted, uncared-for-land but whose negative nuances of destruction, unhealthy disarray, and danger divest the situation of its romantic undertones. Further, when Kamal reflects on the feebleness induced by Aïda’s love, he does not use “*saqam*,” the term usually used in *al hub al udhri* to connote sweet,

⁶¹ See Hussein on the regeneration of Arabic literature.

⁶² For a history of the origins of the Arabic novel see Badawi, *Modern* 128-135 and Allen, *The Arabic Novel*.

welcome lovesickness, using instead the word “*marad*,” just disease. In a further dissociation of meaning, the author has Kamal compare this disease to tuberculosis (Mahfouz, *Al-sukkariyah* 288 and 289). This critique of form stresses Kamal’s cultural inertia, which is reflected in the pleasure he draws from re-living his fruitless love story.

Speaking of cultural inertia, Fanon explains that in the face of the occupation, the national intellectual is either driven towards a wholehearted adoption of colonialist culture or an obstinate clinging to traditional forms. In the latter case, culture, now a sum of meaningless practices comparable to the “verbal acrobatics” which Badawi refers to, is reduced to “an inventory of behavioral patterns, traditional costumes, and miscellaneous customs” (Fanon 170-72). Of course by describing reactions to colonial culture in generalized extremes, Fanon overlooks national intellectuals who attempted to negotiate the imposed, alien culture with their national culture. Kamal’s proclivity to live according to older forms manifests itself, on a small scale, in his insistence on dressing in the no-longer-fashionable style of the *effendiya*, the educated middle class that rose in the early 20th century (Gershoni, “Introduction.” *Redefining* 7-11), and, on a larger scale, in his insistence on older poetic forms.

His ossification is apparent when sixteen years after last communicating with Aïda, he is deeply moved by his friend’s, Isma’il Latif’s, account of her visit to his mother feeling that “his face was starting to burn in spite of the intensely cold February weather” (222). Marveling at his unforeseen reaction to the mention of Aïda, Kamal tells himself that “of course, he might pine for Aïda, not because he had once loved her – for that relationship had vanished never to return – but because she represented love, which he had often sorely missed over the years. She was nothing but a symbol, like a deserted ruin [*kharibah*, not *talal*] that evokes exalted historic memories.” As he clings to the idea of love which Aïda represents, “no matter how dead his love

was, his heart felt an intoxicating longing. Inside him chords once silent reverberated softly and sadly” (223). Kamal’s feeling of intoxication points to his inaction as well as his desire to seek an opiate. In addition, his self-imposed existence in outmoded traditions hinders his advent into Selfhood. Coupling *kharibah* and exalted memories intensifies the irony, further subverting the form.

In short, Kamal’s cultural inertia causes him to submit to events as they happen resigning himself to an unfulfilling job, an ill-fated love, and a recreation of that story 16 years later in his relationship with Budur. He does not attempt to understand his actions, the causes of events, or their effect on his emotions or to ponder their relevance or sincerity;

as for his goal in all this, he had not troubled himself to identify it. Life pulsed through him after a period of stagnation, and that made him feel enthusiastic. With all the strength his tormented soul could muster, he yearned to become once more that man in whose psyche feelings squirmed, from whose intellect ideas soared, and to whose senses visions were manifest. He longed for this magic to supplant his peevishness, ill health, and perplexity at being confronted by unanswerable riddles. Love was like wine, but its enjoyment was profounder and the hangover less objectionable. (236)

Kamal’s musings reveal that he is seeking an escape, not answers. He is looking for a romanticized, idealized state of love, seen in his use of the word “magic.” Distancing Kamal through the irony in the phrase “he had not troubled himself to identify it,” the narrator conveys disapproval of Kamal’s blind fascination with older poetic forms.

Quickly, Kamal transforms Budur into another ruin of the past. Paradoxically, her accessibility lures and repels him at the same time. With the Shaddad family fortune gone, she is not as inaccessible as her sister once has been, triggering feelings of pity and disappointment rather than love and admiration. He haunts her neighborhood as he has once haunted their old mansion to gaze on Aïda’s window. Budur’s responsiveness leads him to compare her with Aïda, asking himself “but would Aïda have done this, even if the moon had split apart?” (255).

Pondering the course of action expected of him he reflects “she seemed ready and responsive – as if she did not belong to the Shaddad family. In fact, she was not a Shaddad at all. The Shaddad family was finished. Its time had passed. ‘the person walking along with you is just one of many unlucky girls,’ he reflected” (256). Retreating into inaction, he stops frequenting her neighborhood.

Kamal continues to enjoy a style of life which Salah ‘Id refers to as indicative of the idleness of the poets of *al hubb al udhri*, relishing deprivation, sometimes self-inflicted, and prolonging pain (‘Id). Knowledge of Budur’s engagement reawakens in him dormant pain reminiscent of that which accompanied news of Aīda’s engagement “evoking the most sublime pain but at the same time bringing veiled hints of pleasure. It was a single emotion in which pain met pleasure, just as night and day encounter each other at dawn.” (265). The phrases “sublime pain” and “pain met pleasure” indicate that he savors the pain of love wishing to re-live the heroic poetic tradition of ‘Antar and ‘Abla. The ambiguous description of “veiled hints of pleasure,” could point to Kamal’s relief that a decision has been made for him, that now that Budur is engaged he needs not choose a course of action. He refuses to acknowledge responsibility for Budur’s engagement, choosing to view it as the result of someone else’s action rather than a result of his decision not to act.⁶³ Additionally, Kamal fails because of his inability to recognize that narratives evolve with the changing times and adapt themselves to the individual needs of each society. This is seen clearly in his invocation of the past through Budur whose voice he wants to hear since it is “ ‘the one bygone melody that time has not altered’ ”

⁶³ Referring to Kamal in *Sugar Street* as an “anti-climax,” Somekh explains that though static, Kamal is not a flat character in the last volume. Somekh argues that Mahfouz intentionally focuses on Kamal in order to “underline the tragedy of a man who comes to an impasse through inaction.” As such, according to Somekh, Kamal anticipates several Mahfouz protagonists “who reach a point of absolute passiveness” (120).

(238). The fact that he wants to hear the same melody that he heard 16 years earlier illustrates his inflexibility as a person and a national intellectual.

The National Intellectual after 1919 and an Egyptian *Bildungsroman*

Sugar Street includes three aspiring male national intellectuals and one female national intellectual, Sawsan,⁶⁴ whose role as Ahmad's mentor helps him reach an enlightenment that reconciles him with modern-day Egyptian society. The novel's juxtaposition of Kamal's two nephews, the brothers Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm as national intellectuals best illustrates the fissures in Egyptian political life. The first, a communist, and the second, a Muslim Brother, are counterparts to each other and more pointedly to Kamal.⁶⁵ Their stories represent two alternative *Bildungsromane*. On the one hand, Abd al-Muni'm embraces the religion his uncle repudiates; on the other hand, after a short-lived love story with an aristocratic woman, Ahmad rejects *al hubb al udhri* and plunges more deeply into Marxism. His flexible approach towards governance and national culture marks him as the protagonist of a new indigenous Egyptian *Bildungsroman* that marries European Enlightenment principles to the cultural specificities of early twentieth-century Egyptian society. Ahmad exemplifies Fanon's involved national intellectual who calls his people to action. Unlike his uncle, he succeeds in demystifying Europe as the source of Enlightenment and modernity. He matures when he realizes that Marxism, though useful in thinking about class politics, emerged out of a historically-specific context and that it must be revised to fit the Egyptian context. Since it is Ahmad who explains to Kamal his Marxist-Egyptian program of action, discussion of Mahfouz's Egyptian *Bildungsroman* will focus on him

⁶⁴ Egyptian feminist Marxist critic and writer Latifa al Zayyat describes Sawsan as the first woman in Mahfouz's work who goes beyond the private to the public and who dedicates her life to the nation and the working classes proving that women could participate in the social context. See 129-64 for Zayyat's analysis of the role of woman in Mahfouz's literature between 1939 and 1973.

⁶⁵ Shukri argues that the main characters in *Sugar Street*, such as Ahmad and Riyad Qaldas, are variations on Kamal, representing the tragedy and schisms of a whole generation (Ghali 61-73).

while acknowledging Sawsan's role.

Kamal's fluctuation between East and West mirrors Egypt's schizophrenic state in the early 20th century as it moves from a state of occupation to one of autonomy. His imprisonment in a Western system of thought and submission to *al hubb al udhri* reflect the *Wafd's* deterioration from a nationalist anti-British party to a British puppet. Read in this light, his relationship with Aïda recalls the unequal relationship between the *Wafd* and the British who exploited the party to further the interests of Empire. As Kamal weeps by Aïda's ruins, mourning an Egypt that has been seduced by a European way of life, Mahfouz, too, weeps by the ruins of 1919 lamenting the rampant corruption of the *Wafd*, to which he remained loyal (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit* 4), and the once vibrant political, intellectual arena that nurtured 1919.

Fanon delineates the evolvement of national culture over three stages from adopt, to adapt, to adept. According to him, the colonized intellectual first emerges as a mimic, adopting colonial forms and reproducing them in his/ her work. In the second stage, he/ she adapts colonial forms to native scenes using the former only as tools to address native culture. In the third and final stage, the intellectual, now versed in various cultural forms, submerges himself/ herself in the native culture assuming an independent stance, creating a unique, native model (158-59). The intellectual's crystallization occurs through active social and political involvement when he/ she calls upon the people to join the struggle using what Fanon calls "combat literature" (173), a stage which Ahmad is about to enter at the end of the *Trilogy*. The success of combat literature, Fanon implies, is dependent, first, upon the utility and relevance of the intellectual's work to the national struggle and, second, upon a mutual recognition between him/ her and the people. That is, not only do the intellectual's topics need to be relevant to the nation, but the people also have to recognize him/ her as a representative and his/ her methods and goals

as valid. This aligns with Mahfouz's understanding of a writer, as he defines a writer not as someone who writes, but as someone whose works are read and whose readership extends outside his critics. Viewing a writer as a citizen with political views, the author believes that, rather than living in isolation, a writer should speak up against social ills (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Taharrur* 85-6, Ghitani 82, 85).

Kamal, who thinks of himself as a national intellectual, never blossoms into an independent thinker. Occupying the first phase throughout, he remains a passive recipient of European knowledge – one who is alienated from the society which he claims to educate. Through Kamal, *Sugar Street* critiques the figure of the nationalist intellectual whose captivation by an imposed, foreign system isolates him from his people – whether educated or uneducated. Sawsan, later to become Ahmad's wife, demonstrates both the irrelevance of Kamal's work as well as the discrepancy between the way he views himself and the way his society views him. Describing him as “a writer who rambles through the wilderness of metaphysics” (191), she notes that instead of utilizing the knowledge he has amassed in order to form his own theory he regurgitates old information.

Not only do Kamal's articles target an insular group of like-minded individuals, they are deemed to be obscure and/ or irrelevant by the educated elite. For example, Fuad al-Hamzawi, Kamal's childhood friend who is now a public prosecutor admits to Kamal that he does not understand his essays. Similarly, Isma'il Latif, another friend, confesses that he has stopped purchasing his journal because neither he nor his wife finds it interesting. When asked about Kamal he answers that Kamal writes articles that he, Isma'il, does not understand and publishes them in a periodical that he does not even buy. Neither representative of nor accessible to the mass population, the culture which he manufactures is elitist excluding even educated Egyptians

who hold prestigious positions. Further, his attempts to acculturate fellow Egyptians in the Western values of doubt and rejection of religious truth for scientific method, are undermined by his dry content as well as his conscious decision to publish in periodicals that his father, who represents average Egyptians, does not read.

The novel's critical portrait of Kamal evokes such Western-oriented intellectuals as Mahfouz's mentor Salama Musa (1887-1958). Musa, whom Mahfouz describes as an independent thinker far ahead of his times, was plagued by self-contradictions, leading him to call for publishing in colloquial Egyptian, while writing in Standard Arabic himself. More notably, his extreme leaning towards Europe, led him to argue for writing Arabic using Latin script. Yet, Musa was instrumental in founding a company that sold only Egyptian goods, and encouraged Egyptians to buy only Egyptian-made products. Mahfouz ascribes this contradiction to the time itself (Mahfouz, *Asatidhati* 225-48) and while Kamal shares Musa's strong inclination towards the West, he does not share his ability to act independently within national interests. To evoke Abdul JanMohamed, Mahfouz uses Kamal to condemn the national intellectual's surrender to the manicheanism of colonialist ideology which pathologizes indigenous culture and valorizes colonialist culture. As a result, the Other cannot escape the double-bind of catalepsy and petrification. That is, opting to merge indigenous culture with Western tradition, the intellectual is pronounced to be an empty receptacle – a mimic; in choosing to cling to tradition, he/she is accused of recalcitrance (JanMohamed).

Kamal wavers between admitting and refusing to accept his failed responsibility as an intellectual. Half aware of his failure he chooses inaction, continuing a life of mimicry rather than investigating the source of his misery. This endless waiting recalls Western assignments of non-European countries to “the waiting room” of history. As Riyad Qaldas, his Coptic friend,

tells him, “you read and understand. You’re a historian with no history. I hope you observe the day you emerge from this condition as your true birthday” (138). Riyad’s poignant observation points to Kamal’s copying phase as an eternal gestation period that places him outside history, which Riyad understands as a confluence of multiple, competing, and alternate fictions. Riyad urges Kamal to become an active participant in the making of history. While he, at times, seems to be aware of his predicament, as for example in his first meeting with Riyad when Kamal describes himself as “a tourist in a museum where nothing belongs to me. I’m merely a historian. I don’t know where I stand” (94), he strips himself of agency and, with it, participation in history. By submitting to the delusion of the objectivity and universality of Enlightenment thinking, he remains a scribe who faithfully, yet selectively, records the history that Europeans make.

Kamal’s struggle for intellectual independence is one that Mahfouz himself underwent. In a conversation taking place in 1978 Mahfouz outlines his development from the adopt into the adept phase, admitting that he only achieved intellectual independence in the last 15 years. He adds that he has recently started creating his own model. Prior to that, he explains, he and other writers assumed that the proper way to write a novel was to produce a European novel. Therefore, he elaborates, for third world writers, literary success meant negating oneself, as a result of which there was a proper novel and an incorrect one. Mahfouz also declares that any mimicking, even of old traditional indigenous forms, is a form of imprisonment (Ghitani 174-75) – precisely the state in which Kamal exists. Unlike him, however, his nephews struggle to make their voice heard.

Ahmad and Abd al-Muni’ represent two directions that existed in Egyptian society at

the time: Islamism and Marxism (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit* 23).⁶⁶ On the one hand, the Society of the Muslim Brothers, founded in 1928, aimed to counter Orientalist discourse and emulate European advancement through the utilization of Islam as an indigenous reformatory force. Many adherents of the Society believed that proper understanding and application of the teachings of Islam would arm Egypt with the tools needed to create a native modernity that reconciled the country's historical Islamic character with the 20th century. According to Kamal Helbawy, previous Muslim Brother leader, its founder, Hassan al-Banna, and his supporters resented the progressive westernization of Egypt in social and moral values but not in administration, science or technology. The Muslim Brothers encouraged Egyptians to ask for their rights in the workplace, contest the British occupation and resist what the group saw as the "de-islamisation" of Egypt.⁶⁷ On the other hand, stood Marxism, the early signs of which appeared in Egypt between the late 19th century and 1919. In his study, Rif'at Sa'id charts the history of the communist movement in Egypt across two phases: the first, dating from 1920-1928 and dominated by foreigners, critiqued capitalism for its tendency to generate social injustice. Placing the second movement from 1930 to 1950, Sa'id explains that while the British tolerated leftist communist movements populated by foreigners allowing them to form organizations, they suppressed Egyptian communism which mainly concerned itself with labor issues.⁶⁸

While Mahfouz acknowledges the importance of a deep understanding of Islam and its ethics, his mistrust of a nationalism that mobilizes religious discourse stems from an awareness of the difference between the religious teachings of a given faith and individual interpretations of

⁶⁶ Contemporary British scholar Michael Diboll notes that the British cultivated Islamist and Pan-Arabist movements to counterbalance the anti-British sentiments of the *Wafd* party (Diboll).

⁶⁷ For a brief history of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt see Helbawy. For a short history of various Islamist movements in Egypt see Meijer.

⁶⁸ See Ismael and Sa'id for the history of communism and socialism in Egypt.

that faith – a view which he delivers through Riyad Qaldas, Kamal’s Coptic friend, who remarks “ ‘the problem is that we interact with Muslims, not with Islam’ ” (139). Mahfouz’s advocacy of democracy and multiple political parties as guarantors of a healthy political life derives from his conviction that Islam is compatible with democracy (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Din*). He asserts that by embracing values and principles found in all religions a particular government follows religion even as it claims the opposite (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Tadayyun*).

Mahfouz’s rejection of religious nationalism is specifically demonstrated in his portrayal of Abd al-Muni’*m* whom the novel distances through irony as, for example, when the narrator describes him as coming into a room preceded by his beard; or in his own mother’s classist declaration that the beard makes him look like the couscous street vendor; or when his colleagues ask if they stone their dissenters. On various other occasions Abd al-Muni’*m* and his friends are referred to as fanatics, sometimes by the former’s parents or by other family members. Although Abd al-Muni’*m* is supposed to serve as a testament to the danger of using religious discourse as a foundation for nationalism, Mahfouz’s presentation of him is puzzling since the latter’s actions do not reflect fanaticism. Apart from the path he chooses, his actions do not differ much from those of his brother. When we first meet him in *Sugar Street*, he is enjoying clandestine meetings with the neighbors’ daughter. Later, he regrets his immorality deciding to get married while still a university student and leaving the choice of bride to his mother. He graduates from college, secures a government job and, at the end of the novel, both he and his brother hold meetings with their respective supporters in their apartments.

Sugar Street does not convey a clear picture of Abd al-Muni’*m*’s understanding and application of religion and in so doing comes close to an orientalist presentation of religion and modernity as antagonistic. Israeli scholar Sasson Somekh seems to agree, pointing to Abd al-

Muni'm's and Ahmad's lack of depth, stating that they become representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood and Communism rather than emerging as individuals (122-23). As readers, we are expected to assume that because of his connection with the Muslim Brotherhood, Abd al-Muni'm is dangerous. This could be the result of Mahfouz's prejudice against the group or his staunch loyalty to the *Wafd* Party. In a collection of interviews published in 1990 Mahfouz admits that he never understood the Muslim Brothers' message viewing them as political power that used religion to compete with the *Wafd*. He adds that, siding with the latter against the Muslim Brothers, he has written that any war against the *Wafd* before achieving nationalist goals weakens the cause (Mahfouz, *I'tirafat* 63-4). Moreover, the Muslim Brothers' militancy did not endear them to the nation.

One might say, however, that in demonizing Abd al-Muni'm the novel condemns a group that purports to institute the rule of religion. Earlier Kamal and Riyad Qaldas recognize fanaticism as a shared human condition to which Riyad adds " 'your fanatics consider us cursed infidels. Our fanatics consider you infidel usurpers. They call themselves descendants of the Kings of ancient Egypt and people who were able to preserve their religion by paying the poll tax levied on non-Muslims' " (136). Kamal's editor, acting as Abd al-Muni'm's antithesis, is an Islamic scholar who publishes alternative viewpoints, including Kamal's atheist voice. Through the editor the novel shows not only that religion and modernity can harmoniously co-exist but that however hard one tries, religious identification remains an essential component of one's identity, whether one is Muslim or Christian. Riyad Qaldas expresses this view:

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. If I analyzed this feeling, I might entertain some reservations about it. But not so fast ... isn't it cowardly to ignore my people? There's one thing that can help me overcome this quandary, and that is to devote myself to the kind of sincere Egyptian patriotism envisaged by Sa'd Zaghlul. Al-Nahhas is a Muslim by way of religion, but he's also a

nationalist in every sense of the word. He makes us think of ourselves as Egyptians, whether we are Muslims or Copts. 135-36

Riyad's words, addressed to Kamal, anticipate Chakrabarty as they sum up Mahfouz's vision of an inclusive Egyptian nationalism. Chakrabarty points to the paradoxes in our contemporary societies by noting how certain contemporary customs derive from medieval or later religious traditions. He rightfully remarks that identification as secular involves thinking about religion (97-113). Both Riyad and Kamal's editor validate rather than critique Abd al-Muni'm since they demonstrate that one can participate in the "modern" while retaining different levels of religious or other identification. With a degree in law and a government job, Abd al-Muni'm does just that and for this reason his portrayal in the novel remains perplexing.

Riyad's and the author's endorsement of the *Wafd* as the nationalist party *par excellence* for transcendence of religious identification to meet Egyptians on a human ground foreshadows Ahmad's epiphany towards the end of the novel. Riyad enthusiastically tells Kamal

All of us Copts are Wafdists. That's because the Wafd Party represents true nationalism. It's not a religious, Turkish-oriented bunch like the National Party. The Wafd is a populist party. It will make Egypt a nation that provides freedom for all Egyptians, without regard to ethnic origin or religious affiliation. The enemies of the people know this. That's why the Copts were targeted for barefaced oppression throughout the Sidqi era. Now we'll be experiencing that again. (135)

Rather than perceiving religion as an obstacle to political evolution, Riyad and, consequently Mahfouz, blame Egyptians for their own disempowerment by painting a picture of a complex struggle between a King whose dictatorial tendencies are supported by corrupt Egyptian officials such as Sidqi Pasha who promoted British interests; politicians, such as al-Nuqrashi, who have deserted the nationalist side to co-operate with the King and/ or the British; patriotic politicians of integrity such as, the Copt Makram Ubayd; and the Egyptian masses.⁶⁹ Speaking through

⁶⁹ For a comprehensive history of events from 1937-1944 see Rafi, *Fi A'qab*, Vol. 2, 174-221 and Vol. 3, 44-138.

Riyad, Mahfouz emphasizes inclusive ideologies as the first step towards the success of the nationalist struggle. This is the truth that Ahmad stumbles upon while in prison: “ ‘without regard to the differences of taste between us, our common human condition has united us in this dark and humid place: the Muslim Brother, the Communist, and drunkard, and the thief. Despite dissimilarities in our luck and success at looking after ourselves, we are all human beings’ ” (301).

Ahmad’s turn to Marxism is significant. Writing on communism in Egypt, El-Sa‘id points out that while the *Wafd* Party appealed to Egyptians outside the ruling elite, its “bourgeois interests in creating political, economic, and social conditions to benefit Egyptian entrepreneurs were antagonistic” to peasantry and laborers (Ismael 26). Similarly, Mahfouz scholar Ahmad M. ‘Atiyah calls 1919 a failed bourgeois revolution since it limited itself to political independence without addressing the socio-economic grievances of the peasants (57-9).⁷⁰ Mahfouz declares that in the later days of the *Wafd* he became a leftist *Wafdist* insisting on social justice and democracy, which fostered friendly feelings between him and the Left not because he was Marxist but because he espoused Marxism’s belief in social justice (Mahfouz, *I’tirafat* 63-4). Although he admired communism for its program of social justice, he preferred British socialism for its democracy and recognition of religion (Mahfouz, *Asatidhati* 229-30). Indeed, in many of his newspaper articles published between 1986 and 1994, Mahfouz expresses his faith in democracy as the solution for social ills, including religious tensions (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Tadayyun*).

Ahmad, who represents the novel’s vision of the national intellectual post-1919 and who

⁷⁰ For the revolution in *Palace Walk* and the various attitudes of the Abd al-Jawad bourgeois family towards the events, see ‘Atiyah, *Ma‘a Najib Mahfuz* 51-70.

is primarily guided by his wife, Sawsan, recasts the European paradigm which entraps his uncle, to actively create his individual *Bildungsroman*. His path at first resembles Kamal's, seen for example in his infatuation with his aristocratic classmate who rejects him. However, harboring none of his uncle's delusions about *al hubb al udhri*, he decides to forget a woman who is looking for a husband who can provide only material comforts.⁷¹ Through his work at a newspaper he meets Sawsan, who, four years his senior, becomes instrumental in his evolution as an independent thinker and who facilitates his ultimate transition from Fanon's adopt into the adapt phase. Together, they embody various segments of Egyptian society: the petit bourgeoisie represented in Ahmad as a merchant's grandson and in Sawsan who could not attend college but is a well-read journalist;⁷² the new educated Egyptian *effendiya* class seen again in Ahmad; and the proletariat which, as a laborer, Sawsan's father stands for. She is also the new woman: the antithesis of the aristocratic, colonized Aïda; the females in Ahmad's family who represent the traditional urban middle class; and Zubayda the entertainer, who represents the exploited women of Cairo's working class.⁷³ In contrast to Aïda, who depends on her husband's earnings and is forced to accept the position of second wife, Sawsan takes on an active role guiding Ahmad's development as a thinker.⁷⁴ Her marriage to Ahmad presents the working class as infusing the

⁷¹ In his critique of Mahfouz's characterization of the two brothers, Somekh notes that the novel does not depict Ahmad's state of mind both times when he is in love, after his classmate rejects him, or his development after, which makes him look as if he takes this rejection in stride (122-23).

⁷² Abu Awf argues that women in Mahfouz's fiction figure as a symbol for a victimized Egypt and adds that Mahfouz does not capture the crisis of the female intellectual activist (143-48).

⁷³ See Surur for a Marxist analysis of the disenfranchised Egyptian woman in the *Trilogy*, and more specifically in *Palace Walk*. Although Surur acknowledges the role of colonialism in disempowering Egyptian women, in offering a genealogy of the institution of marriage, from the beginning of time, through the age of feudalism and into the bourgeoisie, he universalizes the development of marriage as an oppressive system without attending to the historical specificities of the Egyptian context.

⁷⁴ In an article originally published in 1957 on *Palace Walk*, Egyptian Marxist scholar Mahmud A. 'Alim criticizes Mahfouz for offering only examples of passive women, therefore presenting a limited picture of women and the relationship between the sexes. 'Alim goes on to say that although the examples Mahfouz offers were generally characteristic of the time, the novel needed an example of a female activist as a counterpart for Fahmy, but adds that the realist style cannot capture all details (113).

petit bourgeoisie with new blood, new life, new ways thinking and being. To appropriate 'Atiyah, it regenerates him, liberating him of his bourgeois beliefs ('Atiyah, *Ma'a Najib Mahfuz* 41).

Speaking for Mahfouz, she demarcates the parameters of what Ahmad later describes as "perpetual revolution" by critiquing two types of intellectual: the passive, ivory-tower philosopher, and the uninvolved fiction writer. Anticipating Fanon's remarks on the artist's role in turbulent political times she captures Kamal and Riyad Qaldas' disconnect from their socio-political reality. She explains: "your uncle is like all those other bourgeois intellectuals who enjoy reading and pondering things. When considering the 'absolute' they may feel such distress that it hurts, but on the street they nonchalantly walk past people who really are suffering" (192). Her perceptive evaluation of Kamal's personality encapsulates his elitism, indecision and passivity as a national intellectual. It also recalls his fascination by all theories and failure to endorse one against the other. Equally critiquing Riyad Qaldas she concludes that his stories "are not what we need either. They are descriptive analyses of reality but nothing more. They provide no guidance or direction" (192).⁷⁵ What Sawsan calls for is a national program in which art is functional and the artist is involved. As she puts it, "our society is in deep pain. So first and foremost we must stop this pain. After that we can play around and philosophize. Imagine a man musing happily about abstruse points of philosophy while his life's blood drains away. What would you say of a man like that?" (192).

Sawsan's meditations on the value of philosophy and literature to a society in pain echoes Mahfouz's own dilemma and his ultimate journey from the first to the second. Mahfouz, who graduated with a degree in philosophy and started a Master's degree in the same discipline,

⁷⁵ Incidentally, Shukri states that this critique is one that the Arab literary left leveled at Mahfouz (Shukri 73).

oscillated between the two fields debating their respective value. For years, he denied authorship of fictional pieces that he produced until eventually acknowledging the importance of literature in a society suffering from political stagnation (Badr 27-32). Mahfouz followed a similar trajectory as a writer of fiction, turning from historical narratives on ancient Egypt to contemporary realities. Writing three historical novels between 1939 and 1944, he had planned to write a series of novels on ancient Egypt but in the 1940s, which Roger Allen describes as tumultuous years for Egypt, he decided to use the realistic novel to discuss contemporary issues (Allen, *The Arabic Novel* 56).⁷⁶ Mahfouz declares that after his three historical novels, which also occurred during the pharaonic⁷⁷ nationalist phase in Egypt, he felt that he could no longer express himself through historical writing. Even though his three historical novels reflected his dissatisfaction with colonial forces, both British and Turkish, he wanted to address social issues directly (Ghitani 151-52).

Nicknamed the writer of the petit bourgeoisie, Mahfouz was earlier criticized for not portraying the problems of society in their various social classes, regions and the different influences over society and the forces impacting it (Anis 31-4). In a critical study on the author first published in 1955, before the publication of the *Trilogy*, Egyptian Marxist scholar Abdel Azim Anis describes Mahfouz's writing as reflecting the declining world of the petit bourgeoisie in a new age, but not the life of the Egyptian working class. He particularly faults Mahfouz for depicting the petit bourgeoisie seeking escape, focusing on personal problems instead of pondering the bigger, national problem. In the end, Anis argues, the novels' endings provide

⁷⁶ Badawi, however, argues that even when Mahfouz set his historical novels in ancient Egypt, he used it as a vessel for exploring contemporary Egyptian socio-political problems (Badawi, *Modern Arabic* 67). On Arab writers and political involvement from the late 19th century until the 1967 War, see Badawi "Commitment."

⁷⁷ Pharaonism was a popular trend among Egyptian intellectuals in the 1930s as a national identity that included all Egyptians through appealing to a common glorious ancient Egyptian past.

individual, rather than national, resolutions, ending tragically either through suicide, murder, tragic death, or scandal. In this sense, attention remains focused on the petit bourgeoisie to the exclusion of the working class (111-16). Anis attributes this “failure” to the then non-existent concept of a revolutionary protagonist in Egyptian fiction which leads to Mahfouz’s inability, like many bourgeois writers of the age, to see that it is the laborer who is going to be this future hero. For this reason, Anis adds, it is difficult to determine who the protagonist is in Mahfouz’s fiction (123-24). ‘Atiyah remarks that the radical hero in Mahfouz’s fiction belongs to the middle bourgeoisie, not the proletariat and notes the absence of laborers and peasants (‘Atiyah, *Ma‘a Najib Mahfuz* 37).⁷⁸

Egyptian scholars trace the evolution of this revolutionary protagonist in Mahfouz’s writing, distinguishing him from the rebel who stops at rejection – one is reminded of Kamal – without moving towards an ideological vision of a utopia. The former is a progressive character who believes in radical change for society and who possesses unflagging belief in hard work – one whose faith is a progressive rather than a reactionary one. In other words, this hero does not wish to return to the past, regardless of its merits – one thinks of Abd al-Muni’em – rather he/ she looks ahead to the future, believes in science instead of metaphysics, in society rather than heaven and in socialism rather than human competition. A revolutionary hero refuses to work for the government. He/ she works for the revolution and is the one who effects one revolution after another rather than the one who reaps the rewards of a revolution. Egyptian Marxist scholar Ghali Shukri and ‘Atiyah refer to Fahmy in *Palace Walk* as an example of the immature revolutionary who busies himself with independence from British, but does not concern himself

⁷⁸ Anis’ critique seems to accurately describe Mahfouz’s vision who professed “ ‘bias’ for the small bourgeoisie, which he viewed as *the candidate for the salvation of humanity*’ ” (Enany, *Naguib Mahfouz: His Life* 31-2, emphasis in original).

with the problems of the poor people who have fought for independence and have gained nothing in return. He represents the thought of the 1919 Revolution, which wanted to wrest power from the English and the elite (Shukri 228-30 and 'Atiyah, *Ma'a Najib Mahfuz* 38-43). In contrast, whereas a radical seeks total change without concern for personal interest, a rebel only seeks a partial change ('Atiyah, *Ma'a Najib Mahfuz* 25-49). Shukri calls this radical protagonist *al muntami*; the believer – or, for lack of a better term: the one who belongs – an individual who is dedicated to the issues of his society espousing a certain set of scientific, socialist principles. This starts with theoretical interest and develops into joining a party or a group devoted to these issues (Shukri 21-22),⁷⁹ the figure which Ahmad represents in *Sugar Street*.

Ahmad is this radical protagonist who, in Shukri's words, exemplifies mature leftist belonging. He transcends his bourgeois identity, concerning himself with the rights of the masses, refusing to settle for a secure government post, as his brother does, and preferring to work for no pay. Although Shukri and 'Atiyah agree that Ahmad is a radical hero, the latter comments on Ahmad's belonging to the middle bourgeoisie, his work for free and his reliance on his father's money for survival ('Atiyah, *Ma'a Najib Mahfuz* 37). In the same vein, Anis criticizes Mahfouz for his shallow understanding of Marxism stating that his communist characters possess an idealistic view of Communism as an ideology of social justice, but do not reflect an understanding of the real substance of Communism.⁸⁰ For Mahfouz communism entails only a view of social justice not a nationalist stance regarding the 1936 Treaty and the oppressive 1930 Constitution as if the nationalist cause can be separated from the social struggle

⁷⁹ On *al muntami* between faith and socialism in Naguib Mahfouz's work, see Shukri 206-94.

⁸⁰ Abu Awf seems to agree with Anis' analysis of Mahfouz's communist characters, adding that their experience, which mixes Fabian socialism with Marxist thought is unrelated to the experience of leftist activists. See Abu Awf 111-22 on the leftist intellectual in Mahfouz.

in a colonized country like Egypt and when colonialism is the first obstacle towards social justice (Anis 118-19).

Still, in its search for an appropriate model, the *Trilogy* explores various modes of belonging. As Shukri notes, *Palace Walk* records belonging to the National Party⁸¹ and the beginnings of the *Wafd*, *Palace of Desire* records the conflict between belonging to the *Wafd* and leftist belonging, while *Sugar Street* promotes belonging to the left. At end of *Sugar Street* Mahfouz sees hope in the positive left which cares about the social aspect as well (Shukri 228-30). It is equally important to remember that Mahfouz himself has declared that the social justice of Marxism is what appealed to him, that he prefers socialism and, as mentioned above, that he set out to write the *Trilogy* to explore socialism as a solution. More importantly, to hold the author to an established understanding of Marxism is to reinforce an inflexible European paradigm without allowing for a culturally-specific vision. Ahmad's utilization of Marxism attempts to fashion a vision that suits Egyptian society. At the end, he is about to transition from his adapt into his adept phase. He reaches a crossroads when facing common Egyptians in prison,

Clad in his overcoat, he had often written about "the people" in his beautiful study. Here they were – cursing or snoring in their sleep. For a few seconds by the light of the torch he had seen their wretched sullen faces, including that of the man who was scratching his head and armpits. At this very moment his lice might be advancing resolutely toward Ahmad and his brother.

"You are devoting your life to people like this," he told himself. "Why should the thought of contact with them worry you? The person on whom mankind's hopes for salvation are pinned should stop snoring and wake to his historic role. Let him rear up and rescue the entire world." 301.

Faced with the choice of remaining a detached intellectual, like his uncle, or becoming an

⁸¹ The National Party was established in the 19th century. It included Ahmed Urabi the leader of the 1881-1882 Revolution and supported Egypt's belonging to the Ottoman Empire.

engaged intellectual, Ahmad chooses engagement. He overcomes class biases that pathologize the working classes, looking upon them as a source of contagion. Despite the vestige of romanticism in his perception of Egypt's future as contingent upon one person's awakening from a deep slumber to fulfill his historic role and, unlike his irresolute uncle, Ahmad melds European philosophy, that is the Marxist dialectic of class struggle, and Egyptian nationalism, embracing solidarity with his brothers and, by implication, openness to their experiential knowledge as necessary supplements to Western history making.

This is the point where the Egyptian *Bildungsheld* achieves epiphany in a native *Bildungsroman*, emerging from the adopt to the adept phase. Ahmad is arguably discarding one European model – that of Enlightenment skepticism and capitalism – for another European model by adopting Marxism. Yet, what distinguishes this modernity from the Western modern is its malleability. His program of action, as quoted by Kamal, names perpetual revolution, *not* Marxism or another ideology as the solution: “ ‘the duty common to all human beings is perpetual revolution, and that is nothing other than an unceasing effort to further the will of life represented by its progress toward the ideal’ ” (306) Ahmad defines perpetual revolution as an obligation to “ ‘revolt against ideals I believe to be false, since recoiling from this rebellion would be a form of treason’ ” (306). Ahmad's manifesto identifies constant change as the constant paradigm and, by implication, the philosophy as the variable. Therefore, Marxism, for Ahmad, is a point of departure in critical practices that aim to understand and remake the exploitative world in which we live. He steps into adulthood, modernity and Being not by adopting European Enlightenment values, but by using appropriate values from that paradigm to create an individual Egyptian modernity. He adapts where Kamal adopts. It is important to note here that both Ahmad and Abd al-Muni'm agree on this theory although they differ on the

application.

Conclusion

In 1994, Mahfouz called for a flexible view of identity where intellectual independence and free thinking play a major role in shaping Egyptian national identity and where certain native or foreign elements are embraced or rejected based on their utility rather than on their source (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Taharrur* 187-88). Anticipating Chakrabarty's metaphor of the waiting room of history, Mahfouz had, a year earlier, urged third world countries to stop waiting, embrace their role, and rely on those who possess knowledge and expertise, naming religion, science and hard work as necessary for progress (Mahfouz, *Hawla Al-Taharrur* 99-100). This is precisely what *Sugar Street* suggests in its rejection of the European *Bildungsroman* and of anachronistic native traditions. While the novel reveals the former to be an unfit vehicle for Egyptian self-articulation, since development defined along Western terms entails self-marginalization, it declares that the latter precludes participation in a contemporary socio-political life.

In re-writing the *Bildungsroman* along Egyptian lines Mahfouz defines revolution as an intellectual, not an armed, struggle. It is one that demands constant redefinition, flexibility towards the principles adopted and participation by everyone. As the current situation in Egypt, and many other countries, demonstrates a sound political life necessitates a constant push and pull between the ruler and the governed. Yet the discrepancy between how the West views the Arab Spring and how the countries involved view it, points to a still inflexible understanding of ideas such as democracy and legitimacy. Egyptians themselves see themselves as simultaneously occupying and having exited the waiting room.

Following the January 2011, Revolution Egyptians continued to demonstrate in *Tahrir Square* and other places, elected a president from the Muslim Brotherhood, and one year later, ousted him by popular demand. Amid national and international discussions of the legitimacy of this move, American depictions of the event as a military coup, and Egyptian anger at meddling in their affairs, Egypt's intellectuals have decided that an elected president acquires legitimacy, not from election boxes, but from the people. Since, a year after his election, the president has not proven his competency to the people, they have a right to remove him from office. This decision demonstrates a flexible understanding of democracy and legitimacy and once again invites a demystification of these terms in the manner of Chakrabarty. For, who is to say whether a state has finally arrived to that temporal state of "modernity" when strongholds of democracy, such as the United States, witness an ongoing struggle over rights and privileges between the people and the state?

Chapter Three: This Egyptian Nationalism:

The Urabi Revolution in John Wilcox's *The Guns of El Kebir*

Introduction

Self-admittedly nostalgic for Empire, John Wilcox recalls his pride as a child at seeing the pink spots signifying British dominions on a world map. His sense of British uniqueness extends to include the country's post-imperial history seen in its debatably voluntary relinquishment of colonies and support of South Africa's struggle against apartheid (Wilcox, Interview). At the same time, in his autobiography, he enthusiastically records his father's break with the Conservative party shortly before World War II, upon which the elder Wilcox adopted left-wing views and read communist newspapers, which the nine-year-old author devoured (Wilcox, *Bombs* 13). In short, this son of a working-class family views Empire as an exploitative project yet describes imperial domination as a system that is characteristic of the nineteenth century, and one which *did* do a measure of good in certain parts of the world.

Wilcox's ambivalence towards Britain's imperial past colors his views of the 1881-1882 Urabi Revolution in Egypt, leading him to argue that, Britain's egotistic goals notwithstanding, nineteenth-century Egyptians were poor and uneducated, and Urabi had to be reprimanded for endangering the Suez Canal (Wilcox, Interview). The nostalgia inspiring the author's divided view of the Revolution permeates *The Guns of El Kebir* (2007), which follows Simon Fonthill, an unconventional former British military officer entrusted with planning Britain's armed advent into Egypt. Simon's consistent heroism in the face of danger foregrounds Egypt as an inhospitable land waiting to be rescued from oligarchic rule.

This chapter analyzes John Wilcox's narration of the 1881-1882 Urabi Revolution and the subsequent British occupation of Egypt in *The Guns of El Kebir* (*Guns*). Reading *Guns* as a

work that merges the imperial romance with the romance of the archive, and utilizing concepts from narratology, such as focalization, prolepsis, and manipulation of narrative speed, I argue that the plot structure depicts the Urabi Revolution as an anarchic movement. Although the novel occasionally acknowledges Urabi and his supporters as nationalists, most of the time it portrays them as imposters motivated by personal gain. In this respect, it presents the British occupation as introducing stability to a country torn by irrational-rebels-turned-dictators and portrays the British occupation as inevitable. In so doing, the novel confirms the *Bildungsroman* as it makes an unconventional hero and anti-imperialist heroine admit to the wisdom of the social order by acknowledging the necessity of the occupation. *Guns* depicts Empire as a well-structured system of government that, despite its faults, functions efficiently and deserves preservation against threats such as Urabi. The novel suggests British domination as the only form under which good government, so defined, can happen. After providing a brief review of the history of the Urabi Revolution and a biography of Wilcox, this chapter reads Jenkins' trial as a prologue anticipating Simon's and Alice's education, discussed in the following two sections, and their embrace of Empire.

The Urabi Revolution in History

The Urabi Revolution comprised a complicated set of events, whose causes and consequences have remained widely contested by historians. What is clear is the economic context: When French, British, and other powers deposed Egypt's ruler, Khedive⁸² Ismail, in 1879, he had indebted Egypt by 90 million pounds (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 1). The country had gone bankrupt in April 1876 and an International Commission for Public Debt was formed,

⁸² Khedive is a Turkish title meaning Viceroy.

which included British, French, and other European members, with two presiding European Controllers General.⁸³ Under this system, French and British observers in Egypt, who were entitled to attend and participate in all Cabinet meetings as counselors (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 49), had more power and higher salaries than ministers. European nationals proliferated in the Egyptian civil service, earning thousands of pounds and paying no taxes at a time when Egyptian employees' already diminutive salaries were in arrears. For example, Captain Evelyn Baring, later Lord Cromer and British High Consul in Egypt from 1883-1907, earned 3000 Pounds Sterling a year when he was first appointed to the Commission of Egypt's Public Debt (Mansfield 14, 27). By 1881 Britain controlled 70% of Egyptian trade (Pakenham 130) and half of Egypt's income was dedicated to the payment of the debt, which was mostly collected from impoverished Egyptian peasants (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 82).

The Urabi Revolution comprised two demonstrations, occurring in February and September of 1881 during the reign of Khedive Tawfiq. It started as a protest against the Circassian Minister of War, Uthman Rifky, who viewed Egyptian officers with contempt and favored Turco-Circassian and Albanian officers. Under him, inefficient Turco-Circassian officers were promoted ahead of more deserving Egyptians, and Egyptian officers were denied the right to a fair trial and demoted or banished to the Sudan based on false charges. Khedive Said, predecessor of the deposed Ismail, had started giving Egyptians some positions in the military, which had heretofore been dominated by Turco-Circassians. During his reign, Ahmed Urabi, who later led the revolution, rose to Colonel quickly. Under Ismail, however, favoritism for Turco-Circassians returned and Urabi was tried and imprisoned. Although he was released and reinstated, he remained in the same cadre for nineteen years while Turco-Circassian subordinates

⁸³ For details on the changes to the committee see Wesseling 45-46. See also Cromer.

were promoted above him (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 71-5). The early days of Khedive Tawfiq (r. 1879-1892) boded a continuation of the status quo.

The first event of the revolution, the Qasr el Nil demonstration, was a reaction to Rifky's decision in January 1881 to transfer and dismiss two Egyptian officers and replace them with Circassians. The affected officers and others met with Urabi and elected him their leader, after which he petitioned the Prime Minister, Riyadh Pasha⁸⁴ demanding that Rifky be relieved of his duties as Minister of War. The Prime Minister promised to consider the matter; instead, the Cabinet instructed Rifky to arrest the officers and court-martial them. Rather than inform the officers of their arrest, he summoned them to the Cabinet headquarters in Qasr el Nil Palace on February 1, 1881 under the pretense of discussing the wedding arrangements of the Khedive's sister. Since this was unusual, other military commanders followed Urabi and his companions from afar.

Upon arrival, Urabi and the other officers found their court martial already in session, were divested of their swords, and sent to prison. Urabi's military supporters surrounded Qasr el Nil commanding the rest of the officers to attack the Cabinet headquarters. After deliberation, the Khedive pardoned the prisoners, dismissed Rifky, who had escaped through a window, and appointed Mahmoud Pasha Sami el Baroudi, in his place (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 97-108). Following this event, Urabi and his supporters submitted a petition requesting reforms in the military, which both the Ministry of War and the Cabinet approved. Khedive Tawfiq agreed to these demands, promising to institute the constitution drafted under his father and predecessor, Khedive Ismail,

⁸⁴ Pasha was an honorary title bestowed upon the aristocracy and members of the native elite who provided valuable services to the state.

and whose deposition prevented its approval.⁸⁵ According to Abdel Rahman el Rafi, a twentieth-century Egyptian historian, the government's laxity in carrying out these reforms led to the Abdin demonstrations, the second major incident in the Urabi Revolution (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 135).

Occurring in September 1881, the Abdin demonstrations were caused, among other things, by the Khedive's decision to remove el Baroudi from the Ministry of War and appoint his own in-law, Dawud Pasha Yakan, who banned public and private meetings among the threatened arrest if two or more officers were found together, appointed spies and occasionally paid surprise visits to regiment headquarters to ensure the execution of his orders (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 128-30).⁸⁷ Egyptians from various parts of Egypt belonging to all strata of society – religious scholars, the elite, village leaders, and Arab Sheikhs – who recognized the urgency of reform signed documents delegating Urabi to represent the nation. With their support, Urabi demanded a parliament and an end to the government led by Riyadh, who was inclined towards absolute rule and supported the European powers (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 134-35 and 46-7). Through the Minister of War, Urabi notified Khedive Tawfiq of the officers' intention to demonstrate at the Abdin Palace parade grounds. To assure foreign nationals of their safety Urabi wrote a note to that effect to foreign consuls, explaining that the matter only concerned Egypt's domestic affairs (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 135-37).

On September 9, 1881 Urabi and all Cairo regiment leaders met at Abdin parade grounds in order to present their demands to the Khedive. These were: the dissolution of Riyadh Pasha's

⁸⁵ Twentieth-century Egyptian nationalist historian Abdel Rahman al Rafi attributes the Powers' deposition of Ismail to their fear of the threat to their interests that an approved constitution and a flourishing Egyptian democracy might pose Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 31-3.

⁸⁶ This term referred to Urabi's supporters in the army (Rafi *al-Thawrah* 121).

⁸⁷ For accounts of unrest in the military during the period between the Qasr el Nil and the Abdin incidents, see Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 121-28.

cabinet, the establishment of a parliament, and an increase in the number of military personnel – in disagreement with a *firman* (edict) fixing the size of the army at 18,000, the actual size fell 6000 short of that figure. Khedive Tawfiq failed to dissuade the demonstrators, and even his personal guards left him to join the protesting army. The demonstration, which included around 4000 officers with their arms and artillery, was a huge event, with the public watching from the outskirts of Abdin square and from neighboring houses. The events ended with the appointment of Sherif Pasha, a man of integrity, as Prime Minister (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 137-50).⁸⁸

Historians have offered competing narratives of the 1881 events with imperialists discounting their legitimacy and dissenters seeing in them a genuine nationalist movement. In a description recalling the *One Thousand and One Nights*, Alfred Milner, a nineteenth-century British statesman and colonial administrator, declares that Urabi and his supporters “could evoke genii, yet could not control them when evoked” (17). Nineteenth-century journalist, historian, and British diplomat, Valentine Chirol, who refers to the Urabi Revolution as “the old evil days before the Occupation” (47), compares the “abject misery of the pre-occupation days to the abounding prosperity of the present time” (68,70). Other imperialist historians, such as twentieth-century Algerian-French orientalist, Jacques Berque, portray the revolution as a frenzied movement initiated by peasants. Asserting that little of it was caused by “rational thought or responsibility,” Berque stresses the advent of order and reason as British troops entered Egypt. He speaks of Egyptians waiting for British reforms in the Delta and of apathetic Muslims and Copts in Upper Egypt allying themselves with the British (121-23). In contrast, J. Seymour Keay, a nineteenth-century Scottish Member of Parliament and banker, who after managing banks in India resigned to support native capitalism, and whose sympathy to Indians

⁸⁸ See Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 97-142 for a detailed account of the two phases of the Urabi Revolution.

threatened Anglo-Indian interests, calls the Urabi Revolution a “National movement.” Denying the existence of prosperity under British rule and pointing to the dire conditions under which Egyptian peasants continued to toil, Keay asserts that such positive accounts of life under the occupation were produced by the British government for British consumption. He argues that Britain misrepresented the Urabi Revolution after realizing that it aimed at restricting foreign control of Egyptian affairs, adding that Britain depicted Urabi as a mutineer whereas, in actuality, he was a political leader who represented the people (54).

Wilfred Scawen Blunt, a nineteenth-century English poet and an anti-imperialist whose sympathy to Urabi’s cause led the British government to restrict his entry into Egypt for three years after the occupation (Mansfield 21-2), records the general happiness of Egyptians, Turks and Europeans. He remembers the revolution as the time when all Cairo residents, members of all national parties, Muslims, Christians and Jews united. Egyptians from all classes rejoiced at the advent of a new era of freedoms. Reformers acquired an air of optimism. Europeans close to the nationalist struggle were pleased, and foreigners and consuls admitted that the new system was better. In Blunt’s account, even reactionary Turks celebrated what they saw as a conquest over Europe (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 155-57).⁸⁹ In Rafi’s view, although the revolution originated in the military, it gained the support of Egyptians – civilians and military officers alike – who saw in Urabi’s demands their own concerns about increasing European control of the country’s political and economic life, unjust treatment of Egyptian officers, favoritism to Turco-Circassian officers, and the absence of a constitution (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 131-34).⁹⁰ Rafi records the

⁸⁹ See Blunt for his account of the Urabi Revolution, the occupation of Egypt and his attempt all along to negotiate with the British government on behalf of Egypt.

⁹⁰ For a full account of the political, economic, and social reasons behind the Urabi Revolution, see (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 75-87).

happiness of Egyptians, leading total strangers to hug on the street in celebration of a new golden era (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 156). Twentieth-century German historian, Alexander Schölch, while hesitating to call the events a revolution because of the absence of a complete and sudden break with tradition, refuses to see them as a movement because the term is equally limiting. Schölch sees the Urabi demonstrations as rooted more in social and economic causes than in political ones (5-6). Contemporary American historian Juan Cole, however, views the events as a social rather than a political revolution (12).

While the British government did not approve of the turn events had taken after the demonstrations, it was the Alexandria massacre of June 11, 1882 that precipitated, or rather facilitated, Britain's advent into Egypt. The massacre, an event which the novel vividly details, broke out after a misunderstanding between an Egyptian donkey-boy and a Maltese national. When the Maltese stabbed the Egyptian, Egyptians sided with the latter and a fight ensued, upon which Europeans started firing with guns and rifles from upper windows of houses (Chamberlain 14). A contemporary report in *The Daily Telegraph* states that in an "indiscriminate struggle" many Europeans were killed by Maltese and Greek bullets. Trying to stop the fight the British Consul in Alexandria was attacked and his servants injured. The Italian and Greek consuls also sustained some injuries (5). British Vice-Consul Calvert declares first that about 50 Europeans were killed in the events in contrast to only three "Arabs"⁹¹ before adding that the number of Arabs killed was probably hidden so as not to incite the public's anger (qtd. in Malet 402-31).

Like the Urabi demonstrations, various interpretations of this event exist, some investing it with religious significance while others claiming it to have been planned by Urabi. Michael

⁹¹ Many writers on Egypt refer to Egyptians as Arab at a time when Egyptians did not identify this way. The idea of Egyptians as part of a collective Arab identity started gaining ground in Egypt after the 1930s. See Gershoni "Imagining."

Barthorp, a contemporary British military historian, presents the massacre in religious terms describing it as a riot between Muslims and Christians (32). Similarly, Edward Malet, British Consul-General of Egypt at the time, attributes the incident to “ ‘the preaching in the mosques of fanatical doctrines against the Christians. It was clear that any spark would light an already laid train.’ ” Malet goes on to say that despite the absence of evidence that Urabi had instigated the events, none is needed: “ ‘in this way Arabi and his party prepared the massacre. In order to condemn them it is not necessary to prove that special orders were given on any special occasion’ ” (431-32). Twentieth-century scholar, M. E. Chamberlain, however, refutes the claims that the massacre was executed at Urabi’s command.⁹² Contemporary Egyptian historian, Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, refers to Sir Charles Wilson, an English reporter who attended Urabi’s trial, who states that almost all evidence inculcating the Urabists came from Turkish and Syrian government employees. In reality, Urabi was not connected to the Alexandria riots nor was there evidence that the Urabists had planned the massacres of Europeans (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 31).

Britain used this incident as a pretext to occupy Egypt in order to restore stability and, in July 1882, the bombardment of Alexandria began. On September 13, 1882 the British won the decisive battle of Tal el Kebir which lasted about 40 minutes (Long 1) and where ten thousand Egyptian troops were killed in contrast to only 57 British troops.⁹³ The British occupation of Egypt lasted 72 years. In his history, Rafi blames both the Khedive and the Urabists for the occupation, citing the Khedive’s support of the British army after the bombardment of Alexandria, and the Urabists’ negotiations with the British and their preference for life over self-

⁹² See Chamberlain for the conflicting accounts of the Alexandria Massacre.

⁹³ Dibbol 159. Barthorp on the other hand mentions only 2000 (see Barthorp 69), a figure that is consistent with Rafi who estimates Egyptian losses at 1500 to 2000 dead. Rafi quotes Wilfrid Scawen Blunt whose *Secret History of the English Occupation of Egypt* lists 10,000 dead and wounded based on a communication from Urabi’s accompanying servant. Blunt, however, adds that he doubts the reliability of this figure (qtd in Rafi 491).

sacrifice, heroism, and nationalist duty after their shameful performance at Tal el Kebir (Rafi. “Preface” 14-15). Al-Sayyid-Marsot, however, believes that Urabi, as Minister of War, defended Egypt against foreign intervention and names Khedive Tawfiq as the real traitor since he supported a Cabinet decision to resist the British then, to protect his throne, asked the British to bombard Alexandria and occupy Egypt. She adds that Tawfiq “was content to agree with [Lord] Dufferin [British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte] that the Egyptians were not yet ready for self-government, and to defer to his judgment on many points”. In his account, Cromer records that the Urabi Revolution ultimately failed because of British interference (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 31-32).

John Wilcox: A Biography

John Wilcox was born in Birmingham, England in 1931. He started his career as a subs’ boy⁹⁴ for the *Birmingham Despatch* before working as a reporter for the daily newspaper *The Birmingham Gazette* and eventually winning the “Young Journalist of the Year” award (Wilcox, *Bombs* 80, 71). He later became Head of Public Relations at the Rootes Group, one of England’s largest automakers, which he joined in the mid-1950s, and in 1963 took a position as a Public Relations Manager with the International Wool Secretariat. In his late forties, Wilcox left the company to start his own business as a marketing consultant in textiles. Then he partnered with the Lonsdale Advertising Group, which he describes as “one of the oldest and best established in London.” During this time he also served as non-executive chairman of Wilcox, Brown and Madden, a textile-based marketing consultancy started by his former colleagues in the International Wool Secretariat. In the mid-nineties he sold the company, moved to South West

⁹⁴ Wilcox explains that subs’ boys ran errands for the subs, such as bringing them their tea and lunch.

Wiltshire and started writing fiction (Wilcox, *Bombs* 91-8). Since 2004 he has published thirteen books including twelve novels, sometimes almost publishing a novel each year, an autobiography, and a short story. He has also written two non-fiction books.

Wilcox's family background is the main inspiration behind his novels. His father came from a late-Victorian working-class family, whose seven sons, Wilcox's father and all his six brothers, fought in World War I. All seven brothers survived the war and three of Wilcox's uncles earned medals. One uncle received the Victoria Cross,⁹⁵ another the Military Medal, and a third uncle won the Distinguished Service Medal. His uncles' honorable performance in World War I prompted him to question the nature of courage and his ability to be "as venerable as ... [his] Victorian uncles (Wilcox, Personal website)."

Wilcox's uncles, however, were not the sole source of his fascination with the Victorians. Nor was his reading limited to nineteenth-century imperialist writers. While his reading spectrum includes contemporary writers of postcolonial fiction, such as A. S. Byatt and Salman Rushdie, whom he compares to great Victorian writers (Wilcox, Interview), he confesses that he was "tainted a bit by Empire," explaining that he read H. Rider Haggard and Robert Louis Stevenson and was strongly influenced by them. He adds that he avidly read G. A. Henty, a prolific nineteenth-century writer of children's books and an imperialist. Not only is Wilcox influenced by imperialist fiction, but his work has been compared to imperialist works. For example, *The Sunday Express* has compared his novels to the Victorian boys' magazine *Boys Own* while *The Northern Echo* has described Simon Fonthill, the protagonist who appears in several of Wilcox's

⁹⁵ For the especially strong image of uncle Alf, the uncle who won the Victoria Cross, see John Wilcox. *Bombs* 2-11.

novels, as “a hero to match Sharpe or Hornblower.”⁹⁶ The *Good Book Guide* describes one of Wilcox’s novels as “a swashbuckling tale, slashed through with adventure, bravery, and the utmost danger” and finally *The Historical Novels Review* describes another of his novels as “a thrilling tale of courage and fortitude” (Wilcox, *Guns* Inside jacket). Identifying his love of history as the reason behind writing historical novels, Wilcox explains that the nineteenth century’s wealth of material for adventure narrative makes it an appropriate time setting since during the period from 1850 to 1914 the British army was “always in action in some far-flung area.” Commenting on the imperial content of his novels, he concludes that the era dictates it (Wilcox, Interview).

Reflecting on the pleasures, or lack thereof, brought about by his choice of the popular adventure narrative, Wilcox regrets the absence of serious reviews of his work, attributing this to the genre. While he is pleased with the comparison to C.S. Forester’s Horatio Hornblower, which he read as a child, he “winces” at the comparison with *Boys Own* because, in his view, his stories are “deeper than that.” He also points out that he was rejected by publishers forty times for various reasons, one of which is that the kind of novel that he writes is no longer fashionable. Acknowledging that he is a popular novelist, he admits that his stories are formulaic but adds that he cannot write a modern philosophical novel. However, Wilcox believes he is at a disadvantage because women, he surmises, who constitute the majority of readers in the U.K. and who dominate publishing houses, are not enamored with “blood and thunder” books. For this reason, he now tries to insert romance into his novels. Still, Wilcox is proud of his “following.” Not only does he receive letters from all over the world and read appreciative responses on his

⁹⁶ Wilcox, *Guns* back cover. Sharpe and Hornblower are protagonists of two series of twentieth-century novels written respectively by Bernard Cornwell and C.S. Forester and set during the Napoleonic wars and beyond.

online blog, but he is proud that there is “a market in first-edition hardbacks” of his novels (Wilcox, Interview).

Jenkins’ Trial and the Justice of Empire:

In *The Guns of El Kebir* Sir Garnet Wolseley, Adjutant General of the British army, recruits Simon Fonthill and his Welsh petty officer, Jenkins, to conduct undercover scouting missions in Egypt in preparation for the British invasion. Along with Ahmed, an Egyptian who recognizes the need to destroy Urabi, Simon and Jenkins battle Bedouins and angry Egyptians in various locations. Always appearing at the right moment, they rescue the British Consul during the Alexandria massacre, help protect a European community taking refuge at the Anglo-Egyptian Bank during the bombardment of Alexandria, and facilitate the British invasion.

In his recreation of events in late-nineteenth-century Egypt, Wilcox employs adventure narrative, which, Martin Green asserts, for English writers in the 17th century and beyond, “became the literary counterpart to Empire” (Green, *Dreams* 37),⁹⁷ infusing it with the imperial romance, a subgenre of the Victorian novel, with its post-imperial permutation, the romance of the archive. The result is a work that upholds Empire – a task that is particularly aided by the trial of Jenkins. This section analyzes the ideological function of the trial scene while the following sections explain how two dissenting British voices are co-opted into the imperialist narrative.

Guns is the product of a trend that surfaced around the middle of the twentieth century and which was marked by a surge of interest in all things Victorian, including art, fashion, architecture and literature. In her study of the Victorian period in British cultural memory, Kate

⁹⁷ See Green, *Seven* for an analysis of select Western adventure fictions from the 17th century and after.

Mitchell points to a shift in perception towards the era, contrasting feelings of repulsion experienced by authors in the earlier half of the century with those of nostalgia harbored by their counterparts in the second half of the century. Thus, whereas the former distanced themselves from the era and its values, which to them denoted repression and injustice, the latter resolved their feelings towards life after two world wars by re-casting the era in more favorable terms. According to Mitchell, in the span of a century, the Victorian era changed roles from “Other” to precursor of the then contemporary moment (Mitchell).

Nostalgic literary and historical studies were particularly inspired by Margaret Thatcher’s call in the 1980s for a return to Victorian morals. The former Prime Minister’s extolment of Victorian values and of her Victorian grandparents helped popularize the period, which spawned neo-Victorian genres. These spanned magazines, biographies and fiction, among other things. According to Dana Shiller, this neo-Victorian genre features novels that are “set at least partly in the nineteenth century. This capacious umbrella includes texts that revise specific Victorian precursors, texts that imagine new adventures for familiar Victorian characters, and ‘new’ Victorian fictions that imitate nineteenth-century literary conventions” (Shiller 558). *Guns* belongs to the last category. But, while scholars such as Shiller, Louisa Hadley and Cora Kaplan argue that neo-Victorian fiction adopts postmodern views of history in its reflection upon historiography and theorization on the ability of history-writing to access the past,⁹⁸ *Guns* follows a more conservative path.

As stated above, *Guns* fuses two subgenres: the imperial romance and the romance of the archive. A tale of adventure, written by authors such as H. Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling,

⁹⁸ See Hadley and Shiller. Simon Joyce, however, asserts that despite attempts at interrogating a master narrative about the period in the twentieth-century British social and literary imaginary, some works end up reinforcing a normative narrative of the Victorians. See Joyce.

an imperial romance is an adventure narrative which follows a European hero as he explores exotic lands, battles disorder, and conquers uncivilized foes bringing stability to an “otherly world” (McClure 2). Narrating the exploits of Simon Fonthill as he assists the British Empire in averting what is depicted as a crisis, *Guns* is charged with such elements of the imperial romance as the chivalric hero, the white woman, Alice Covington, to whom the hero is devoted and whom he rescues from evil natives, the native sidekick, Ahmed, whose job it is to affirm the righteousness of the hero and of Empire, and, finally, the villain, George, who is punished in the end.⁹⁹ Alongside him are “vicious” Egyptians, whom the narrative constantly describes as the “mob,” in comparison to the magnanimity of the British, who allegedly take pains to preserve Egyptian civilian life while invading the country.

The romance of the archive, the second genre which *Guns* straddles, is a continuation of the adventure narrative. In her study of the genre in contemporary British fiction, Suzanne Keen notes that, following post-1956 decolonization, British imperial romances mutated into romances of the archives, often producing fictions that defended Britain’s imperial past. Many later fictions, however, adopt a critical approach towards history-writing. Keen defines the genre as a narrative which chases historical archives, such as important documents, or which takes place in locations significant to that history, such as libraries. She elaborates that the definition of “archive” has extended to include museum collections, mappings and “fictional representations of memory” (Keen 3-27). A representative of the genre in *Guns*, is Alice who, in search of the truth, travels to Egypt, interviews Colonel Urabi and Admiral Seymour. The imperial romance and the romance of the archive, thus, intersect through Simon and Alice.

The use of the imperial romance determines the imperialist narrative of the Urabi

⁹⁹ For elements of the imperial romance, see Dryden 36-41.

Revolution. The genre, manner of emplotment, and narrative mode, all combine to echo an orientalist narrative of events. In his foundational work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said defines this phenomenon as a mode of writing that pretends to provide scientific knowledge about the Near East and its inhabitants, configured as the Other, while distinguishing them from the West, the Self. Orientalist works produce a world where East and West stand on opposite planes occupying clear-cut, fixed spaces. Within this binary divide, the East features as ignorant, childish, and irrational while Europe possesses knowledge, maturity, and Reason (Said). According to Hayden White's analysis of various types of historiographic writing, romantic emplotment tells the story of a hero, usually superior to his environment, who successfully overcomes adversity.¹⁰⁰ In *Guns* Simon Fonthill, the twenty-seven-year-old unorthodox hero, travels to a primitive environment and successfully helps the British Empire fend off the collapse of Egypt into anarchy. As an imperial romance, *Guns*' romantic emplotment advances the story of an anarchic Egypt that is rescued by a superior, rational British force.

The novel's employment of Free Indirect Discourse (FID), elides the ideological content. Also termed psycho-narration, this narrative mode allows authors to enter characters' minds and report their thoughts and feelings to readers through seamless transitions from third-person narration to the character itself.¹⁰¹ In *Guns*, characters seem to be directly accessible to readers who are transported inside the formers' minds to witnesses what seems to be fresh, unmediated thoughts that are uncolored by ideological stance or political allegiance. In other words, the novel's employment of adventure narrative, with its orientalist overtones, and use of FID create a semblance of objectivity in an otherwise non-reliable narrative. In consequence, the British

¹⁰⁰ For different modes of emplotment in historical narratives as outlined by Hayden White, see Munslow.

¹⁰¹ On Free Indirect Discourse (FID), see Jahn and Cohn.

occupation of Egypt poses as justifiable and Empire as just. This view is demonstrated by none other than Jenkins, Simon's Welsh petty officer and servant – an Other. This attestation of the justice of Empire, effected through the story of an Other who is already assimilated into this system, and its position before the story of the revolution, authenticates imperialist accounts of the Urabi Revolution while endorsing Empire.

The opening chapters of the novel describe a hunt and a trial taking place in Brecon, a town on the Welsh-English border, in March 1882, about six months after the Abdin demonstration and about five months before the British invasion of Egypt. Simon's father, a former Major in the British army and a Victoria Cross holder who believes that hunting fox is inhumane, bans the hunt from passing through his country estate. When his neighbors, Colonel Reeves and Barker, a magistrate, trespass on his grounds while chasing a fox, an altercation follows during which Jenkins assails Reeves. The latter brings a case against Jenkins, constantly referred to as 352 in the novel, who insists on acting as his own barrister and, despite class biases, convinces the court that he has acted in self-defense.

The trial scene, occupying the whole second chapter and lasting exactly 14 pages, acts as a prelude to the story of British involvement in Egypt. Anticipating the novel's narration of the Urabi Revolution in terms of class struggle between impoverished, power-hungry Egyptian peasants and Egypt's Turco-Circassian ruling elite¹⁰², the scene validates the British political system which, despite its class hierarchies, is capable of administering justice to all members of society. In so doing, the trial scene upholds Empire for its ability to provide equal treatment to all its subjects. Additionally, Jenkins' trial can be seen as standing in for the historical trial of Urabi, which the novel does not cover.

¹⁰² See Abu-Lughod for class-makeup of Egypt around the Urabi Revolution.

Although the trial briefly and covertly questions the validity of British presence in Egypt, exposing the classism inherent in British society, it lauds the ability of its legal system to overcome class and ethnic biases in its efforts to provide justice to all members of society. Thus, the scene progresses from critiquing an unjust classist society to redeeming it. In upholding the justice of British governance, Jenkins' trial legitimates British intervention in Egypt as an extension of a fair system that makes justice available to both victims and perpetrators alike. Rebellion, class and ethnic politics, imperialist ideology, and justice, all coalesce in the figure of Jenkins whose role as both victim and lawyer and whose success in the trial are pivotal in first subverting then defending imperial politics.

The novel does not make Jenkins' success inevitable. Analyzing the dynamics of the trial, George Fonthill observes that one of the magistrates is "a great supporter of the hunt, a dedicated Tory, and has a reputation for sending down almost everyone who appears in front of him," while the other magistrate, although "a bit more balanced ... sits on the county council with Reeves, so is likely to support him" (20). From the outset it is clear to the elder Fonthill that the magistrates will side with Reeves because the case is influenced by political allegiances as well as mutual interests. Fonthill's statements imply that Jenkins does not stand a chance – a thought that Simon's mother voices during the trial (24).

Simon's perception of the courtroom scene, delivered through FID, paints a picture in which the solicitor's arrogant elegance meets Jenkins' "rosy-cheeked and freshly scrubbed" working-class cleanliness (21). The lawyer, who speaks with a sniff and addresses the ceiling while questioning Jenkins, appeals to class and ethnic politics in his attempt to indict the latter who, in Simon's view, "bore the appearance of a collier at Sunday morning Chapel" (21). In describing Jenkins as a man "of a rebellious and violent nature" and one who "often imbibe[s]

alcohol to the point that it inflames this violent nature of [his] and gets [him] into fights” (22), the solicitor presents Jenkins as a passionate, irrational ethnic Other. The solicitor’s defense rests not on evidence relating to the event but on criminalizing Jenkins’ transgression of social boundaries and attributing this action to his character. Words such as “rebellious” and “violent” tie the ethnically different, socially inferior Welshman, to insubordination and violence.¹⁰³

The unnamed solicitor mainly relies on the “standing of his client” (32) to win, as Simon deduces. The lawyer’s conclusion that “ ‘this gratuitous attack on a respected member of our community by a violent man must result in a custodial sentence, of as severe a nature as the law allows,’ ” (23-4) appeals to class and identity politics as components of a rational system the violation of which is sufficient grounds to condemn Jenkins. Believing that he has presented a strong case, the solicitor decides not to cross-examine George Fonthill and when asked by Jenkins whether he would like to talk to Simon, he “[raises] his eyebrows in disdain and [shakes] his head” (25). As Jenkins prepares to question Reeves, Simon wonders whether Jenkins will have “the forensic skill to counter Reeves’s bluster and innate air of superiority – not to mention the obvious bias against him shown by the three magistrates[.]” (27) Jenkins’ position is precarious because he has “only the most tenuous hold on the chairman’s patience” (28).

As the trial progresses, characters invest the conflict with ideological and political meanings. Simon’s awareness of this shows in his expectation that gossip will decree that Jenkins’ mode of self-defense, kicking Reeves in the groin, is “*such a disgusting way to behave and so typical of what happens when a liberal entertains ‘modern’ ideas!*” (13, emphasis in original). Reeves and the hunt supporters interpret the fight as a struggle between tradition, which supports the hunt and maintains class divisions, on the one hand, and liberal values which

¹⁰³ For 19th century British portrayals of the Welsh as Other see Kreider.

oppose these divisions, on the other hand, thus encouraging anarchy. In a sense, Reeves and Barker stand for British subjects who believe that it is their duty to keep the fox population down; in imperialist terms to keep nationalists in check so that British investors in Egypt can continue to profit. For example, Colonel Reeves, who describes the elder Fonthill as a “lily-livered socialist” (11), sees the hunt as “a matter of tradition” and “good housekeeping” (23). In his view, it clears the land of “vermin” (9), a term that is used later to refer to Egyptians in a description of the looting following the bombardment of Alexandria and which anticipates the animal imagery used to describe Egyptians in various instances in the novel. In contrast, Simon’s father describes Reeves as “a bully” and “a most reactionary sort of fellow” (12). Major Fonthill represents British anti-imperialists who think that hunting fox is “cruel” (7), who are concerned with the well-being of the fox, Egypt, and who oppose meddling in its affairs on ethical grounds.

Several incidents in the trial scene point to deception on the part of those representing the established order. For example, the narrator mentions that “the facts as [Barker] related them were not specifically inaccurate, but they skillfully shaded the evidence against Jenkins” (22-3). Apparently Barker twists his narrative. The narrator also mentions that at the beginning of Reeves’ testimony he is “leaning heavily on a stick” (23), to indicate infirmity, whereas Jenkins’ cross-examination of the Colonel reveals that he has gone hunting after the event therefore refuting the Colonel’s claim that he finds it “incredibly difficult to stay in the saddle” (31). As Reeves risks perjury in his attempt to take revenge, and as Major Fonthill applies rouge to his face in order to heighten the mark left by Reeves’ whip, the scene shows that justice for the poor is only attainable through subterfuge.

The fact that Jenkins is able to prove that he has acted in self-defense is central to the novel’s argument about the efficiency of the British system. Because Jenkins proves that Colonel

Reeves has trespassed and because he clears himself of the assault charges, the scene upholds the racial ideology upon which Empire rests, even as it questions it, by showing that justice is accessible under this very same system. Jenkins has to work within the system in order to attain justice. George Fonthill alerts Jenkins to this before the trial:

“But you can’t defend yourself! A court of law is a sort of ritualistic place, highly disciplined. You have got to know the rules and procedures and to conform to them. You can’t expect to just . . . well . . . talk your way out of it, you know. You attacked a highly respected member of our community and we must put up a well-argued case for you. Frankly, my dear chap, I don’t quite see you being able to do that.” (17)

George Fonthill stresses the performative aspect of legal proceedings, the proneness of members of the legal system to class and ethnic biases, and finally, Jenkins’ inability to speak for himself. In other words, Jenkins cannot talk his way out of the trial because he has to follow a rather rigid, disciplined, procedure and produce a logical argument of which he is incapable by virtue of his social standing. The irony of the situation is that, in a way, Jenkins does talk his way out of it. He refuses to submit to a system which forces him to delegate someone to speak for him. However, he does submit to the procedure by cross-examining the defendant, calling witnesses, presenting incriminating evidence, albeit fake, and informing the judges that he is ready to provide more witnesses.

Because the hunting episode is a scene of disorder followed by order and the administration of justice for the poor servant, Jenkins, it proves that the existing system is capable of delivering justice to rich and poor alike. The resolution of this episode repudiates Jenkins’ veiled critique of the established order and implied threat of revolution should the system be found lacking: “Now, my lords, we can’t ’ave blokes goin’ round whippin’ other people in this day an’ age, now can we? Whoever they are. It’s the sort of thing that causes . . . revolutions an’ that. We saw this in Italy. Let them eat cake, wasn’t it? Well, we can’t ’ave that

sort of thing in England, or Wales, look you. What I did I did in self-defence” (31). Jenkins distinguishes between England and countries like Italy, and by implication Egypt, where lack of justice causes revolutions. He asserts that justice is the best precaution against class uprisings. Because the court rules in his favor, the scene upholds a system that can overcome class and racial bias to restore order.

The fact that it is Jenkins, a servant, who wins the case against his social superiors testifies to the uprightness of English law. As in the case between Jenkins and Reeves, the novel later interprets the Urabi Revolution in terms of a class struggle that carries racial undertones, therefore questioning the legitimacy of Urabi’s other demands for Egypt’s economic and political autonomy. In the same way that Jenkins is validated for working within the system Urabi, whom the novel portrays as a dangerous man disturbing the status quo, is expected to accept Egypt’s submission to Europe’s, specifically Britain’s, superior tutelage. The novel highlights the importance of submission to British guardianship through Ahmed.

Mirroring Jenkins’ trial, the novel’s later validation of Ahmed and condemnation of his counterpoint George, a British Thomas Cook employee in Cairo, affirms the justice of the British system, which recognizes the worth of the Other and punishes its own people when they transgress. In contrast to Ahmed, who safeguards British lives and corroborates the British view of the revolution as a dictatorship, stands George who is in charge of managing the communication between Simon and Wolseley before the invasion. George meets Cromer’s definition of a Levantine – a European who has lived long in the Orient and has become corrupted by Orientals (Cromer). Like many Europeans in the 19th century, he is discovered to be

guilty of illegal trade in monuments.¹⁰⁴ Twice he kidnaps Alice, attempting to kill her until she kills him in self-defense. George adopts an Arabic name, as was the practice among many Europeans,¹⁰⁵ and has a retinue of natives who help him in his illegal endeavors.

Rather than upholding a certain ethical code, the novel metes out punishment or reward according to how useful individuals are to Britain and, in so doing, validates Empire while employing a double standard. Commenting on George's role as an informant to the Egyptian side, Simon declares: "the man is English and remains a traitor" (339). In another incident, after a misunderstanding between Ahmed and a British officer where the former is wrongfully detained, Simon liberates Ahmed. This incident, which lasts ten pages, appears at first sight to be a detailed account of Ahmed's vindication. In reality it functions as a re-affirmation of the efficiency of the British Empire under which Egyptians, like Jenkins before them, are guaranteed justice. George is punished because he betrays Britain while Ahmed is rewarded for his loyalty to Britain, never mind that he betrays his own country.

By ensconcing the Egyptian narrative of anarchy between two powerful examples of the justice of Empire – Jenkins' trial and the Ahmed-George parallel at the end – *Guns* shows this anarchy to be the result of rebellion against superior European, particularly British, vigilance. That is why, the novel implies, reform has to be done under British supervision. *Guns*' critique of the social and imperial structures, in fact, legitimates the occupation by suggesting that simple Egyptians will benefit from the intervention the way Jenkins, the othered Welshman has benefited from submitting to British tutelage. At the end of the novel, Wolseley tells Simon that

¹⁰⁴ Donald Reid mentions that many monuments were able to leave Egyptian shores in the 19th century because Egyptian police had no authorization to inspect European vessels. See Reid.

¹⁰⁵ To cite one example, Edward William Lane, author of *The Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians*, was known as Mansur *Effendi* in Egypt (Kararah, "Introduction" IX).

he will see to it that Urabi receives a fair trial (424).

By masking the deal that Britain made with Urabi *Guns* not only paints the occupation as a means of bringing order and stability, but also confirms Britain's fairness in dealing with the leader following their triumph at Tal el Kebir. Historians confirm this pretense. Al-Sayyid-Marsot states that Dufferin "insisted on pretending that no deal had been made with the Urabists." Explaining that Urabi's trial was a charade, since the sentence was already agreed upon, she states that the negotiations between Urabi and the British influenced the former's decision to plead guilty to the rebellion despite the fact that it was not a rebellion (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 30).¹⁰⁶ In his account of the revolution, Blunt writes that he has been privy to information that if Wolseley had captured Urabi in battle he would have shot the latter immediately adding that it was "only the intervention of Sir John Adye, a General much older in years and in length of service than Wolseley, that prevented it later – Adye having represented to Wolseley the disgrace there would be to the British army if the regular commander of an armed force, whom it had needed 30,000 troops to subdue, should not receive the honourable treatment universally accorded to prisoners of war" (421).

A Dangerous Man: In Defense of Occupation

The third-person, omniscient narration that slides into FID enables *Guns*' account of the Urabi Revolution and the ensuing occupation to pose as a detached ethnographic account. In actuality, this reportage is focalized through biased Western subjectivities: Simon, Alice, and Ahmed, who is simply a third Western consciousness posing as an Egyptian voice. In "The Point

¹⁰⁶ For the details of Urabi's trial see Broadly. See also Blunt 417-48 for the preparations for the trial and 449-65 on the deal made with Urabi.

of Narratology,” Mieke Bal intervenes in criticism of non-Western populations and their cultures, attributing the othering that many scholars have cited to the discipline’s reliance on third-person narrative. In Bal’s words: “the subjective focalization no speaker can avoid adopting shape[s] the fabula or content of narrative decisively (731-32). Simon’s military training, perspicacity in previous battles, and reservations about the army provide a supposedly detached opinion about military intervention. Alice’s approval of the invasion despite her anti-imperialist stance shows Britain to be acting out of altruistic motives. Simon and Alice’s assessment masks their subjective judgment where British interests rank first.

Particularly significant is Ahmed, who represents native Egyptian opinion, and whose credibility stems from his sensible recognition that Egyptians are not ready for self-rule.¹⁰⁷ In reality, he is another British voice disguised as an Egyptian whose native support solidifies Britain’s invasion of Egypt as an action that Egypt itself desires. Bal’s critique of Western ethnography’s attempts to speak for the Other through the Western Self, captures his character: “‘we’ speak, and focalize, the focalization of ‘them,’ but ‘they’ do not speak, and ‘their’ focalization only comes to us filtered by ‘ours’ ” (733). Ahmed’s “insider” knowledge of Egypt is a conglomerate of British assumptions among which are the political immaturity of his country, Urabi’s intention to seize the Canal and his dictatorial tendencies. All of his tips about the current state of affairs cater to Britain’s imperial aspirations, legitimating the occupation, which he depicts as delivering Egypt from chaos: “‘I think it has to be done, this big fight. Otherwise this silly man Arabi will continue to muck up country [sic]. Egypt needs stability, quietness [sic]’ ” (402).

¹⁰⁷ On how the British used the language of character and moral superiority to justify the occupation of Egypt, see Cain.

Guns' narrative structure and its strategic employment of prolepsis, lend more cogency to Simon and Alice's evaluation of the events which, in turn, furthers an imperialist delivery of events, thus validating the genre of the *Bildungsroman* with its standardization of the European paradigm. The narrator uses prolepsis, flash-forward, so that the first time we meet Simon and Jenkins in Egypt after leaving them in England, they are in the middle of the desert about to be attacked by Bedouins. The novel then pauses to go back to the pair's arrival in Alexandria reporting hostility towards Europeans before returning to the desert scene. Such departures from the storyline, anachronies as Gérard Genette calls them (Herman 74), cultivate an image of Egyptian violence, which *Guns* shows to be the result of the Urabi Revolution. *Guns*' manipulation of narrative speed and its reliance on repetitious structures which retard the narrative supports its depiction of Urabi as creating an anarchic state. Writing on narrative speed, Kathryn Hume lists "repetitious structures[,] the framing of tales within tales" and characters, among techniques that writers use to delay narrative.¹⁰⁸ In *Guns*, for instance, highly dramatized episodes describing how Simon and his group are constantly attacked by "Arabs," or "Bedawis," slow down the pace to demonstrate that anarchy rules rampant in Egypt. The two abductions of Alice Covington, the female war correspondent, are also illustrative. Because Simon has to delay his main mission in order to rescue her, the latter functions as an impediment while foregrounding the image of Egypt as a dangerous place.

Guns does not offer details of the two main demonstrations occurring in February and September 1881, choosing instead to judge the whole situation, first, in relation to Urabi's character and actions and, second, in relation to the tension between Egyptians and European residents in Egypt. Narrative speed is sometimes so fast that events occurring a month apart,

¹⁰⁸ On repetition and retardation, see Hume.

such as the Alexandria riots and the bombardment of Alexandria, are shown to be happening within a day of each other. Additionally, the story of the Urabi Revolution is dispersed through the novel. Out of a total of 431 pages, only about 23 pages refer to the revolution and its possible causes. Some of these references occupy as little as two lines while others average from two to three paragraphs, with the exception of Alice's interview with Urabi. The details of the interview, which I will discuss in detail later, lasts for a little over four pages and is the longest continuous piece on Urabi and his revolution.

The novel focuses more on the effects of the revolution on Europeans living in Egypt so that the narrative moves quickly past the Egyptian nationalist movement, only slowing down when the focus is violence against Europeans or chaos caused by rebelling Egyptians. Whereas the narrator dramatizes the attack on Charles Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, the novel only summarizes the details of the revolution. *Guns*' focalization of the situation – its attempt to retell events through certain characters, in this case Simon and Alice – is, thus, considerably selective, skipping over Egyptian attempts at having a healthy political life and slowing down to show the suffering of Europeans. For example, after the bombardment of Alexandria, Simon, through FID, describes the destruction of the European quarter in highly humanizing terms speaking of “chairs spilling out their soft fillings like intestines torn from corpses,” describing them and other furniture as “victims of the shelling” (152). This depicts the revolution as an ignorant force indiscriminately fighting Khedive Tawfiq's despotism and British civilizing attempts alike – a narrative that is highly aided by Simon's credibility as the hero of the imperial romance.

Simon's identity as the unconventional son of a military man promises a hero who is loyal to Empire, yet one who could sympathize with the natives or at least provide a detached

account of the Urabi events and the British occupation. Simon functions as a “reflector,” whom Manfred Jahn describes as “a foregrounded character, a ‘central consciousness,’ whose perceptions ‘reflect’ the fictional world.” Jahn refers to the reflector’s thoughts, perceptions, and feelings as “consciousness-data” and points to the use of FID in presenting this data: “in reflectorial mode, a reflector’s inside views are shown ‘from within,’ the text foregrounds the reflector’s consciousness-data, the narrative tempo is scenic, and the reader is cast into the role of a witness” (445). Simon’s judgment of events is instrumental to the picture that *Guns* paints.

As reflector, his credibility is of prime importance. The narrator establishes it by introducing Simon’s family, which is a peculiar mix of liberalism and conservatism. His father objects to the tradition of the fox hunt while Charlotte Fonthill, his mother, hates “Mr Gladstone and ... all things radical. She disliked the unconventional – and her son *was* unconventional” (3, emphasis in original). Shifting from third-person narrative to FID, the novel introduces Simon Fonthill through his mother’s perspective to further distinguish him from her. Her thoughts of her son promise a different kind of hero of the imperial romance. Simon’s rejection of traditions peculiar to his social class and society, which irks his mother, portrays him as a liberal hero who will be more accepting of the Other and who will, therefore, offer a fair assessment of events.

Charlotte Fonthill

is puzzled by her son’s “stubborn refusal to conform[.] His dislike of tradition. His cursed independence[.] His reluctance to take up a profession or – more acceptably – stay at home and help his father manage the estate[.] ... In a rural economy that relied on horses, he disliked riding. Born into a military family, he had willingly taken a commission in his father’s old regiment, but left the army early” (3).

Even while portraying Simon as a rebellious son who refuses to take the traditional path, the text assures readers of the hero’s courage and dedication to Empire. Although cleared after being court-martialed for cowardice and “commended for bravery in later campaigns in South Africa

and Afghanistan” (3), Simon “had refused the chance to resume his commission, with guaranteed promotion, but still stayed working for the army as a scout in the field with Jenkins” (3). Later, during his meeting with Simon, Sir Garnet Wolseley establishes Simon as a rebellious yet trustworthy character. Recognizing, even appreciating, the latter’s predisposition to irregular jobs Wolseley almost entreats Simon to accept the assignment.

The novel presents Simon as the new blood whose creative thinking regenerates the army and, therefore Empire. Coming from a non-titled, middle-class family, he believes in hard work and rejects the army with its rigid system of respect for seniority and rank superseding good thinking. The novel presents his knack for good military tactics, despite his young age, as a gift that the army is now beginning to use to its advantage. Wolseley solicits Simon’s assistance because as a former military man he will not shy away from armed intervention while his level-headedness will guarantee sound judgment. He distinguishes him from Edward Malet, British Consul General in Egypt from 1879-1883 who, according to Wolseley is “anxious to avoid armed intervention” and sometimes “looks at the situation through rose-tinted spectacles” (45).¹⁰⁹

The text persistently asserts Simon’s credibility because of the unique role that he plays as the mastermind of Wolseley’s invasion. Unconventionally, his plans rely on information that he gathers through clandestine means.¹¹⁰ His is an irregular military role. He is an indispensable member of the team, yet he is expendable if the whole affair comes to light. For these reasons the narrator painstakingly establishes Simon’s shrewdness, his reliability, and devotion to the Queen. His non-conformity and espionage, instead of endangering Empire, become an asset because the

¹⁰⁹ Whereas in November 1881 Malet reports calm in Egypt, he later sent reports of anarchy in Egypt. See Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 166 and Robinson 100-01.

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the spy thriller as the successor of the imperial romance, see Denning.

job he undertakes is an unconventional one – one that needs a creative mind that is unfettered by the kind of traditional thinking which Simon despises. Wolseley’s reiteration of Simon’s rejection of a commission in the army and a promotion, information provided earlier by Charlotte Fonthill, ward off any remaining doubts about his loyalty, taking the tarnish off espionage.¹¹¹

Because Simon’s image as an intrepid yet balanced hero of the imperial romance¹¹² is essential to the account of the revolution, the narrator inserts reminders of Simon’s character in the text, assuring readers that the account of the situation is balanced and that the occupation of Egypt, in turn, is a legitimate move. For example, during his meeting with Stone Pasha, historically the Chief Staff of the Egyptian army, Simon feels remorseful for the lies that he has to tell, “*Oh the lies, the lies!*” (83, emphasis in original). In another instance, he tells Wolseley that he will “lie as little as [he has] to” (49) and most importantly, in his musings, he reiterates that “he had sworn not to be a spy. But he had also promised to serve the Queen” (69). These instances serve as proof of his integrity, confirming his reliability as they stress his honest desire to give sincere accounts of events. Having established Simon’s credibility, the novel makes him reflector depicting the situation in Egypt through his consciousness.

First, Simon sees the revolution as a class uprising caused by the dissatisfaction of an Egyptian peasant class with the privileges of their Turkish overlords. During his first meeting with Wolseley, the former mentions the displeasure of “the Egyptian underclass, who are not enamoured anyway of what I suppose one would call the rather indolent suzerainty administered by the Turks from Constantinople” (41). Because Egyptians in the military mostly occupied

¹¹¹ For how Edwardian spy novels reconciled ideas of gentlemanliness and espionage, see Stafford 506-507.

¹¹² On the heroes of the imperial romance, see Dryden “Introduction” 3-4.

subordinate positions to Turks and Circassians, the novel describes the request for equality for Egyptians as the rise of an uneducated underclass and as a military coup.¹¹³ Although Urabi was an Ottomanist, seeing Egypt as part of the Ottoman Empire rather than seeking to overthrow it (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 114-21),¹¹⁴ the novel frames the revolution as an attempt to overthrow Ottoman rule in Egypt.

Simon's classist analysis of events structures his report to Wolseley, who is informed that Urabi "is putting pressure on the Khedive ... to change the Egyptian government to make it more, er, radical and representative of the peasants" (41). Moreover, he continuously refers to Egyptians siding with the revolution as *fellahin*, peasants. While Egyptians in the military tended to belong to the peasant class, because *Guns* skips this fact, the term "*fellaheen*," as the novel uses it, becomes a derogatory term denoting naïveté, incompetence, obduracy, and sometimes subhuman qualities. By describing Urabi as "a formerly obscure colonel ... a *fellaheen* or member of the peasant classes" (41), Simon frames the revolution as a jealous attempt by the underclass to replace their masters, reinforcing imperialist framings of the revolution as a passionate outburst by ignorant peasants. After his arrival in Egypt, he observes the "low-bred Egyptian officers grown arrogant because of their newly acquired power" (80). Additionally, Simon's reference to Egyptian troops as mostly composed of "low-born *fellaheen*, like Arabi himself" (80), betrays his own classism.

Other characters in the novel confirm Simon's way of seeing the revolution, even those who are in close contact with the situation in the army. For example, when Simon meets the

¹¹³ For the unjust treatment of Egyptian officers under Uthman Rifky, the Circassian War Minister, see Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 71-75.

¹¹⁴ See also Gershoni, "Introduction" *Egypt* 5-8. The authors explain that nationalist ideas promoting independence from the Ottoman Empire did not emerge in Egypt until the beginning of the 20th century when in 1912 *Hizb al-Umma* (Party of the Nation) drafted a plan for Egypt's independence from Turkey.

American Stone Pasha in order to extract information from him, they discuss the revolution. Stone's description of Urabi, again, frames the events in classist terms: "he's a *fellaheen* himself, from peasant stock in the south. And he looks it. Big man. Not exactly elegant" and "he's a good orator and he began to gather the support of the *fellaheen*" (86-7). Like other middle-class subjects in Jenkins' trial, Stone views Urabi through a classist, racialized lens. Stone presents Urabi as an uncouth peasant, presenting his oratory as a means for galvanizing the masses where, in reality, it was almost the only way of circulating ideas among a mostly illiterate population.

Second, Simon understands the Urabi Revolution as a menacing military coup that aims to oust the Turkish leaders who support European interests in Egypt. Because the novel supports the British intervention in Egypt, the question no longer becomes whether Urabi is justified in his demands, but what the repercussions of his movement will be for Europe and, in particular, for Britain. Depicting the revolution as a military coup aiming to overthrow the Ottoman Empire shows it as a dangerous movement that upsets the existing world order and ushers in dictatorship. According to British political journalist, Peter Mansfield, because Britain was invested in safeguarding its route to India, it made sure to snatch Egypt before France and other rivals such as Russia and Germany (XI). Twentieth-century historians of the British Empire, Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, declare that from 1838 onwards, Britain and France wanted to keep the Ottoman Empire healthy because it acted as a shield between Russia and Britain's colonies in India (Robinson 77). Further, Rafi explains that Britain curbed the Turkish control of Egypt because the former wanted a free hand there (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 33-4).

Scattered references to Urabi's control of the army and to the Khedive as a prisoner in his own palace (*Guns* 42, 74, 87, 103) construct Urabi's rule as Minister of War as a reign of terror. Stone Pasha confirms this interpretation when, in his meeting with Simon, he paints the image of

a Khedive being chased by Urabi from Cairo to Alexandria. This portrayal justifies British involvement in Egypt, since it shows that the purpose of the Urabists is not sharing government, but seizing power for themselves. Further evidence of their unsuitability for governance appears in the *Times*, which follows up on the failed attempt to assassinate Urabi with the news that the guilty persons, all of Turkish and Circassian origin, have been tried in secret and exiled (74).¹¹⁵ The absence of a fair trial shows Urabi's rule as the antithesis of British rule, presenting the latter as a harbinger of justice and freedom.

Third, despite the somewhat-sympathetic portrayal in places – “Simon felt a pang of sympathy for the rank and file of the Egyptian army, paid a pittance, treated badly by their Turkish officers and living in what was virtually an occupied country” (47) – Urabi is presented as a pretender, who is using political demands to achieve personal gain, and his cause is always qualified. Although, or because, Stone Pasha tells Simon that Urabi's promotion was held back for 16 years under Khedive Ismail (87) his account of Urabi's personal investment in the revolution casts it as a personal vendetta. Stone says “I guess he wants the Turks out, a lessening of foreign influence and a new constitution” (87). Earlier, when Simon meets Wolseley, the former states that “the Egyptian army is adopting nationalistic postures” and that at the Abdin demonstration Urabi demanded “some sort of a new constitution” (41, 42). Qualifying terms such as “I guess,” “nationalistic” instead of “nationalist,” and “some sort of” together with “postures” depict the Urabists as insincere. Like Chirol, who called the revolution a military mutiny, dismissing the existence of nationalist feeling in Egypt (65),¹¹⁶ the novel dismisses the

¹¹⁵ Egyptian historian Mahmud El Khafif writes that suspects were given a fair trial that was presided over by an honest Circassian officer. See Khafif, Vol. 1, 216-25.

¹¹⁶ In contrast, Rafi mentions that French and British Consuls in Egypt were behind Khedive Tawfiq's decision to alienate Sherif Pasha, the Prime Minister, from power because he stood by his belief in a constitution. See Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 36-7.

revolution.

Throughout, Simon is reluctant to name the revolution as such, sometimes referring to it as a “movement” (42), a “nationalistic movement” (42), or “this Egyptian nationalism” (43). As Simon recruits Ahmed the former says that the French and British do not want Urabi to cause a “revolt throughout Egypt” (91). This reluctance to name the events serves to exonerate Britain, to deny its responsibility for Egypt’s political and economic problems. Referring to the revolution as “insurrection” and “revolt” (432) in his Author’s Note, Wilcox delegitimizes Urabi’s movement and, in an interview with the author of this study, adds that that time lacked “democratic ways” of voicing dissatisfaction. The author is also unaware of Egyptian nationalist accounts and sympathetic British views of the revolution (Wilcox, Interview).

To be clear, the novel does, at times, acknowledge the legitimacy of the Urabists’ demands. For instance, in his conversation with Wolseley, Simon lists Egyptian dissatisfaction with European influence tolerated by the Ottoman Empire, Egypt’s fears of a French invasion after the French annexation of Tunis, the demand for a new constitution which allows all Egyptians to share in the government and finally the demand for equal rights for Egyptians and Turco-Circassians in the military (41-2). Yet at other times *Guns* presents Egypt’s political concerns as unfounded and Urabi as a man whose ambition surpasses his sincerity, while gracefully overlooking relevant information.

For example, the novel uses Urabi’s desire for an increase in the army to reinforce its depiction of the revolution as military coup. What it neglects to mention is that Urabi was demanding a return to the quota of 18, 000 soldiers in times of peace, as authorized by an Ottoman *firman* (edict). Rafi states that the reduction in the military caused an economic problem because the army did not help disbanded officers find new jobs (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 33-4,

82-5). This incomplete information divests serious Egyptian grievances of urgency. In the end, Simon describes Urabi as “a dangerous man” (42) because the Khedive has agreed to his demands. The novel further corroborates Simon’s views when Gladstone describes Urabi as having ““thrown off his mask.”” Suppressing the note sent by Urabi to European consuls before the Abdin demonstration in September 1881 assuring them of the safety of their citizens, Gladstone concludes that Urabi intends to depose the Khedive and expel all Europeans from the country (103). In Egypt, Simon learns that “Gladstone denied that Arabi was a national leader and charged the ruin of Egypt upon ‘lawless military violence, aggravated by wanton and cruel crime’” (213).

Despite the narrator’s efforts to present Simon as a reliable reflector, the latter’s dependence on rumor and conjecture for his account of the Alexandria riots points to his lack of reliability. Delivered in third-person narrative that drifts into FID, the episode lasts close to ten pages. Because Simon does not catch the event from the beginning, the story of the riot is truncated and the reason behind it appears to be meaningless anger at the British Consul. Simon first becomes aware of it when he hears a commotion on the street. When he inquires about it, Ahmed reports that Fatima, his cousin, says it is about “something to do with British consul. Big riot” (129). There is no mention of the stabbing of the Egyptian boy by the Maltese national.

Simon focalizes the riot as if it truly *were* about the British Consul. That is, unlike the investigative reporter for *The Daily Telegraph* who concludes that European-on-European violence sparked the massacre, Simon is content with hearsay and spins his yarn accordingly, reporting what he expects to see rather than what he witnesses. Later approaching the Consul’s carriage, he reports that the “the noise grew louder until they turned a corner to find a crowd of Arabs, including, *Simon felt sure*, some black-shrouded Bedawis, jostling around an open

carriage so that it was completely surrounded” (129, emphasis mine). Simon does not see Bedouins jostling the carriage, but he is sure of their presence. His guess is supposedly sufficient to establish guilt. However, it is true that the governor of Alexandria enlisted the help of Bedouins to tarnish the revolution with chaotic lawlessness that included looting and acts of violence against Europeans. Egyptian historian Mahmud al Khafif states that some stories maintain that the governor was commissioned to this task by the Khedive himself (Khafif, Vol. 1, 303-28). The novel’s alliance of violent Bedouins with Urabi depicts the revolution as a violent movement. Simon’s lack of reliability is overshadowed by the narrative techniques in *Guns*.

The narrator uses prolepsis again so that Seymour’s ultimatum, instead of occurring almost a month after the Alexandria massacre, not only precedes it but becomes the reason behind what is presented as unprovoked violence against Europeans. When Simon asks Cookson about the reason behind the Alexandria riots, the latter answers that Seymour has issued an ultimatum to Urabi warning him to stop work on gun emplacements in the forts (134). Cookson adds that he has been attempting to warn other leading Europeans still in Alexandria.

Historically, Seymour issued the ultimatum on July 10, 1882, almost a whole month after the Alexandria riots and twenty-four hours before the bombardment of Alexandria. Commenting on narrative speed, David Herman explains that “longer or shorter duration can cue readers to focus on some narrative details as more salient than others. When a storyteller passes over events quickly or fails to mention them altogether, story-recipients regularly infer those events to be of relatively little importance vis-à-vis the narrative as a whole” (73). The narrator spends close to ten pages dramatizing the attack on Mr. Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria, and his rescue by the trio; Simon, Jenkins, and Ahmed, but skips over the events preceding the British

invasion.

Rearranging incidents heightens the drama of adventure as well as the sense of impending doom. Such manipulation of narrative transforms Egyptians from exploited victims shot at by Europeans, to an angry “mob,” a term that the narrator frequently uses to refer to them. The episode portrays them as passionate, war-like people threatening Europeans; preparing to attack the British war ships anchored at their own shores; continuing to work on their defenses despite several warnings. The detailed description of the trio’s flight from the “mob” to the British Consulate, coupled with Simon’s praise for Mrs. Cookson’s “imperturbability of a colonial officer’s wife” (134) and the resourcefulness of “these women working in distant lands!” (137), presents the British as victims of a lawless people whom they are desperately trying to civilize. More dangerously, it shows Egyptians as the initiators of the Alexandria massacre, and therefore as provokers of the invasion, thus denying Britain’s active role in the aggression.

The novel persists in portraying British and European residents in Egypt as victims while overlooking the effect of the events on Egyptians. When the novel does mention Egyptians who are not evil natives, it features those who side with the British, such as Ahmed and his cousin Fatima, who installs them in her hotel in Alexandria. After watching the shelling of Alexandria from a hill and before rushing to help any Europeans who might be in danger, the trio takes Fatima and her staff back to the hotel which is said to be still standing. Simon declares that “it appeared that the native quarter had been spared any damage” (142). The vague term “appeared” is enough to dismiss concerns about displaced Egyptians. Strangely, Alice’s account of Alexandria after the bombardment corroborates Simon’s view.

The Archive that does not Lie: An Anti-imperialist's View of the Revolution

In *The Guns of El Kebir*, the imperial romance and the romance of the archive blur and merge in a fluidity that does not limit one genre to a set of characters while excluding others. For example, the romance of the archive figures when Simon interviews the American General, Stone Pasha, as well as during his various exchanges with Wolseley. However, this section discusses the genre only in relation to Alice Covington in her capacity as the official researcher in the novel and the person concerned with presenting Egypt's voice to Britain. Simon, in comparison, is more concerned with information as it affects British military tactics.

In the same way that Simon's unconventionality affords him credit, Alice's reputation as an author whose pieces in the Tory newspaper, *The Morning Post*, "upset cabinet ministers" (112) gives credibility to her narration of the situation in Egypt and her ultimate recognition of the necessity of the British occupation. Her role as the only journalist to interview Ahmed Urabi, the leader of the revolution and at that time Minister of War, and Admiral Seymour, executioner of the bombardment of Alexandria, her independence in a traditionalist Victorian society that does not approve of female war correspondents, and, above all, her radicalism, which fuels her desire to work as a foreign correspondent in Egypt, all promise a balanced view of the Egyptian-British situation. Alice, however, gradually moves from fierce dissatisfaction with the way Britain handles Egyptian affairs to conviction in the inevitability of intervention. On her first appearance she seems sincerely pro-Egypt. She is angry with Gladstone and the financiers who have benefited from exploiting Egypt. In her meeting with Charles Cornford, the editor of *The Morning Post*, her "radicalism" is tempered with concerns for Britain's well-being, while in her meeting with Urabi she joins the opposite side.

As a journalist in pursuit of facts, Alice Covington is the hero of the romance of the

archive *par excellence*. Pointing to the importance of research to the plot, Suzanne Keen explains that such romances are usually set in places that include archives such as libraries or country houses and include characters that also feature as researchers. These characters are “endowed with the corporeality and ‘round’ psychology of the realistic novel” (35). They meet obstacles and are rewarded at the end with sex and physical pleasure – seen in the convenient combat death of Alice’s unlikeable husband and her impending marriage to Simon, whom she loves. While, as Keen explains, many authors use the genre to subvert imperial discourse, in this novel the imperial romance woos and, indeed, subjugates Alice by assimilating her into the imperialist narrative by undermining her feminism.¹¹⁷ Her multiple abductions, for example, confine her within the role of the helpless woman whose lack of shrewdness leads her in one instance to travel across the desert with none other than George, the Thomas Cook employee. Before discussing Alice’s journey, however, it is necessary to refer to Hayden White’s critique of history writing.

White emphasizes the literary aspect of history that results from the inability to access the past directly. Because “we can never know *the* story of the past as it actually was, it means that there can be no historiographically uncontaminated past – the past exists for us *only* as it is written up by historians.” White writes that not only is the past elusive, but the raw material used to create it – the archive – is equally elusive, since the archive is created by a person with his/ her own subjectivity. The historian then provides a certain emplotment by “selecting from the evidence that which is significant and that which, when strung together, produces a meaningful explanation” (qtd in Munslow 33, 34, emphasis in original). Therefore, history as a narration of

¹¹⁷ Medalie analyzes how the imperial romance forces its conventions even as twentieth-century authors attempt to subvert it, causing the traditionalist strain to triumph over the revisionist strain. See Medalie.

past events is a literary narrative even at the level of the archive.

I would like to suggest a different way of understanding the term “archive” as it bears on a discussion of Alice as a researcher, or in this context a historian. One can define archive as the location(s) to which Alice travels, the sights she sees, the people she interacts with and the specific persons she interviews. Her archive, therefore, is Egypt itself and, in more specific terms, Urabi and Seymour. Another definition is the archive as the document(s) which she produces by virtue of her role as witness to certain events – for example her reports for *The Morning Post*. Alice assesses events, sights, and persons, filtering her interpretation through her own perceptions or, as in her interviews with Urabi and Seymour, she interacts with a human archive who is contaminated by his understanding of events, who harbors fears, concerns, hopes, and plans for dealing with these situations.

Alice’s interviews with Urabi and Seymour function as two reconstructed archives, the interplay between which, because focalized through a self-professed anti-imperialist who experiences a change of heart, favors the British narrative. Both interviews are crucial to the representation of the situation in Egypt since each figure speaks only once. Occurring after the most poignant use of prolepsis – the premature dramatization of the Alexandria massacre and the bombardment of Alexandria – their respective positions in the novel condemn the revolution. The novel’s bestowal of credibility on Alice, its presentation of the archive as trustworthy, tips the scale towards the imperial romance.

Because Alice’s meeting with Urabi occupies a little over three pages, it carries the semblance of an in-depth report. The interview, constructed from the published details of Urabi’s trial (Wilcox, Author’s 433), poses as an authentic historical archive, corroborating the novel’s verdict on the revolution. Their actual conversation, or what passes for it, lasts about two pages,

and is further interrupted by the narrator to describe Alice's impression of Urabi or her wish that "she had mastered shorthand!" (160). Urabi's answers to her questions occupy a total of three paragraphs. Except for the introductory sentence where he welcomes her and except for her first question, which is quoted in the text, the interview is narrated through omniscient narration that seamlessly slips into FID. In actuality, the reader is twice removed from the original archive – three times counting this fictional representation itself collected through various imperialist sources. Not only does Urabi communicate to Alice through an interpreter, but his voice in the novel is mediated through her. Because the interview continues in FID, it appears as though the reader is still witnessing the interview first-hand since the narrative takes us inside Alice's head.

The use of prolepsis settles the case against Urabi. According to the plot, Alice meets him in Cairo as Simon enters Alexandria for the second time after having accepted Ahmed as a third member of the team. Chronologically speaking, neither the Alexandria massacre nor the bombardment has occurred yet. Alice interviews Urabi *before* these two turbulent incidents. The narrator, however, structures the plot so that this interview anachronistically appears after the massacre and is cut short by news of the bombardment. This use of prolepsis, reporting the massacre and the bombardment of Alexandria before their time, and offering vivid descriptions of purportedly gratuitous violence against Europeans, frame the revolution as an ignorant war on civilization, rendering Urabi's statements to Alice inconsequential.

The interview is structured around three questions: does Urabi wish to depose the Khedive; why is there animosity towards Europeans on the streets of Alexandria; and does Urabi intend to regain the Suez Canal by force if negotiations between Egypt and the Turkish government fail? Confirming Egyptian historical accounts, the fictional Urabi repeats his loyalty

to the Khedive and acknowledges Egypt as an eternal part of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁸ To the second question, he answers that because the demands of the people have not been met, some of “the ordinary people” – the masses – have blamed “high taxation on foreign demands” (159). He adds that French and British residents in Egypt bring in necessary financial expertise that helps Egypt’s economy and that therefore he does not intend to expel them. The irony of the situation stems from the fact that this declaration appears after the vividly dramatized attack on Cookson in Alexandria. Urabi’s answer to the third question, whether he intends to regain the Canal by force, acts as a British ideological justification of the occupation of Egypt by emphasizing the issue as a conflict over the Suez Canal. Allegedly, Urabi says that he will only resort to that under certain unlikely circumstances such as “an attack ... launched on his country by the foreign powers, Britain and France” (160). Urabi’s ambiguous statement, while clearing him of accusations of planning to seize the Canal by force,¹¹⁹ functions as a veiled threat that confirms nineteenth-century newspaper accounts of the revolution as the “Suez Crisis.”

Alice’s reaction to Urabi, delivered through FID, reflects her inability to read him as an archive:

She became increasingly aware that she was dealing with a man who was *probably* sincere in his radical view of the need for greater liberalisation of the Egyptian people but who would stop at nothing to get it, including force, once he had moulded the army to his satisfaction. He was, *after all*, a soldier. Was he being duplicitous in some of his more contradictory answers, or was he merely displaying the ingenuousness of the peasant? Difficult to tell. *A strange and not unlikeable man on the surface, but also a potentially dangerous one.* (160, emphasis mine).

This passage poignantly records the shift in Alice’s thinking. Despite the apparent uncertainty in

¹¹⁸ See Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 111-121 for an account of Urabi’s vow of allegiance to the Khedive following the Abdin demonstration.

¹¹⁹ Sayyid-Marsot mentions “rumors” which claimed that Urabi was planning to use ships loaded with explosives in the Canal (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 22).

her analysis and despite her reliance on assumptions, she decides that Urabi's inscrutability is what makes him possibly dangerous. Her change of heart echoes what many British radicals underwent after the Alexandria massacre. According to al-Sayyid-Marsot, the British cabinet, whose decisions were mainly colored by their view of Irish nationalists, was divided on how to deal with Egyptian nationalists. After the Alexandria riots, however, even radicals were convinced that Urabi was a dictator (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 21-2).

Alice's shift in perspective poses as a result of a shrewd analysis of her contact with the archive. It is as if she can detect dictatorial tendencies in Urabi's sincerity. She confirms her notion of his potential tyranny when, in response to the news that Urabi has restricted civilian travel from Cairo to Alexandria, she addresses a Thomas Cook employee saying " 'but the man is not Khedive yet, is he? Is Egypt a police state now?' " (163). Additionally, because her analysis is positioned to follow the Alexandria massacre this event functions as irrefutable evidence for her conclusion about Urabi. To be sure, her portrayal of Urabi's exercise of power coincides with Rafi's evaluation of the Minister of War. But, whereas Alice attributes his actions to uncurbed ambition, Rafi refers to Urabi's lack of military and political experience.

Further, as seen in the above excerpt, like Simon and Stone, Alice views Urabi through classist terms. Her thoughts identify him as either one of two things: an imposter, or a naïve peasant who believes that he can deliver what the masses demand. In both cases, the revolution becomes a sham. Even at first sight of Urabi, Alice notices his looks: "now in early middle age, he had the build and appearance of a peasant: tall, broad and running to corpulence, with a large fleshy nose and great sweeping moustaches. It was his eyes, however, that held her. They were black, of course, and they seemed to contain a sadness that spoke of hardship and disappointment" (157-58). Apart from the fact that her picture of Urabi is poetically romantic –

for instance, seen in her description of his sad eyes that spoke of hardship – it is quite odd that the first thing she notes about him is his peasant looks. Since Alice’s main objective behind meeting Urabi is learning his account of the events, his social class is irrelevant. Clearly, she does not approach her archive with the necessary detachment required of so-called objective reportage/ history-writing. Her impression of Urabi helps cement the interpretation of the revolution as a class uprising.

Alice’s thoughts on the interview reveal her propensity to use the Other as a tool to advance her career as they highlight the corrupt nature of the archive she produces; her reportage. After the meeting:

[Alice] sat frowning as she went through her infuriatingly inadequate notes and attempted to digest what Arabi had said. In fact, it seemed he had told her nothing particularly new, nothing that had not been written in dozens of newspapers already and analysed so many times. Yet she had *met* him and would be able, under her authoritative if anonymous byline, ‘by Our Special Correspondent in Cairo’, to give her balanced view of the man by reporting his words and, er, yes, adding just a touch of colour. Then there was that sting in Arabi’s tale: the threat of reprisals against the Canal should there be an invasion. Now *that* was something he had not said before. She put her pencil to her teeth and looked out on the multicoloured streets of Cairo and grinned. On only her second day in Egypt she had a – what was it the Americans were now calling an exclusive? Ah yes. Scoop. She now had a scoop after all! (161, emphasis in original).

Alice’s obsession with the newness of her information is expected of a female war correspondent wishing to prove her professional excellence in a male-dominated career and falls within the bounds of career satisfaction characterizing the protagonist of the romance of the archive.¹²⁰ However, the contradiction between giving a “balanced view” and “adding just a touch of colour” to Urabi’s words reflects her divided self. On the one hand, Alice wants to see the Other as a person in his or her own right – to report his/ her struggle fairly but, on the other hand, she is willing to use Urabi and/ or the Egyptian situation to further her career prospects. Despite her

¹²⁰ See Keen 3-27 for characteristics of romances of the archive.

earlier promise to Urabi to “*articulate [his] views as fairly as [she] possibly can*” (157, emphasis in original), she is willing to abuse her authoritative voice by twisting Urabi’s words in order to achieve a desired end – a scoop. The term “tale” in the above quotation, betrays her search for sensational news and points to her conceptualization of the whole story as an oriental, romantic tale in the fashion of the *Arabian Nights*.

The sole function of Seymour’s interview is to justify Britain’s decision to attack Egypt. Although the narrator places Seymour’s meeting after Urabi’s, this arrangement does not constitute a chance for the Other to speak first. Rather, because the bombardment of Alexandria is sandwiched between these two interviews, placing Seymour’s interview after Urabi’s and after the riots at Alexandria, justifies Britain’s subsequent attack on Egypt. The massacre and bombardment of Alexandria emphasize the chaos that governs Egypt, more so because the interval between them is collapsed into a matter of days although, in reality, at least a whole month would have elapsed between Alice’s meeting with Urabi and her interview with Seymour. When the latter cites the Khedive’s compromised position as ruler, the threat to British investments in Egypt, and the danger surrounding British subjects in the country, his statement “‘we will invade to restore order. We shall not be attacking the Egyptian nation’ ” (176), legitimates the occupation.

Although Alice’s focalization of Seymour shows him in ridiculous light – for instance his sometimes inconsistent answers and his constant swearing, or his reluctance to admit that he acted without permission when he decided to attack Egypt¹²¹ – she makes subtle distinctions

¹²¹ For a British view of the circumstances leading to the bombardment of Alexandria, see Seymour. Khafif records that Admiral Seymour received instructions from the British government to use force against the Egyptian forts. See Khafif, Vol. 2, 13-62 on the situation in Egypt and specifically in Alexandria between the Alexandria massacre and the bombardment.

between him and Urabi. Whereas the latter is portrayed as an uncouth peasant who keeps her waiting for one and a half hours, Seymour grants her immediate attendance and offers her tea and “some excellent muffins” which constitute her breakfast (174-75). As if to further confirm the difference between the two men, the narrator mentions that Alice sends prior notification to Seymour implying that she has followed the same procedure with Urabi, who despite that keeps her waiting and ends the meeting brusquely. Despite Alice’s ridicule of Seymour, the novel makes sure to show a human side to the leader of an attack on a sovereign country.

Seymour speaks more than Urabi. While his actual interview answers occupy five short statements, ranging between two to three lines and a sixth longer paragraph justifying the attack on Alexandria, the rest of his utterances are small talk that humanizes him. The novel’s mild criticism of Seymour is consistent with Alice’s portrayal as critic of Empire with a predilection for antagonistic engagement with British officials. This trait manifests in her suggestion that perhaps the Egyptians fortified their defenses because “they felt that your squadron, with all these magnificent ironclads anchored out here off the port with their huge guns, was threatening *them*” (175, emphasis in original). Yet, she shows sympathy to Seymour. After his statement about attacking Egypt to restore order, she ponders his answer: “it was clear that Sir Frederick was uneasy on these issues, so Alice led the conversation back to the bombardment, the attack on the European quarter by the mob and the subsequent looting” (176). Her tact with Seymour, an Admiral, versus her straightforward attitude with Urabi, a War Minister, indicates unequal treatment leaving her without giving the Other a fair hearing.

Alice’s thoughts reflect the discrepancy between the kind of story that the novel professes to recount and the narrative that it advances. The narrator pretends to filter the account through a detached observer, but the truth is that Alice is as unreliable as Simon. In her story to the

Morning Post she starts with Seymour's unauthorized shelling and mentions the 100 Europeans thought to be dead,

she then developed the story into a colour piece on the devastation caused and the terror unleashed when the mob took to the streets, going into detail on the siege of the bank and the intervention of the three unknown men who had organised the defence and then disappeared. On completion, Alice read it through with satisfaction. It was a good piece: a mixture of hard news and feature-style colour. Had she been hard on the Admiral? She went back to the beginning and checked. No. She had let the man's arrogance be reflected in his own words. Let the Tory sub-editors tamper with this at their peril! (178).

Her description of the account as a "good piece" mixing evidence with drama, her use of terms such as "colour piece," "terror unleashed," and "mob," apart from confirming imperialist accounts of Urabi's movement as passionately ignorant, sensationalize the whole affair. Her last sentence about the sub-editors is quite ironic as it implies that their interference will obstruct the truth that Alice has reported. But, the fact is, her strategic, dramatized portrayal of rampant terror overshadows Seymour's blunder.

Because her anti-imperialism is what distinguishes her professionally, Alice figures as a political analyst whose political leanings are highly subjective – one who acknowledges Egyptians' aspirations for independence as justified as long as they do not interfere with Britain's interests – a stance which the novel validates. This is seen, for instance, in her meeting with Cornford where she presents a

well-rehearsed critique of the government's seeming opposition to the Egyptian people's right and proper desire for independence from the Turkish yoke and British and French interference in their affairs. An opposition, indeed, that had impelled it to send a squadron to menace the Egyptians and persuade them to accept the suzerainty of the Turks – the most backward and barbaric of all the imperial powers.

'It's both hypocritical,' she concluded, 'given that this is supposed to be a Liberal administration, pledged to people's rights to self-determination, and unwise, in that it will end in another expensive war – just think of that seemingly "easy" Zulu campaign – and we could lose the very thing we are trying to protect, the Suez Canal, for it would be so easy for its defenders to blow it up or block it.' (113).

Alice worries about two things: embroiling Britain in another expensive war and losing the Suez

Canal, both of which concerns do not consider the ramifications for Egyptians. More important in this critique is her orientalist view which classifies the world according to an imperialist scale where Turks pose as the “most backward and barbaric of all the imperial powers” and the British, by implication, as a superior imperial power. In this sense, Egyptians are justified in their demands because they aim to free themselves from (an)“other” empire.

Alice gives an account of the effects of the British attack on Alexandria in which Egyptians are shown to be the aggressors and Europeans the real victims. Alice neither attempts to assess the losses in the native quarter, nor does she, or anyone else, speak about Egyptians displaced by the attack. Instead, the narrator laconically mentions that Alice arrives in Alexandria with her caravan and makes her way through the native quarter: “the caravan reached the walls of the city as dusk was beginning to fall and wound its way through the native quarter at the edge of the town. Alice left it there and made her way towards the harbour. It was then she saw the results of the bombardment and the fires that had followed it. She sat on her pony and looked around in awe” (167). Alice’s shock at the destruction at the harbor implies that the native quarter is untouched and that its dwellers are safely sheltered from the events.¹²²

At the harbor, she notes the devastation, declaring that the European quarter has suffered the most:

The seaward side of the city looked as though an earthquake had torn it apart. Smoke still rose from the piles of rubble and blackened timber that lined the thoroughfares and marked where substantial houses had once stood. It seemed as though the shells and the conflagrations had followed no consistent pattern, for untouched buildings stood between the demolished houses. Following the little map Mustapha had given her, she made her way towards the European quarter. It was here that the damage was worst. It was clear that fire had been the greatest destroyer here, for the skeletons of the houses remained standing but the walls were smoke-blackened and the remains of the doors lay splintered

¹²² Urabi’s memoirs, Khafif and Rafi all mention general destruction visited upon the whole city without singling out either European or native residences as more tragically affected. Khafif contrasts 2000 Egyptians killed in Alexandria, in addition to the wounded, to five killed British soldiers and 19 wounded (Khafif, Vol. 2, 80).

where they had been thrown. Remnants of furniture were scattered in driveways and on the pavement, and Alice wrote ‘looters’ in her notebook. More horrifying were the red stains that still marked the roadway and showed where bodies had lain. (168).

Alice’s description is vague and impersonal. Her lines speak of rubble and blackened timber in thoroughfares, of untouched buildings that used to stand between now demolished houses without specifying who the residents of these buildings are – whether these buildings belong to Egyptians or Europeans, or whether these thoroughfares also house Egyptians or non-Egyptians. The first part of Alice’s description is free of the humanizing terms that characterize her later account of the European quarter with its allusions to skeletons of houses, remains of doors, and stains left by dead bodies.

Whatever concern Alice has harbored for Egyptians is outweighed by her professional aspirations. The destruction of Alexandria is a mere inconvenience for her, since she cannot move easily through the country to report on events. As if to follow up on Simon’s elaborate dramatization of the defense of the Anglo-Egyptian bank, a highly dramatized episode, the narrator sends her to the same bank to further portray the effects of the bombardment on them. Through FID, the narrator evokes sympathy for Europeans displaced by the bombing by painting a picture of compassionate sharing of food and liquor. Such sympathetic descriptions of Europeans as innocent victims of the shelling might very well represent true cases. Yet the exclusion of Egyptian victims of the same event emphasizes the shift in Alice’s understanding, and helps portray the revolution in Egypt as the work of the rabble whose goal is seizing power and spreading anarchy.

Conclusion: The Justice of Empire

As Simon looks upon the bodies of the dead at the battle of Tal el Kebir, he ponders “so

many lives lost, to preserve ... what? The ownership of a few miles of waterway carved out of sand dunes [the Suez Canal]? The restoration of stability to a country unsettled by foreign domination? Well, at least Ahmed seemed to think it had all been worthwhile” (419). Simon’s doubt, though at first seeming to interrogate the validity of imperial war, serves not so much a question, but as a confirmation of the “truth” that *Guns* has offered through the imperial romance and the romance of the archive. Closure and the existence of truth characterize romances of the archives, which “create temporarily risky worlds in which the character – and by extension the reader – can seek and find that truth” (Keen 3-27). Alice, the anti-imperialist researcher, finds her truth when she recognizes the danger of Egyptians once in power. Siding with Britain, she deems the revolution anarchic, accepting the necessity of British intervention.

As such, Simon’s question echoes the rhetorical question that functions as a subtitle to *Guns*: “Can the redcoats defy death under a desert sun?” This question anticipates other reassuring subheadings that emphasize the strength and valor of British soldiers. For example, Wilcox’s *Siege of Khartoum* (2009) wonders “Can one man stop a massacre?” while *The Shangani Patrol* (2010) asks “Can even the bravest survive?” At a time when Britain’s power has significantly dwindled in comparison to the United States, the subheadings are at once diffident questions and confident statements about Britain’s might. Despite *Guns*’ willingness to imagine an alternative narrative – albeit compromised – to strict Victorian gender roles, it denies the existence of enlightened Egyptian nationalism. Thus, in the same way that the imperial romance forces upon Alice the role of the damsel in distress, the genre imposes its conventions, as a result of which Alice succumbs to the hegemonic discourse of Empire. Her submission to imperial romance indicates submission to social order where her freedom is limited. Simon, although he remains unconventional until the end, learns that the social order has been justified

in intervening in Egypt. Together, Alice and Simon achieve an epiphany each in an individual *Bildungsroman* where they realize that they should have trusted their social order.

Chapter Four: Destroying the Archive:

Towards One-Thousand-and-One Identities in Bahaa Taher's *Sunset Oasis*

Introduction

One of the founding members of the political group *Kefaya* (Enough) founded in 2004 to protest Hosni Mubarak's long rule and the possible inheritance of his son Gamal of the presidency, Bahaa Taher was among the first ardent supporters of Egypt's 2011 Revolution. Although his ailing health prevented him from regular participation in the *Tahrir Square* demonstrations, his enthusiasm was inspired by the activism which he started earlier in his life. Taher recalls that the first big demonstration calling for the fall of King Farouk and his repatriation to Turkey came out of his secondary school. When the 1952 Coup occurred, Taher was about to start his first year at the university. He was overjoyed at the news of the revolution.¹²³ Even though the King was in Alexandria at the time, Taher and other Egyptians rushed to Abdin Palace, which was surrounded by army tanks. The palace evoked images of the Urabi Revolution and, in Taher's imagination, spectators were thinking of Ahmed Urabi the whole time – picturing him in Abdin Square, the Khedive¹²⁴ telling him, “you are only our slaves.” Standing there, he felt as if he and the multitudes were confronting Khedive Tawfiq. Taher explains that, for his generation, the history of Egypt was never part of the past. Speaking in 2004, the author laments the absence of this feeling in Egyptian contemporary life (Hussein, A. 62-3).

For Taher, history is not dead, nor is it confined to past events. It extends into the present

¹²³ The main figures of the coup first referred to it as a coup, then as a movement. Later, when they witnessed the Egyptian people's support, they termed it a revolution. See Naguib. Until today, the 1952 Coup is generally referred to as a revolution in Egypt.

¹²⁴ Khedive is a Turkish title meaning Viceroy.

and informs the future. For this reason, the author visits various historical moments in his works (Hussein, A. 125-27). The past also haunts Mahmoud Abd el Zahir, the chief of police whose story the novel follows. Tormented by his decision to testify against the Urabi Revolution after the British occupation, Mahmoud spends the rest of his life trying to understand why he has betrayed Egypt. Mahmoud occupies various contradictory positions. He is simultaneously nationalist and collaborator, colonized and colonizer, hero and coward, victim and oppressor. Preferring safety to prison, and job security to continued support of the revolution, he denounced Urabi and his fellow revolutionaries as mutineers. Twenty years later, he is still obsessed with the past, trying to come to terms with his decision.

In this chapter I argue that *Sunset Oasis* (2006) revisits the imperial romance, the *Bildungsroman* and the romance of the nation in order to stage an open-ended encounter with history. The imperial romance focuses on a male protagonist having adventures in exotic lands and conquering inferior natives while the *Bildungsroman* marks the protagonist's reconciliation with the European social order as the moment of maturity. Both confirm Europe as the standard of civilization and equate it with modernity. The romance of the nation, despite its hope and dream of creating a new collective identity that counters western imperialism with an indigenous identity, typically projects a male middle-class one.

In the end, the novel favors a more flexible narrative that is inspired equally by Irish folktale tradition and the *One Thousand and One Nights*, both of which accommodate the various ethnic and gender fragments that make up the nation. These two traditions are subaltern articulations whose flexibility and resistance to closure reflect the messiness of history. To contextualize the events of the novel, the chapter begins with a history of the Urabi Revolution, and proceeds to a biography of Taher, then, it analyzes the novel's interrogation of the imperial

romance and the *Bildungsroman* before it finally addresses its endorsement of folktale tradition as the genre which gives voice to the disempowered.

The Urabi Revolution: Historical Background

Accounts of the 1881-1882 Urabi Revolution abound, with imperialist narratives dismissing it as a chaotic movement born out of religious fervor, or reducing it to the “Urabi Revolt” and the “Suez Crisis” (Cole 14), and other narratives exploring various political and economic reasons behind it.¹²⁵ Among the revolution’s many triggers, the most commonly cited are: favoritism shown to Turco-Circassian and Albanian officers by the Circassian Minister of War, Uthman Rifky, proliferation of Europeans and European influence in the government, dire economic conditions, and the absence of a parliamentary life.¹²⁶

It was mostly economic conditions that precipitated the events. Egypt had gone bankrupt in 1876 and, in 1879, it emerged out of Khedive Ismail’s reign owing 90 million Egyptian pounds in debt (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 1). Following the country’s bankruptcy, an International Commission for Public Debt was established. The commission had two presiding European Controllers General, in addition to British, French, and other European members¹²⁷ who held the right to attend and participate in all Cabinet meetings as counselors (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 49), exercised more power and earned higher salaries than ministers. Not only did the number of European employees in the government increase, but these employees also received huge salaries. British historian and political journalist Peter Mansfield states that the number of

¹²⁵ Some of these accounts are by British sympathizers such as Blunt and Keay.

¹²⁶ For a comprehensive review of political, economic, and social reasons behind the revolution, see Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 75-87. For other economic and political reasons, see Cole 274.

¹²⁷ For details on the changes to the committee see Wesseling 45-46. See also Cromer.

Europeans in the Egyptian civil service rose to 534 between 1876 and 1879. According to Mansfield, European officials in 1878 earned salaries that reached thousands of pounds while Egyptian civil servants, whose payment was in arrears, earned trifling sums. Further, under the Law of Capitulations over 100,000 foreign residents in Egypt paid no taxes “ ‘at a time when the fellahin [peasants] were being flogged to disgorge their last piastre’ ” (Mansfield 14-21).

The revolution was marked by two main events: the Qasr el Nil incident, taking place on February 1, 1881, and the Abdin Palace demonstrations, occurring on September 9, 1881. The first incident mainly protested the Minister of War’s policies in the army. Whereas Khedive Said (r. 1854-1863) had created opportunities for Egyptian officers to advance in the military, conditions changed under his successors, Ismail and Tawfiq, as favoritism towards Turco-Circassians returned. Under Said, Ahmed Urabi, the leader of the 1881-82 Revolution, received promotions in the military but during Ismail’s reign, his promotion was frozen for 19 years while junior Turco-Circassian officers bypassed him. Under Tawfiq, Rifky, the Minister of War, continued this policy and during his tenure, inadequate Turco-Circassian officers were promoted above more efficient Egyptians, Egyptian officers were denied the right to a fair trial, demoted or banished to the Sudan upon false charges (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 71-5).

The Qasr el Nil demonstration resulted from Rifky’s decision to replace two Egyptian officers with Circassians. With the support of many officers, Urabi penned a petition to the Prime Minister demanding Rifky’s removal from office (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 98-9). On February 1, 1881, Rifky summoned the officers to the Cabinet headquarters in Qasr el Nil Palace, ostensibly to discuss the wedding arrangements of the Khedive’s sister. Upon their arrival, the officers were court-martialed and imprisoned. Suspicious of the intent behind the invitation, other military commanders had followed Urabi and his fellow officers from afar. When they protested, the

Khedive pardoned Urabi and his companions, dismissed Rifky, who had escaped through a window, and appointed Mahmoud Pasha Sami el Baroudi Minister of War (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 103-08). Out of this incident grew a petition from all regiments to improve the conditions of military officers, which the Cabinet approved, and in a party celebrating the increase in officers' pay Urabi praised these Khedival reforms, vowing allegiance to him (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 113-21). However, twentieth-century Egyptian historian Abdel Rahman al Rafi believes that the government's laxity in carrying out reforms led to the Abdin demonstrations, the second major incident in the Urabi Revolution (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 135).

The Abdin demonstrations were caused, among other things, by the Khedive's decision to remove el Baroudi from the Ministry of War and appoint his own in-law, Dawud Pasha Yakan.¹²⁸ Yakan restricted the Urabists'¹²⁹ movements banning public and private meetings, threatening arrest if two or more officers were found together, using spies to ensure the execution of his orders, and sometimes surprising regiment headquarters with unscheduled visits (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 128-30). In a manner that anticipates the 1919 Revolution,¹³⁰ Egyptians from various parts and strata of Egypt, including religious scholars, the elite, village leaders, and Arab Sheikhs, who all recognized the urgency of reform, signed documents delegating Urabi to represent the nation. Urabi demanded a parliament and an end to Riyadh's government – the Prime Minister who had European leanings and preferred absolute rule. Through the Minister of War, Urabi had notified Khedive Tawfiq of their intentions to demonstrate at the Abdin Palace parade grounds. He had also sent a note to foreign consuls reassuring them of the safety of their

¹²⁸ For accounts of unrest in the military during the period between the Qasr el Nil and the Abdin incidents, see Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 121-28.

¹²⁹ The term referred to Urabi's supporters in the army.

¹³⁰ See Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt's*.

citizens, stating that the matter only concerned Egypt's domestic affairs (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 134-37).

On September 9, 1881, Urabi and all Cairo regiment leaders met at Abdin parade grounds in order to present their demands to the Khedive: the dissolution of Riyadh's cabinet, the establishment of a parliament and an increase in the number of military personnel to comply with an earlier *firman* (edict) fixing the number at 18,000. From the outskirts of Abdin square and neighboring houses, the general public watched this huge event that included around 4000 officers with their arms and artillery as well as Khedive Tawfiq's personal guards, who deserted him to join protestors. As Tawfiq confronted the demonstrators, he was joined by Cookson, the British Consul in Alexandria who advised him to shoot Urabi, the British Controller-General and some guards (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 135-42). The event was resolved with the appointment of Sherif Pasha as Prime Minister. Sherif Pasha had started some reforms under Khedive Ismail towards the end of whose reign he had inaugurated parliamentary rule in Egypt by forming a national Ministry that included no European ministers (Rafi, "Preface" 15) and drafting a constitution in 1879. However, Ismail's deposition in 1879 by British, French, and other foreign powers precluded the birth of the constitution (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 10, Cole 12-13).

Assessments of the Urabi Revolution vary, reflecting the positioning and political leanings of their authors. While imperialist accounts attribute it to ignorance and religious fanaticism, sympathetic views recognize the plight of Egyptians. Alfred Milner, a nineteenth-century British statesman and colonial administrator, describes Urabi and his fellow revolutionaries as "feeble agitators" and their followers as an "ignorant populace" (18). He depicts the revolution as an irrational opposition to the "reform, education, and progress" which the British were allegedly bringing about. Casting the events in terms of a crusade, he states that

“the ever-smouldering hatred of Moslem for Copt had been stirred into flame” (16-17), portraying the revolution as a threat bringing a “reign of blank barbarism” (13). Employing a civilizational narrative, he contrasts benign European Christianity with the supposed bloody fanaticism of the Urabi Revolution declaring that Britain undertook the harder task of restoring order from within, by civilizing and reforming, rather than simply restoring it from without with the aid of an army: “for any civilized and Christian Power the answer could not be doubtful” (21-2).

Nineteenth-century journalist, historian, and British diplomat, Valentine Chirol calls the revolution a military mutiny, dismissing the existence of nationalist feeling and maintaining that the British occupation of Egypt was necessary for the peace of Europe and for stability in Egypt (65, 44-5). Citing agrarian and other British reforms, Chirol compares the “abject misery of pre-occupation days to the abounding prosperity of the present time” (70-7). Twentieth-century Algerian-French orientalist, Jacques Berque, depicts Urabi as a romantic hero who preferred his personal interests to military or parliamentary goals. He describes the revolution as a frenzied movement initiated by peasants in the Egyptian Delta and turning into uncontrollable fanatical violence against Christians inspiring other urban “disturbances.” Some of the words that Berque uses in association with the revolution are “frenzied,” “zeal,” “resentment,” “undisciplined,” and “demagogic,” to which he adds the leaders’ “incapacity” vis-à-vis the “forces they had rashly aroused” (118-21).

However, there existed British accounts that viewed Urabi as a political leader representing the Egyptian people and putting forth national rather than personal demands. One such voice was J. Seymour Keay, a nineteenth-century Scottish Member of Parliament and banker, who after managing banks in India resigned to support native capitalism and whose

actions posed a threat to Anglo-Indian interests. Keay argues that the British and French Powers were focused on protecting their financial interests in Egypt for which reason the British presented Urabi as a villain (79). Repudiating the reports of prosperity which figures such as Chirol allude to, Keay states that laws such as the Law of Liquidation cheated peasants out of their money. Yet, despite that, he elaborates, in 1880 the British Consul General asked his employees to produce fictional narratives that reassured the British public that the British intervention in Egypt helped improve the living situation for peasants, who were no longer flogged to pay taxes, but instead paid them of their own volition (Keay 48-9).

Wilfred Scawen Blunt, a nineteenth-century English poet, an anti-imperialist and a personal friend of Urabi, espoused the causes of Algeria, Egypt, Ireland, and India and was imprisoned in Ireland for two months between 1875-6. For some time Blunt became the “unofficial adviser” to *al Hizb al-Watani*, the National Party Urabi had formed, negotiating between them, on the one hand, and the British side, on the other hand. Blunt records the support that Urabi received from Egyptians belonging to all religions – Muslims, Christians and Jews – all parties and classes. He adds that Europeans close to the nationalist struggle, foreigners, consuls and even reactionary Turks celebrated the reforms which the revolution instituted (qtd in Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 155-57).¹³¹ Despite his detractors dismissal of him, Mansfield explains, Blunt was such a powerful player in the events that he was discussed in the House of Commons and after the British occupation of Egypt he was barred from entering Egypt for three years (Mansfield 21-2).

Rafi admits that the revolution started as a set of military demands before it developed

¹³¹ See Blunt for his account of the Urabi Revolution, the occupation of Egypt and his efforts to negotiate with the British government on behalf of Egypt.

into a bigger movement, demanding constitutional rule and gaining support from various classes of Egyptian society (Rafi, "Preface" 9). However, he emphasizes that Urabi's demands echoed those of the nation. Even though these demands were mainly concerned with the military, Egyptians sympathized with them since many families had members in the military (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 131-34). To economic, social and political reasons, Rafi credits the enlightenment movement started by Mohammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt in the early 19th century, with a desire among the educated classes for freedom and constitutional life, openness to literature and the sciences and the flourishing of the press,¹³² to which the teachings of Gamal el Din al Afghani, an Afghani-Muslim religious scholar, contributed (Rafi, *al-Thawrah* 75-87).¹³³

However, it was the Alexandria massacre of June 11, 1882 that provided Britain with the perfect excuse to invade Egypt in order to rescue the country from what Milner terms "further violence, not only to all Europeans, but to all Christians" (14). The massacre rose out of a misunderstanding between an Egyptian donkey-boy and a Maltese national and ended with the latter stabbing the former.¹³⁴ Egyptians sided with the Egyptian boy while Europeans fired guns and rifles from the upper windows of houses (Chamberlain 14). Although many Europeans were killed by Maltese and Greek bullets (The Daily Telegraph 5) imperialist reports by the contemporary British military historian Michael Barthorp and the British Consul-General of Egypt Edward Malet, attribute the events to religious fanaticism claiming them to be the work of Urabi despite the absence of evidence (Barthorp 32, Malet 431-32). Contemporary Egyptian historian, Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, writes that Urabi had no knowledge of the Alexandria

¹³² Taher records that under Khedive Ismail there were ten unofficial newspapers representing different schools of thought (Taher, *Abnaa* 42).

¹³³ Although Khedive Tawfiq banished al Afghani at the beginning of his reign, Afghani's teachings about freedom remained highly influential.

¹³⁴ It is quite interesting that twentieth-century Egyptian historian Mahmud al Khafif writes that the Maltese who killed the Egyptian donkey-boy was a brother of Cookson's, the British Consul's, servant (Khafif, Vol. 1, 321).

riots and when he did learn about them he sent troops to quell them. She goes on to say that up until this point, the British Cabinet had been divided on how to deal with nationalists and its decisions mainly colored by its members' views of Irish nationalists. However, after the Alexandria riots even radicals were convinced that Urabi was a dictator (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 21-2).

On July 11, 1882 the British bombard Alexandria and on September 13, 1882, General Sir Garnet Wolseley defeated General Urabi in the battle of Tal al-Kabir, which lasted around 40 minutes (Long, "Introduction" 1). Twentieth-century Egyptian historian Mahmud al Khafif lists 2000 Egyptians killed in Alexandria, in addition to the wounded, compared to five British soldiers killed and 19 wounded. Fires went on in Alexandria for several days after the bombardment. Although the British blamed the fires on Urabi, later investigation found him innocent (Khafif, Vol. 2, 80-5). Urabi surrendered to the British in order to save Egyptian lives (Khafif, Vol. 2, 229-30) while all leaders of the revolution were exiled and minor players were either in prison or awaited judgment or trial. Sayyid-Marsot explains that Urabi pled guilty to rebellion after his negotiations with the British (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 36, 30).¹³⁵

Bahaa Taher: a Contextualization

Bahaa Taher's life presents a curious case of an ongoing relationship with history. In 1935 he was born in Giza to an upper-Egyptian family from Karnak, Luxor. He entered university in 1952, the year of the Coup d'état and in 1956, a date that marks the Tripartite

¹³⁵ On Urabi's trial see al Khafif, Vol. 2, 270-309. See also Broadly. For the preparations for the trial see Blunt 417-48 and 449-65 on the deal made with Urabi.

Aggression on Egypt,¹³⁶ the author received his Bachelor's degree in History. He earned a graduate diploma in Modern History in 1965 and another graduate diploma in Mass Communications in 1973. Between 1955 and 1966 Taher worked as translator; radio announcer, program planner and director; as well as Drama lecturer. His career in the radio continued until the mid-1970s (Ubaidallah, 193-4), at which time his works were banned from publication under the Sadat era restrictions over nationalist intellectuals (Hussein, A. 116). Ironically, it was not the State, but Taher's fellow intellectuals, who ostracized him forcing him to leave Egypt (Taher, "Introduction" 23). In 1981 he settled in Geneva where he worked as a translator for the United Nations for 14 years until his retirement in the mid-1990s. Taher now lives in Cairo.

Taher is a prolific writer but one who does not publish much. After finishing a work, he prefers to wait for a while, sometimes even waiting ten years before publishing it (Hussein, A. 113). His publications include several short story collections, novels, and studies on drama, radio, culture and liberty, and the novel, all published between 1972 and 2009. He translated Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* and Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* and is the recipient of several awards including Egypt's highest literary award, The State Award of Merit in Literature in 1998, the Italian Giuseppe Acerbi Prize for his novel *Aunt Safiyya and the Monastery* (1991) in 2000, The International Cavafi Award in 2001 (Ubaidallah 193-4) and, more recently in 2008, the inaugural International Prize for Arabic Fiction for *Sunset Oasis*.

History has been part of Taher's life since childhood. As an elementary school student he followed World War II in the newspapers, participated in his secondary school's Historical Society and in his final year won fourth place in a history competition, thus earning a university

¹³⁶ England, France, and Israel invaded Egypt in 1956 in retaliation for Gamal Abdel Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal earlier the same year.

scholarship (Hussein, A. 61). His secondary school, al Saidiyya, was immersed in current events with a student body whose diverse interests accommodated *Wafdists*,¹³⁷ Muslim Brotherhood adherents, and communists. He recalls that, at the risk of losing their jobs, some teachers instructed students in nationalism as if it were part of the curriculum. One particular history teacher taught students to take risks for the sake of the nation and blamed those who missed protests. The author remembers that the police surrounded al Saidiyya School and Cairo University. But, he adds, most students, who constituted the majority of demonstrators, were like him. That is, despite their admiration of el Nahhas Pasha, the Prime Minister, and despite their advocacy of socialist slogans they did not join a particular party (Taher, "Introduction" 13).

Taher attributes this activism to their teachers who taught them that homeland came before partisanship. He explains that nationalist interest was inclusive in the 1940s, extending to the whole Arab world. For instance, Taher and fellow students protested French crimes in Tunisia and Algeria, British policies in Iraq and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. They were beaten by police clubs numerous times and at other times they heard gunshots. When el Nahhas Pasha became Prime Minister in 1950, however, demonstrators enjoyed relative safety and were not harassed unless they shouted out against the king (Taher, "Introduction" 13).

The 1952 Coup generated dichotomous feelings in Taher and other Egyptians. On the one hand, they supported its resistance to British domination but, on the other hand, they denounced its totalitarianism and oppressive measures, such as the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Egyptians were happy because they had participated in this revolution when they went on protests against the king. But, Taher declares, the harmony between students and the revolution was a short-lived honeymoon. Their feelings oscillated between love for the revolution and fear

¹³⁷ *Wafdists* are political adherents of the *Wafd* Party, the party born out and representative of the 1919 Revolution.

and hatred of it, particularly when the Revolution Council tried Egyptians or arrested them and placed them in concentration camps. Taher asserts that nationalist conquests coincided with infringements on individual freedoms and human rights. After ousting the King, introducing agrarian reforms that put an end to feudalism, and eliminating corruption and bribery in the government, it became clear that the new government did not want to share power with population. Demonstrations broke out denouncing the rule of the *Bikbashis*¹³⁸ and soldiers beat the protestors. This ambivalence towards the revolution and attempts to address this feeling were a main influence in the writings of Taher and his generation (Taher, "Introduction" 14-15).

For instance, in his last year of college and while working for the Information Service, he hid his writing activities to avoid being commissioned to write propaganda literature. Taher relates that by the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Revolution had developed into a set of ideological institutions (Taher, "Introduction" 15, 17). During these years, he worked in *Soat al Arab*, a radio station "fulfilling the State's plans to bolster Arab nationalism and resistance to colonialism." To avoid betraying himself, he pondered resignation when Nasser ordered the channel to attack Abd al Karim Qasim, the Iraqi Prime Minister, after Nasser's disagreement with the Iraqi leader. Taher viewed the shift from fighting colonialism to fighting a fellow Arab nation as a form of self-betrayal (Hussein, A. 81). One sees a re-enactment of this situation in *Sunset Oasis*, but where Taher prefers exile, the protagonist accepts to be redefined by the state.

Taher attributes the degeneration of cultural life in Egypt to the state's ostracism of the intellectuals, by describing them as communists or atheists. In time, the general public viewed the intelligentsia with suspicion and, as a result, cultural awareness deteriorated because the state replaced real leading thinkers with its own supporters. In this environment views that opposed

¹³⁸ *Bikbashi* is a Turco-Egyptian military rank equivalent to lieutenant colonel. The term is now obsolete.

free thinking became popular (Taher, *Abnaa* 81-2). Then, intellectuals started policing each other. The Literature of the sixties is a case in point. Characterized by rebellion, literary works in the sixties indirectly advocated change, pointing to a schism both in the nation and the self. Taher adds that although these works did not directly address politics, but rather remained steeped in individualism evoking romanticism, critics considered them more dangerous than political works. Critics hurled various accusations at these authors urging the state to discriminate against them (Taher, "Introduction" 22-3).

What followed, Taher elaborates, was the destruction of intellectual integrity. The state did not give the chance for rising talents to join the group of established writers whose works it sanctioned. Such a field became restricted to Tawfiq al Hakim, Naguib Mahfouz, and Youssef Idriss afterwards. The same set of writers monopolized the newspapers, excluding new blood. First, this occasioned an absence of dialogue between these writers and new ones and second, it necessitated change to happen outside these ideologically sanctioned institutions. For instance, in the early sixties opportunities for new writers were restricted to evening papers with limited circulation, limited literary pages in a few magazines as well as radio broadcast station (Taher, "Introduction" 18-19).

The figure of the intellectual was consistently compromised after the revolution, barring the development of a healthy cultural life. Taher believes that intellectual leadership does not necessarily mean appointing the intelligentsia in high positions, but rather giving them the opportunity to speak and listening to them. Rather than a free-thinking figure, the model intellectual became a government employee: in other words the intellectual who is the purveyor of the ruling ideology and not the critic of it. Taher adds that Sadat took the policy to new heights by attacking the intellectuals and describing them as communists and Gnostics. At the

beginning of his rule he closed all magazines and serious theater and later, in response to a letter where the intelligentsia asked him for a clear plan to wipe the effects of the Israeli aggression, he expelled several figures from office, among whom were authors Tawfiq al Hakim and Naguib Mahfouz (Taher, *Abnaa* 78-9).

Taher explains that, depending on the person or party in power, intellectuals were accused of embracing what was portrayed as malicious ideologies, and identified as either existentialists, communists, anarchists, or reactionaries. For example, when the Socialist Party was in power advocating positivist thinking, these writers were described as negative existentialists. Later, after the Socialist Party was liquidated, writers were described as communists, and pro-totalitarianism. These attacks succeeded in excluding Taher from work in the Egyptian broadcast system and in banning him from publishing in the mid-Seventies. Ironically, the state had nothing to do with it, since the security forces knew exactly people's political views. It was fellow writers advocating freedom of thought who, ironically enough, made Taher an outcast. Consequently, he had to look for work outside Egypt and in the early 80s he left for Geneva to work as a translator at the United Nations (Taher, "Introduction" 22-3).¹³⁹

Imperial Adventures: Catherine as Historian

Set in 1902 Egypt – twenty years into the British occupation, *Sunset Oasis* follows the fictional character Mahmoud Abd el Zahir who is appointed Chief of Police in the Siwa Oasis in Egypt's Western Desert close to the Libyan border. Mahmoud is to replace the former chief of police whom the Siwans have killed. Throughout the novel he continually re-evaluates his decision to give up his allegiance to Urabi's cause rather than face imprisonment or exile. His

¹³⁹ For a study of Baha Taher's fiction between 1981 and 1995, see Mamkigh.

Irish wife, Catherine, is intent on discovering a link to Alexander the Great in Siwa. Mahmoud's regret over the choices he has made, in addition to his dissatisfaction with his wife's defiant insistence on roaming the village and incurring the enmity of the Siwans, finally lead him to kill himself.

Through Catherine, the amateur Irish historian, the novel undermines the imperial romance and identifies the objective historian as a myth. Two incidents highlight Catherine's inflexibility as a historian: First, her encounter with Maleeka, the Siwan young woman who seeks friendship outside her community and, second, the means by which Catherine reaches her groundbreaking discovery about Alexander the Great. Her experience in Egypt, her inability to assess the events in which she is involved and her reliance on luck and intuition in the absence of evidence, highlight her tendency to force pre-formulated narratives on a slippery past. Although she distances herself from her late father, the amateur historian for whom Eastern people pose as a mere "repository of history" (19), the novel exposes her lack of credibility not in the least because Fiona later reveals that their father " 'like many Irish of his time, considered Urabi Basha¹⁴⁰ a hero for resisting the British occupation of his country. His picture hung in his study and it remained there for a long time' " (235). In fact, Catherine approaches Egypt with the hubris of an orientalist, believing that her knowledge of Egyptian history, her familiarity with the ancient Egyptian and Arabic languages and mere interest in the culture will guarantee her speedy access to the community.

Edward W. Said's now classic study, *Orientalism*, explains how the 18th and 19th-century French and British writing on the Near East was affected by as well as shaped views of the inhabitants of the area, producing what came to be known as the discourse of orientalism.

¹⁴⁰ Basha is the Egyptian pronunciation of Pasha.

Orientalist writing reduced East and West to a sum of traits existing in a binary opposition where East – the Other – was characterized by ignorance, adherence to primitive or meaningless traditions, whether religious or societal, proneness to childish passion and, consequently, incapability of democratic rule. In contrast, stood the West – the Self – particularly Britain and France, whose knowledge, rejection of tradition in favor of scientific reasoning, level-headedness and rational thinking enabled a sound political life. Thus, Western norms became standardized ways of living, while Eastern life was represented as a deviation. This, however, did not prevent orientalists from assigning the Other contradictory roles. For example, Eastern people were described as at once childish and wise, or sexually depraved and fanatical. Such depictions often served Western interests in the region by justifying so-called civilizational projects (Said). The imperial romance both fed and was sustained by orientalist discourse to the extent that Martin Green asserts that for all English writers adventure narrative became the literary counterpart to Empire (Green, *Dreams* 37) .

The imperial romance relies on a classification of space into ordinary and exotic; orderly and wild; civilized and savage, controlled and sexual (Dryden, “Introduction” 1-2). The hero, usually a white male, is a manly figure who travels from familiar, civilized, and structured English society to exotic, savage, and chaotic lands. He experiences a series of adventures, imposes order and civilization, and triumphs over less fortunate natives, who ultimately acknowledge his racial superiority (McClure, “Introduction” 2). Thus, the genre presupposes not only a male protagonist, but also passive natives who submit to the hero’s superior, civilizing powers.

First, Catherine is undermined in the narrative because the Siwans actively resist her. They close their doors in her face and children walk away when she addresses them. Even the

women do not welcome her in their circles. While Siwans do not welcome outsiders, even Egyptians from outside their community, they immediately embrace her sister, Fiona, when she arrives at the Oasis. Second, despite her claims to view the Other, or Egyptians, as individuals, Catherine adopts the traditional view of an imperialist protagonist who expects the natives to submit to superior European knowledge. With the hubris of an orientalist historian, she imagines Siwa and the Siwans to be longingly awaiting her expertise to uncover hidden information about their past. She views the place, the people, history and geography in mythological terms. In her mind, her love of the place and knowledge of Siwa will win the heart of the Siwans who will immediately recognize her worth. Catherine plans to “tame” the Siwans (37), imagining their land as a passive female waiting to be penetrated:

I truly long to see all that and understand it and I am convinced that the oasis will meet my longing with its own. I don't suppose anyone like me has visited it. All those who visited it before me were content to describe its ancient ruins from the outside, and some of them drew them, but which of those could read the language of the Ancient Egyptians or of the Greeks? Even those who copied the carvings from the temples made horrible mistakes, because they copied the hieroglyphs as though they were just pictures. I could tell the mistakes just by looking at them. Only I am capable of revealing your secrets, Siwa! (50).

Catherine fashions herself as the ultimate scholar who will force the land to submit to her, be penetrated by her, and reveal its secrets to her.

In the process, the Siwans become a tool that could either aid or hinder her imperial quest. With a few exceptions, she paints them as either mute subjects or as a curious people babbling an incomprehensible language. In her imagination they are an ignorant people whose resistance to her friendship threatens the success of her project. Her attempts to form friendships with them are inspired by her belief that having lived among the ruins for a while they could act as her native informants. Because they refuse to cooperate, she perceives them as perversely and obstinately hindering the process of knowledge and enlightenment.

For instance, when Catherine goes to the Umm Ebeida temple to search for clues about Alexander the Great, she regrets that she cannot communicate with the young Siwan boy in charge of the donkeys; “I could teach him and make him my friend, and he could guide me to places I didn’t know about. His bright eyes spoke of intelligence, but he himself didn’t utter a word” (101). Catherine is only interested in the boy’s capacity as a facilitator of discovery. Although she sees him as intelligent he is not clever enough because, like the other Siwans, he has chosen to ignore her. When she points to a “beautifully shaped” image of Isis and asks him “‘Nice?’ ” his response is shockingly fanatical: his “ ‘face darkened as he snatched his hand violently from [Catherine’s]. Then he spat on the image, saying angrily, ‘Unbelievers!’ ” (102). Catherine’s reaction represents Siwans as recalcitrant; “ ‘ I continued to stand there, overwhelmed by frustration and embarrassment at myself ... It was hopeless. No one was going to extend a hand to me. I apologize, my dear Isis, for this indignity. I apologize, Alexander. I don’t know where or how to begin” (102).

Catherine’s reaction to the boy’s behavior reveals her orientalist stance. Although Irish herself, she extends imperial attitudes in her judgment of the Siwans. For example, she regards their traditional remedies as primitive medicine even after they cure her husband’s petty officer, Ibraheem, and save him from having to have his leg amputated. Later, she declares that if he has been cured by “primitive medicine” then his injury must have not been serious to begin with. Additionally, when she finds out that the Siwans have put one of the temples to practical use for housing, turning the Holy of the Holies into a kitchen, she does not consider the value, use, or practicality of ruins to a community that can barely survive. Rather, she sees in their action evidence of unforgivable ignorance.

Catherine’s hopes of penetrating Siwa are invested with sexual overtones born out of her

exoticization and sexualization of Mahmoud as a virile male Other. Consequently, she arrives in Siwa predisposed to view the location through a sexualized lens, which sets the stage for her encounter with Maleeka. When she first meets Mahmoud, Catherine notes his dignified deportment. On the Nile boat to Aswan she notices his hostile look which she contrasts to the submissive, yet lascivious looks that other Egyptian officers have given her (18). She imagines Mahmoud's fez a "pharaonic crown on his head, his stern face with its wide black eyes and regular features the face of a real king transferred from the walls of a temple to the deck" (14) and after their marriage declares that he is also king in lovemaking (16). Indeed, Egypt for Catherine is a place where she experiences a sexual awakening after a disappointing first marriage:

I only really discovered my body with Mahmoud, after the failed attempts with Michael. With Mahmoud, I came to know that the practice of love is a sublime moment in which two bodies fly together, leaving the world's orbit for a pleasure that is new every time. A unique grace would descend, as though each occasion were the first, and as though that final gasp were a new birth, or a new resurrection – something I never knew with Michael, something utterly different from the stickiness of the sweat, the revulsion and the tension of a body desperate to be watered and, with that, relieved of the torture of an entangling that led only to disgust at oneself and one's bedmate. 23-24.

Finding in Egypt the satiety which she has missed in her first marriage, her experience of the desert further whets her sexual appetite. Additionally, since she has read everything that has been published about Siwa by travelers and historians, one might safely conclude that she has also read the accounts speaking of the Siwans' loose sexuality and their homosexual practices, such as that by Georg Steindorff.

When Catherine meets Maleeka she is ready for an adventure. From the minute she lays eyes on Maleeka, she is smitten by her beauty and finds herself nailed to the spot because of it. She speaks of Maleeka's "smooth white skin and fine, well-proportioned features – grey eyes and full rosy lips, chestnut hair, of which a single thick lock fell across her brow, and the rest of

which hung down on either side of her face in hundreds of fine plaits with silver decorations to form a frame from which emerged the radiant face” (98). Later, Maleeka comes to Catherine in a sexual dream where she has snakes for braids, “which started to slither towards me and wrap themselves around my body” (152). Thus, when Maleeka tries to cross language barriers and establish a friendship with Catherine, the latter first mistakes this friendly move for a homoerotic advance before she questions her judgment of the episode, wondering who seduces whom and whether in fact there has been any seduction to begin with.

Catherine’s second meeting with Maleeka ends disastrously. In a defiant spirit, the widowed Maleeka, seeking friends outside her community, dresses up as a young man and visits Catherine. As Catherine recalls the details of the visit, she recollects that, at the sight of Maleeka, her mind “seemed suddenly to have stopped working” and adds that she “stood there, [her] eyes fastened on [Maleeka’s] scarlet lips and her bewitching grey eyes” (188). When Maleeka faces Catherine, the latter recalls that “her heavy breathing was hot on my neck” (188). When Maleeka embraces Catherine, Catherine first embraces her, then she thinks of Sappho and pushes Maleeka away and shouts “ ‘No! No! I’m not Sappho!’ ” (188). Catherine adds, “in agitation, I kept muttering to myself the same sentence, ‘I am not Sappho! I am not Sappho!’ while at the same time resisting the temptation to stretch out my hand once more and raise her from the ground and clasp her face to my bosom’ ” (189). Catherine experiences a rush of contradictory urges that render her incapable of judging the episode.

In a critique of the novel, contemporary Egyptian critic and Islamic thinker Ibrahim Awad describes *Sunset Oasis* as a mediocre novel. He faults the novel for its narration of Catherine and Mahmoud’s sexual life, and questions the sincerity of Catherine’s love for Mahmoud. Awad strongly rejects the homoerotic episode with Maleeka, which he finds highly

improbable (Awad 239-76). He overlooks Catherine's attraction to Maleeka, her awakening sexuality and her orientalist approach to Egypt that leads her to exoticize the place and the people. Despite questioning Maleeka's seduction of Catherine, Awad, interestingly, does not interrogate Catherine's reliability as narrator and seems to accept her story even when she herself is not completely clear on the details.

On two occasions, Catherine tries to understand the incident and admits that "there's nothing but fog" in her mind (224). At first, she casts the episode as a seduction but later ponders whether *she* has been the one to press Maleeka's face to her breasts. In her first narration of the incident, she asks herself

was I really angry with her or with myself? Was I angry because she kissed me or because of the shudder that swept over me when she kissed me? And since yesterday I have been asking myself the question. Why had her image never left me since I first saw her? Why did I become excited and my heart beat with joy when she knocked on my door? And why have I memorized the poetry of Sappho if I want nothing of her feminine love? (189).

Catherine answers the last question by reminding herself that she has memorized a great deal of ancient Greek poetry, including that by Sappho's male lover. Her perplexity remains unresolved as she questions whether she has shuddered with disgust or with pleasure. Finally, she settles the matter by pronouncing it a "moment of weakness, a moment of confusion brought about by the killing loneliness of this oasis" (224). Much later, Catherine's thoughts indicate that Maleeka has not seduced her: "I still live the shudder that swept over me when she kissed me and I pressed her head to my breast" (267). Very much like an orientalist, Catherine blames, what she views as, illicit sexual feeling on Siwa and further invests the geographic location with sexual qualities.

The other incident, which exposes Catherine's inflexible historical practice, is her "discovery" about Alexander the Great. This discovery rests on faulty methodology as Catherine resorts to magic and intuition in her quest for information about Alexander. She tries to hold a

séance, but changes her mind at the last minute. The aborted séance questions her methods as a historian and anticipates the research blunder which concludes the novel. During the process, Catherine admits to her reliance on luck. At the end of the novel, defying the non-pliant natives and tempting their anger after her husband's squabble with them, she insists on going to the Umm Ebeida temple in order to read some inscriptions which, she believes, contain key information about Alexander's burial place.

This particular scene is very compelling for the way it interrogates the events surrounding Catherine's examination of her archive – the temple. First of all, the situation is far from conducive to accurate research. She leaves the house disguised in Siwan garb while an old Siwan woman is visiting her sister. She takes the woman's donkey without permission and steals to the temple. Once there, she copies inscriptions hurriedly, making mistakes and erasing them as she goes. Then, as the Siwans discover her, they throw stones at her. The resolution of the scene, represented in Catherine's subsequent report on her findings, comments on her methods recording her shift from close examination of evidence, to making the archive corroborate her assumption; that Alexander is buried in Siwa. A review of Catherine's thoughts before and after this fateful visit, highlights this change.

Recalling a conversation in which her father suggests that Alexander's sepulcher might have been moved to another location, she surmises that no place is more likely than Siwa. Initially, Catherine realizes the insanity of the idea, yet is aware of her need for evidence for her father's supposition:

If his supposition were true and if my interpretation were correct. Mere guesswork, there being no indication in history that the sepulchre was moved. No evidence, not the slightest sign.

It was an insane idea, an insane intuition. But every discovery ever made came with this kindness of insanity, didn't it? I would hold my tongue, then, and let my goal be to prove my intuition, to find some evidence, even the slightest evidence, that might lead

others to search and dig, and then I'd have some credit for the greatest discovery in the history of the world. (107, emphasis in original)

Although aware of her reliance on unfounded intuition and that, in the absence of a shred of evidence, the greatest discovery in history is a product of guess work, Catherine alerts herself to the importance of method. This stands in stark contrast with her account at the end of the novel.

Reciting the prayer which she has found on the temple wall, Catherine explains

'The name of the pharaoh is *unclear*, and in many places I've had to use my imagination where writing in the columns is *illegible*. For example, the sign for "water" is clear and I confirmed it when I returned to visit the temple, but the context – meaning the return to the land of thy father and so on – there *I had to use my imagination* because the writing is *completely erased*. But then, who is it who "thwarted all the enemies in the land"? To whom other than Alexander could this prayer be made?' (296, emphasis mine)

By Catherine's own admission, the illegibility and absence of evidence prod her to use her imagination to supply her own evidence. As her sister, Fiona, points out, not only could this prayer be made to any god or ancient king, but Catherine has also used intuition and creativity in the most important part of her discovery. The fact that Catherine bases the greatest find of her career on intuition questions the view she projects of herself as an accomplished, so-called objective historian because she forces her narrative on the archive – Siwa and the Siwans. This serves not only as a critique of the imperial romance but also of history-writing and its custom of imposing coherent narratives on events.

Catherine also suppresses Maleeka's attempts to speak through alternate forms. That is, through her art. On her ill-fated visit to Catherine, Maleeka takes along two statues, which she has fashioned out of clay and made to look like herself and Catherine. She moves them to signal to Catherine her message and wish to become friends. Catherine, however, neither recognizes nor acknowledges this form of expression. She ignores the import of Maleeka's communication, choosing instead to focus on her as an Other – a curious being belonging to an inferior, primitive

culture. When she later examines the statues, she describes them as “primitive but displaying in their sculpting a feminine suavity and flow most appropriate to a woman’s form” (187).

However, earlier, Maleeka’s uncle reflects on her skill for making small statues that he “could hardly distinguish from the tiny small statues scattered in the ruins” (74). Catherine writes Maleeka as a subaltern.

In her famous article “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak comments on the way European historians and anthropologists have projected a false sense of transparency in their writing on the Other. In reality, rather than providing understanding, these writings project the writers’ subjective views of the Other. Using colonial India as an example, Spivak notes that the subaltern’s attempts at speech are constantly thwarted and assimilated into a larger colonial, imperial narrative that further orientalizes her. Catherine extends the same treatment to Maleeka by projecting her own thoughts onto the Siwan young woman, ignoring the latter’s ingenious method of establishing contact. She only hears and sees her own view of Siwa as primitive and rejects paradigms with which she is unfamiliar. Finally, her blindness to her dying sister, Fiona, because Catherine is enrapt in presenting her finding at the end of the novel confirms her obliviousness to her surroundings.

Catherine’s archive, the temple, equally deconstructs the idea of history-writing as solid, factual, and unequivocal/verifiable beyond doubt. As was the habit in ancient Egypt, newer wall inscriptions were added to existing older ones. The temple walls point to the elusiveness of history and question the possibility of the existence of an unadulterated document even at the level of the archive. As Catherine wades through layers of history, she ignores the fact that her archive may have already been corrupted before she accesses it. Then, as a transmitter she tampers with the archive. Not insignificantly, this is the Temple of the Oracle where, according

to myth, Alexander goes to communicate with the ancient Egyptian god, Amun, in order to learn the *truth* about his birth and destiny. Alexander emerges with a confirmation that he is the son of Amun. However, in Catherine's dream, he asserts "here in the world of death, I know for sure that I am not a god. The immortal life of the gods does not take place in blind darkness and impotence. I am confident now that I did not understand the oracle of Amun, if his oracle was speaking the truth in any case and if Amun was a god" (129-30). Alexander's pronouncement indicates that even when in communion with the direct archive – the ultimate source of truth – truth, or the interpretation of events emerges out of a creative human mind.

Both incidents – Catherine's meeting with Maleeka and her discovery – emphasize her inability to exercise the alleged detached judgment of a historian. Her encounter with Maleeka alludes to Catherine's rigidity when faced with unfamiliar narrative modes. Maleeka's attempts to speak to, or through, Catherine fail because, as I mentioned earlier, Catherine imposes on Maleeka a homoerotic narrative and, as a result, is blind and deaf to the individual whose friendship she claims to desire. Similarly, in her discovery, Catherine attempts to force her own narrative on the terrain. She substitutes imagination and intuition for evidence. In this sense, the novel, in general, highlights the high level of creativity involved in the process of history-writing and, in particular, critiques Catherine's insistence on imposing a tidy narrative/theory on the messiness of events. In both incidents, history – or narrative – precedes rather than follows the archive. That is, the historian makes the details conform to her pre-formulated notions.

History as a bastard: the failure of the European *Bildungsroman*

Sunset Oasis is also a critique of the *Bildungsroman*. As mentioned above, the novel casts the genre as a colonialist, civilizational narrative that equates efficient rational governance with

Europe and the latter with modernity. In adopting this paradigm, the non-European protagonist is alienated from himself and his native society, unable to reconcile with a social order which ostracizes him. However, in *Sunset Oasis* this alienation is productive as it pushes the protagonist to interrogate various histories; the history which he has created of himself, the imperialist history imposed by the West and, finally, Egyptian national history.

Mahmoud's self-alienation stems from a life-changing decision which he makes as a young officer. Quite significantly, his loss of Self coincides with Britain's colonization of Egypt. After the Egyptian ruling authority cooperates with the British to demonize Ahmed Urabi, the leader of the 1881-1882 Revolution, Mahmoud has to choose between continuing to support Urabi and risking persecution and preserving his career. His decision to pronounce Urabi and his supporters as traitors alienates him from a government whose agents continue to view him as an enemy. He remains persecuted and his promotion frozen until he is exiled to Siwa. The novel records Mahmoud's attempts to come to terms with his actions and, ultimately, his failure to reach maturity within the European *Bildungsroman* framework. He cannot be reconciled to a social order that has demonized Urabi and prostituted Egypt to the British invaders.

Mahmoud's treason to Egypt is closely intertwined with his abandonment of Ni'ma, the slave woman whom he loves, but is too proud to admit it because of her unknown parentage. Trying to solicit a confession of love from Mahmoud, Ni'ma is hurt by his stern chastisement for speaking such nonsense. In both cases - the case of Ni'ma and that of Egypt - Mahmoud's fear for his reputation prompts him to follow the social order. In suppressing Ni'ma's voice - by refusing to accept her as an equal - and in changing his testimony after the revolution, he denies both Ni'ma and Egypt existence. Ni'ma, at once a victim and an agent, leaves Mahmoud forever. Still, she visits him in his dreams at moments when he is most plagued by his cowardly role after

the revolution. His nostalgia for Ni‘ma is for an Egypt before the British occupation. She represents the old, familiar Egypt, the lost, irrecoverable creative, native voice of the *One Thousand and One Nights* that constitutes the subject of their childhood and adult life entertainment, where she becomes storyteller and Mahmoud captive audience. As his childhood friend, his companion, and lover during the national struggle, Ni‘ma represents his old self – his history/his past.

One incident at the Umm Ebeida temple marks Mahmoud's epiphany. However, unlike moments of education in the traditional *Bildungsroman*, this one does not bring the protagonist reconciliation with society. On the contrary, it initiates a process that will culminate in his opposition to it. During the visit, a huge ceiling stone falls, almost killing the Siwan boy who is in charge of their donkeys. Mahmoud, at first rushes towards the boy, then hesitates when he realizes that the stone will kill him. In the meantime, his petty officer, Ibraheem, saves the boy by pushing him away and throwing himself on top of the boy, after which Mahmoud follows suit.

At this point, Mahmoud begins to confront not only the false histories that the British imperialists and the collaborating Egyptian government have created of the Urabi Revolution, and to which he has contributed, but also faces the fictional history that he has created of himself, exaggerating his heroic role in the revolution and presenting himself as a victim, then believing the narrative which he has constructed. He realizes that his fictional history not only echoes imperialist narratives but also emulates them by describing the revolutionaries as “miscreants” (139). Even his imaginary nationalist narrative focuses on himself to the exclusion of the subaltern. For example, remembering his insignificant role during the bombardment of Alexandria he recognizes the absurdity of his constructed heroic narrative and acknowledges

civilian men and women as the real heroes:

What precisely did I do during the revolution? I ran from the beach to the hospital transporting the wounded and the dead, did I? No, men of the native population, wearing *gallabiyas* [full length garments], not military uniform, climbed up to the forts and fired the guns alongside the artillerymen. They picked up the wounded and the dead, soldiers and relatives who had fallen in the fighting, and carried them on their shoulders to the carts which it was your role to gallop in front of. Women from Alexandria did the same and climbed up to the forts and were wounded and never thought of themselves as heroines or martyrs. 135

This incident urges Mahmoud to re-evaluate his fictional heroic past, repositioning himself from a state of victimhood to one of agency. He finds in his moment of hesitation at the temple a replication of his act of cowardice after the revolution.

Mahmoud revises the history that he has created of himself, deconstructing the details and identifying himself as the real traitor as opposed to collaborators who are, at least, honest with themselves. He further critiques his narrative of himself by contemplating the absurdity of the circumstances surrounding his injury:

You fired on the Bedouin after they opened fire on you? What else would anyone have done to defend himself? The war in which thousands died left you with an injury as a result of a bullet in your shoulder that neither ended your life nor threatened it. You didn't even receive the bullet while fighting the enemy who were invading your country. No, it was like a wound received in some fleeting accident on the road, yet you lived your life thinking of your wound as a medal worn under the skin and a badge of glory. Now all that's gone, so what's left of your image? (136).

The irony generated through a juxtaposition of the gravity of the events with the absurdity of Mahmoud's injury, forces him to face yet another discrepancy between isolated events in his past and the meaning which he has created out of them, admitting his strategic use of his persecution: "this persecution served my interests, however: by degrees I created for myself the image of the forgotten victim, the man with a cause" (139).

Mahmoud's self-questioning leads him to interrogate historical narrative, pondering the substance of fact and that of myth, and finding history a fabricated, highly creative narrative. Not

long before they arrive at the temple, Mahmoud and Catherine stop by a spring mentioned in Herodotus' history of Egypt. This incident is interesting for the ways it allows Mahmoud to interrogate historiography through the image of the "Father of History." According to Herodotus' account, which Catherine relates, the water of the spring is cold in the morning and continues to cool until it is very cold at noon, after which the process is reversed and the water "boils fiercely" at midnight (103-04). Mahmoud's own experience of the spring leads to his comment, " 'now that's what I call historical scholarship! I've been past the spring at night, at dawn and in the afternoon, and I've drunk from the well and washed in it, and I've never seen the water "boiling fiercely", or even slightly, at any of those times.' " Ignoring Catherine's interjection that this description might have been accurate at the time of the account, he continues, " 'the Father of History, indeed! Why not, when things I saw with my own eyes only a few years ago are now being recounted in the history books exactly the wrong way round? Father of History! History, it seems, truly is a bastard!' " (104).

This incident constitutes the first step towards Mahmoud's maturation in an unconventional *Bildungsroman*. He meditates on the distinction between the raw material of history – actual past events – and the process of signification whereby the transmitter constructs a narrative which invests these incidents with specific meaning, casting them in a causal relationship to form a coherent narrative (Barthes 120-23). Mahmoud discovers that history is undefined and access to the past – one might even say to the present – is always mediated through personal interests and strategic alliances. He recalls his friend's words before the former changes his testimony about the revolution: " 'as you see, Umar Basha is now the minister for the army, and yesterday's revolutionaries are now "mutineers".' Recalling his own role in the construction of a history of the revolution, Mahmoud confesses "I added my own contribution at

the investigation and described them as ‘miscreants’!’ (139).

As evident, nationalism and treason overlap in the figure of Mahmoud. Through him, the novel destabilizes concepts such as heroism, patriotism and treason. It also reflects on history – that is the interpretation of events – as incidents acquire different meanings from day to day. For example two months later when the interrogation is re-opened, everything has completely changed and the revolutionaries have come to be seen as mutineers. As Mahmoud’s account indicates, the popular resistance towards the British assumes different meanings not only as the location changes – for example, in Alexandria those considered mutineers by the pro-Khedive rulers are seen as heroes in Cairo – , but, to evoke Benedict Anderson, even during the homogeneous empty time of the events. While narrating the story of the bombardment, Mahmoud speaks of the native civilian resistance, the apathetic Italian station chief, Bedouins doing the bidding of the governor of Alexandria and the Khedive and facilitating the British occupation, and Mahmoud and his companions who are defending the country against the British invasion. All of these, offer differing representations of the same events occurring at the same time and place. Mahmoud realizes that treason and patriotism change meaning as people quickly change allegiance.

Historically, many Egyptian notables joined the Khedive’s side. For example, the governor of Alexandria, Umar Basha Lutfi, whose treason Mahmoud ponders, changed sides during the Alexandria massacre after receiving a telegram from the Khedive asking him to decide whether he supported Urabi or Khedive. With the Alexandria police under Lutfi’s authority, he used it to spread chaos instead of quelling crime. Egyptian historian al Khafif records that a witness, working as an engineer in the British navy, declared that the police took an active role in killing Christians when the revolutionaries left them in peace. And, when the

Urabists did attack Europeans, the police did not take action. Additionally, the Khedive used Bedouins to spread chaos, a plan which was successful in Alexandria, but failed in Cairo because government was watching (Khafif, Vol. 1, 303-08). Further, Lutfi claimed that Urabi and his supporters, including some religious scholars, have turned the conflict into a religious war. According to Khafif, Lutfi also gave false reports of the Alexandria massacre maintaining that he saw corpses of massacred Europeans from the train on his way from Alexandria to Cairo, and that he witnessed the murder of a German couple at another train station (Khafif, Vol. 2, 109-10).

Alexander the Great's interlude gestures to the inaccessibility of history as well as the creativity of historiography, particularly so since he appears to Catherine in a dream – a realm where fact, fiction and fantasy interlock. As a historical figure, Alexander functions as at once the raw material of history and an example of the process of signification. Existing in the present tense of his world, he is ignorant of his state. Addressing Catherine in her dream he says,

it is your reckoning that I know more than you. No. Our spirits after death roam in the darkness, and now I am like a blind fish that knows of the vast ocean only that it is swimming in black water beyond which follows more of the same. Thus do I grope aimlessly in darkness beyond which lies darkness. Is this the hell of Hades that the Greeks held to be the resting place of evildoers, while the spirits of the good floated in light with their lords? Or is this the sinners' void described by the priests of the Egyptians? I do not know. I cannot say. (109-10).

Alexander earlier confides that he does not know whether Amun is a god or a myth (106).

Through him, the novel illustrates the failure of history to *truly* access the past. Events simply occur, but history, the interpretation of events to create a recognizably logical story, is a human product. Alexander's account examines the subjects of myth and history and concludes that both are made of the same material, but that "the living are captivated by myths" (110). Accounts of the past remain fictions. This is clearly manifested in the account that Alexander gives of himself. His narrative portrays his contradictory character as hero and villain, magnanimous ruler

and tyrant, friend and abject traitor.¹⁴¹ His voice refers to the erasures in historical accounts. He exposes the way history crafts a narrative that masks oppression, presenting civilization as victory rather than violent subjugation. In Walter Benjamin's words: "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (258-59). Benjamin specifically refers to cultural treasures in his discussion of tainted civilizations. One is reminded of the temple.

The Umm Ebeida temple plays a pivotal role in the novel. The site of Mahmoud's epiphany and burial as well as the location of Catherine's theory about Alexander the Great, it represents not only different pasts, but also various views of the past. It is an ancient Egyptian temple, assimilated under Greek rule, currently standing on Egyptian/Siwan territory surrounded by Siwans who do not glorify this part of Egypt's past viewing the ancient Egyptians as infidels. In other words, the temple is the site of conflict over history/histories.

As Mahmoud recognizes himself as an agent in his and Egypt's subjugation, Egypt too emerges at once as victim and agent, colonized and colonizer. While Egypt was compelled to submit to the British occupation, corrupt government authorities and the Khedive made the country an agent in its own subjugation. Egypt, too, has forced its own policies on the Siwans, imposing exorbitant taxes and ignoring their conditions. For instance, when Mahmoud sends a petition to Cairo demanding a tax reduction, he does not receive an answer, but receives a copy of the initial letter outlining the taxes he is to collect. Thus, while the British social order is seen as unjust and impervious to reason, the Egyptian government is equally incriminated.

Through the temple and other ruins, *Sunset Oasis* questions the various histories, or

¹⁴¹ In his study of the novel, Egyptian scholar Mustapha El-Dabe sees that Alexander the Great almost parallels or is equivalent to Mahmoud. Whatever the former says comes close to or expresses the latter's nature (Dabe 161-72).

nationalist ideologies that Egyptians have embraced at one point or another and finds them restrictive. As it does so, the novel foregrounds the fictionality of the past while it interrogates fictive notions of belonging. All of these fictive ethnicities prove inflexible, excluding certain ethnic groups and causing strife rather than harmony. For example, through Wasfi, the blond Circassian officer who refers to the ancient Egyptians as *his* ancestors, the novel interrogates Pharaonism and Ottomanism. Pharaonism, a short-lived form of nationalism popular at the end of the 19th century until the 1940s,¹⁴² acted as an inclusive Egyptian form of belonging that united Muslims and Christians by promoting pride in Egypt's ancient past and ancestry. Although sympathetic to the Urabi Revolution, the novel also uses Wasfi to question Ottomanism as a national identity, as the revolution acknowledged Egypt as an eternal part of the Ottoman Empire. Wasfi's interest in his so-called ancestors, however, prompts Mahmoud to reflect on Egyptian-Ottoman relations and finds in them an enactment of imperial relations; of the master-servant relation. He concludes that Wasfi admires only the Pharaohs – the masters who ruled a community of Egyptian slaves.

Finally, the novel critiques Egyptian nationalism, demonstrating how Egyptians themselves have assumed a colonial role in relation to the Siwans. They do not understand the Siwan language – a fact that has engendered hatred towards Egyptians and created tensions between Siwan tribal leaders depending on whether they studied at al-Azhar Mosque in Egypt or at al-Zeitouna Mosque in Tunisia. The Egyptians' use of brute force against the Siwans has earned their hatred. As a boy, Sheikh Sabir, the leader of the Easterners, witnesses the Egyptians brutally apprehending his father and when the young Sabir cries and clings to him, the soldier

¹⁴² For a discussion of Pharaonism in general and in Egyptian literature in particular see Colla, "The Stuff" and Colla, *Conflicted*.

hits him with a big stick that cracks his skull and leaves him half-blind. Because of violent actions like this, Siwans have always resisted Egyptian government officials and have killed the last Chief of Police, Mahmoud's predecessor.

Thus, history – that is the resolute narratives of the past, which people create, and ways of viewing the past – emerges as the culprit. Mahmoud's view of Ni'ma's unknown past causes him to lose love. His choice to support a hegemonic narrative of the Urabi Revolution triggers his self-alienation. The view which Catherine wants to impose on Siwa as Alexander's burial place brings about conflict between her and the Siwans. All of these are attempts to force the past within specific bounds. Pharaonism emerges as elitist, glorifying the masters rather than the hard-working peasants. Ottomanism centers Turkey, positioning Egypt as the periphery while Egyptian nationalism, in turn, ignores other non-Arabic-speaking communities in Egypt.

In fact, like several other Egyptian intellectuals, Taher believes the Ottomans to be partly responsible for the French and, later, British colonization of Egypt. In *Abnaa Rifa'ah*, he adopts the view of Egyptian scholar and geographer Gamal Hamdan, presenting the Ottoman Empire as a religious colonialism, in which Turkey's suzerainties are colonies of the metropole. Instead of placing all blame on the West,¹⁴³ Taher blames the Ottoman Empire for Egypt's intellectual stagnation, arguing that Turkey facilitated the West's domination of Egypt by neglecting education (Taher, *Abnaa* 22-24). Read in light of Mahmoud's denunciation of the Khedive as the real traitor, the novel rejects the revolution's Ottomanism.¹⁴⁴

Sunset Oasis reflects a widespread disenchantment with the failure of the 1952

¹⁴³ For the image of the West in Taher's narrative, see Casini.

¹⁴⁴ Sayyid-Marsot corroborates this view. She pronounces Khedive Tawfiq as the real traitor, explaining that he supported a Cabinet decision to resist the British then, to protect his throne, he asked the British to bombard Alexandria and occupy Egypt (Sayyid-Marsot, *Egypt* 31).

Revolution to live up to its promises. The post-1952 regime replicated the master-servant discourse about which Wasfi and Mahmoud disagree.¹⁴⁵ In Wasfi's opinion, chaos and decline result when governments allow the common people to share power. Comparing England and France, Wasfi declares that a successful government is one that is run by strong politicians, not by the mob. Mahmoud sarcastically corrects him saying "the masters" (268). Taher's disappointment with the 1952 legacy, represented in Mubarak's era, occasions his nostalgia for the Urabi era as the direct heir to the project of Egyptian enlightenment mapped out by 19th-century Egyptian intellectuals. Comparing different projects such as Turcification, westernization and liberalism, Taher believes that the only successful project in Egypt was that mapped out by intellectuals in the 19th century. In his view, this project succeeded because it provided national unity, national independence, social justice, and liberty for women. It was a vision planned by intellectuals, supported by society, practiced by politicians at different times up until Nasser destroyed it by marginalizing the intellectuals (Hussein, A. 133).

Like Mahmoud, the Siwans, too, are plagued by narratives of the past which Sheikh Sabir knows how to manipulate. Seeking revenge from the Egyptians and the rival tribe, Sabir terrorizes the Siwans with the book of prophecies given to him by another Siwan exile in Tunisia. The book supposedly predicts success for Sabir and victory for his tribe. It also contains other narratives that pose as Siwan traditions delineating Siwan practices and ways of life. While Sabir does not necessarily subscribe to the narrative presented in the book he deliberately manipulates it. As a construction of the past, the book of prophecies dictates the present and precludes the future. In other words, it fixes history: past, present, and future. This triggers tragic consequences for Maleeka.

¹⁴⁵ For a review of political life in Egypt from the 1952 Revolution until the present day, Bradley.

The conflict over defining Maleeka as a widow is one over writing her. She is the ultimate subaltern. A Siwan woman living in a marginalized Egyptian territory in a colonized country, she is triply colonized – denied writing her own story. For the Siwans, Maleeka is an experiment. Belonging to the Westerners, she is married off to an Easterner in an attempt to bridge the nationalist schism between the two tribes. When her husband dies, she violates the widow code dictating that she remain confined for a period of four months and ten days – not to see or be seen by anyone. Otherwise she will bring disaster to everyone who lays eyes on her. During her confinement the widow is known as the ghoulish woman. When Maleeka is discovered after visiting Catherine, disaster ensues that is immediately attributed to Maleeka’s violation of the rule. One might say that Maleeka as a subaltern is oppressed by her tribe. But, one needs to remember that they, too, are silenced as subalterns, forced to fit in a dominant narrative that Orientalizes them. Although her voice is missing from the narrative,¹⁴⁶ it escapes through her uncle, Sheikh Yahya, filtered through the more hegemonic voice of her mother.

Maleeka’s contestation of her definition, Yahya’s questioning of the disasters that befall the oasis, and the declarations of the oasis historian, all expose the tyranny involved in history-recording. Taking issue with her classification as a widow, Maleeka stresses the fictionality of history, the presence of evidence notwithstanding: “why did they consider her a widow when Mi‘bid wasn’t a man? She was still a virgin and the blood that Mi‘bid had brought them after his first night with her was faked. She’d never been a wife or a widow, so how could she be a ghoulish woman?” (197). Yahya, deconstructing the story of disasters, notes that the palm tree that has fallen is not Maleeka’s fault. The tree has been rotten for a while. Quite interestingly, the oasis

¹⁴⁶ In his analysis of the novel, Hafez compares speech as evidence of finding one’s voice and one’s freedom to delegation of freedom. He wonders whether the *zaggala*, the Siwan farmers, do not speak because they do not wish to or because they have simply delegated Sheikh Sabir and Sheikh Yahya, to speak for them (Hafez).

historian, despite remarking that the incident is without precedent in the oasis, justifies the ancestors' restrictions on widows because they "knew how dangerous it was" (181). In this situation, a history without any anchoring in the past controls both present and future. Yahya blames everyone for Maleeka's death " 'even the ancestors who invented the story of the ghoul-woman' " (254). In the end, the novel advocates a view that leaves history open to constant re-signification, a perspective which Fiona supports.

Destroying the Archive

Two things separate Fiona from her sister: first, she acknowledges that history is an invention and, second, she explains that it is subject to change since recipients of history change it by participating in it. Described by Catherine as the last of the line of Irish folktale storytellers, she is a re-incarnation of Ni'ma, with her *One Thousand and One Nights* narrative, and Maleeka, who speaks through her art. Fiona accepts alternate forms of expressions and re-evaluations of history. This allows her to live in harmony with herself and with the Siwans. Unlike Catherine, she instantaneously wins the hearts of the Siwans and despite the language barrier manages to communicate with them, learning some of their language, thus accomplishing what Catherine does not.

Fiona does not share Catherine's tendency to exoticize or stratify cultures, nor does she glorify one side of the past over the other. For example, when Catherine speaks of Alexander as a great warrior who wished to unite the world in peace, Fiona reminds her of his tyrannical side, explaining that he tried to achieve peace by enslaving imperial subjects. When Catherine critiques Siwan customs, Fiona responds that Siwans are entitled to their own way of life. Further, her identity as Irish and her familiarity with British imperialism through the history of

the Irish struggle, allows her to deconstruct the dominant narrative of the Urabi Revolution as treason. Addressing Wasfi, she asserts “ ‘the uprisings of many of our leaders in Ireland against the British ended in defeat but we still consider them heroes. At least they tried’ ” (235).

Fiona’s historical practice is grounded in Irish folktales. Asking Catherine, Mahmoud and Wasfi to tell her what they have understood from an Irish folktale, she teaches them that the story “doesn’t end with its telling. Its listeners have to finish it.” She adds that the story is “fashioned anew by everyone that listens to it” (210). Fiona’s practice opens up possibilities for re-reading, re-evaluating and re-making the past. It is a process where the past is constantly present, constantly changing and always creatively used to fashion the present as well as the future. It evokes the malleable history of the *One Thousand and One Nights* with stories of good and bad kings that Ni‘ma relates to Mahmoud in their childhood and, Mahmoud remembers, “each time she’d change the same story, so that it was as though I were hearing it for the first time, and she’d tell it as though these were things that had just taken place” (85). Fiona’s approach also accommodates Maleeka’s attempts to communicate through art.

It is puzzling, though, and perhaps problematic, that each of these women meets a tragic end. Ni‘ma disappears never to be found again. Maleeka is killed by her relatives and Fiona dies, after which Mahmoud commits suicide by blowing up the Umm Ebeida temple while inside it. Since it is Catherine with her rigid understanding of history who outlives everyone, one might conclude that the novel ends with despair – despair that Egyptians will find the opportunity to fashion themselves anew, following Fiona’s advice. Seen in this light, Egypt’s past has already determined not only its present, but also its future.

Yet, Mahmoud’s suicide inspires hope because by destroying the temple, the subject of conflict over history and definitions of Egypt, he frees Egyptians to start defining themselves

anew. Mahmoud destroys two restrictive narratives: one which confines Egyptian greatness to the past, while claiming that contemporary Egyptians need to be civilized, and another corollary narrative which consoles Egyptians with their glorious past, almost excusing their current petrification. In his dying words Mahmoud declares “we had to be done with all the stories of the ancestors if the descendants were to wake from their delusions of greatness and their false complacency. One day they’d thank me! They’d have to thank me!” (301). Evoking Benjamin, Hatem Hafez states that in destroying the temple Mahmoud destroys a despotic history even if that history is a civilizational landmark (Hafez 178). Benjamin notes that cultural treasures “owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries.” Barbarism, Benjamin continues, taints not only these treasures, but also the manner of their transmission from one owner to another (258-59). To re-appropriate Benjamin, Mahmoud’s destruction of the temple is an attempt to “blast open the continuum of history” (264).

Conclusion

To conclude, in rejecting the imperial romance and the *Bildungsroman* and critiquing various forms of national belonging, Taher exposes these narratives as tyrannical and destructive. They are guilty of stunting, or aborting the future. *Sunset Oasis* avoids delivering a story of a unified national character, exposing the treason within patriotism, preferring to acknowledge the shortcomings of the nationalist project which colonizes other ethnic minorities. It incriminates Egypt as traitor to the Urabi revolution and as colonizer of Siwa. In its exploration of Egyptian resistance to foreign domination and the ensuing British occupation, the novel refuses to represent Egyptians as mere victims and instead shows the fragmentary side of nationalism

through Siwan resistance to Egyptian hegemony, then through Siwan divided nationalisms.

In the end, *Sunset Oasis* advocates the destruction of cultural icons as the only route towards a new and inclusive national identity – one that is inspired by an amorphous and malleable definition of history. Because history is written by the empowered, it is despotic. It imprisons its subjects within a confined framework. In destroying the temple the novel affirms that all histories should be equal that all people's histories should be allotted equal time.

Epilogue:

How does the Subaltern Speak?

It is tempting to conclude this study by reiterating Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question: Can the Subaltern Speak? But, before doing so, it is fitting to ask what exactly constitutes speech. J. Maggio critiques Spivak for privileging the active speech act in her analysis of the limited ability of western discourse to engage with the Other. According to him, although she points to the erasures of the subaltern in texts, locating moments where the subaltern speaks, Spivak's "notion of the silence of the subaltern betrays a Kantian bias toward the active Western 'speaker' and shows how the Western subject is a hegemonic idea" (438). Maggio declares that Spivak "is still looking for the deliberate act of speaking, instead of attempting to *listen* to the subaltern in the many ways by which they communicate" (439, emphasis in original).

In an earlier interview, however, noting calls urging her to rethink her statement, Spivak explains that "problems arise if you take this 'speak' absolutely literally as 'talk.' ... The actual fact of giving utterance is not what I was concerned about. What I was concerned about was that even when one uttered, one was constructed by a certain kind of psychobiography, so that the utterance itself ... would have to be interpreted in the way in which we historically interpret anything" (Spivak, Interview 291). She adds "so, 'the subaltern cannot speak,' means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act" (292).

A rewording of Spivak's question, then, seems more appropriate: How does the subaltern speak? But, before attempting to answer this question, I would like to question the implication of Spivak's remarks. As she explains, speech entails a speaker and a recipient. Both interlocutors

have to mutually recognize each other in order for the speech act to succeed. However, a question arises: if the Other's speech is not heard/ recognized, does this invalidate it? While it is inconceivable to deny the importance of listening to the subaltern, there is a potential danger in making the subaltern's success, and therefore existence, contingent upon being heard and/ or recognized. For to wait for the Self's recognition of the Other's speech is once again to make the subaltern's utterances, his/ her Being, contingent upon the Western subject's comprehension of the form of speech. This confirms the power structure upon which colonialist discourse rests.

Each of the novels discussed above represents a reaction to the Other's attempt to speak. In Lawrence Durrell's *Mountolive*, Egyptians' attempts to speak occasionally figure through mockery, as in Leila's exchange with Mountolive discussed above. In John Wilcox's *The Guns of El Kebir*, Egyptians are stifled and made to participate in their own subjugation, as is the case with Ahmed. In contrast, the Egyptian narratives give Egyptians more freedom to speak. In Naguib Mahfouz's *Sugar Street*, Ahmad casts off the yoke of Enlightenment which chokes his uncle to create his own Egyptian-inspired program. While Ahmad still belongs to the petty bourgeoisie he embraces fraternity with Egypt's disempowered. *Sunset Oasis* allows different kinds of subaltern to speak. Maleeka speaks to Catherine through her art. The fact that Catherine does not understand or acknowledge this form of speech should not matter. Mahmoud speaks by destroying the temple and, along with it, all restrictive and despotic narratives. The novel also allows representatives of the rival Siwan tribes to speak.

The issue of the speaking subaltern informs current debates about Egypt's future after the 2011 Revolution. The intelligentsia, the media, and state officials, ask who has the right to participate in political life and who needs to be educated before performing as a responsible political being. In these conversations, women, the poor, the illiterate, the uneducated, or the

peasants – in a word the subaltern – are still assigned to history’s waiting room. Beneath these declarations, are assumptions about the subaltern’s ability to function as a political being, making efficient performance contingent upon literacy or type of education, which itself becomes entangled with class and socio-economic factors.

Endorsing mostly the vision of the empowered and the intelligentsia as the official imagined community, and the only desirable one, many figures speak of the didactic role of the state in preparing responsible citizens. It often goes unacknowledged that, most of the time, the subaltern’s so-called deficiency is not a result of ignorance or recalcitrance, but is primarily caused by support of political views at odds with those of the “enlightened” liberals. Rather than acknowledge that these “uninitiated” groups have legitimate concerns pushing them to embrace decisions labeled as “misguided,” the conversation replicates the colonialist narrative of the *Bildungsroman*.

This is further complicated by the prevalence of voices in the Egyptian media identifying Egypt as the target of a world-wide conspiracy and depicting current events, occasionally including the 2011 Revolution, as foreign creations. Author Alaa al Aswany notes that such theories fail to confront the government’s shortcomings.¹⁴⁷ Evoking the *Bildungsroman*, voices such as Bassem Youssef’s, Egyptian satirist and columnist, have rightfully asserted that the conspiracy theory narrative casts Egyptians as gullible, easily misled, and/ or incapable of rising against injustice. Like Wilcox’s vision, this Egyptian narrative locates nationalist demands outside Egyptian subjectivity. Taher and Aswany, among others, are attempting to listen to

¹⁴⁷ Aswany, Alaa. “*kayfa naqdi ‘ala al mu’amara.*” *Al Masry al Youm*. 7 April, 2014. <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/424525>.

common Egyptians in an effort to accommodate multiple nationalist visions. As another round of presidential elections approaches, different dissenting groups continue to speak.

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