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Nathaniel Greenberg

Secrecy, Secularism, and the Coming Revolution
in Naguib Mahfouz's Postwar Masterpieces (1952-1967)

Nathaniel Greenberg

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Reading Committee:

Terri DeYoung, Chair

Cynthia Steele

Willis Konick

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Abstract

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Nathaniel Greenberg

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Associate Professor Terri DeYoung
Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

In the wake of the Egyptian revolution of 1952, Egypt's Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz turned to stories of corruption and alienation, initiatory underworlds of the revolution's political detractors drawn from an unlikely aesthetic combination of Hollywood Westerns, local mythology, and Nasserism. Today, his literature appears prophetic, providing a window onto the metaphysical connotations of democratization which, in Egypt, have long been haunted by the moral vacuousness of western style secularism and what Jürgen Habermas has described as the global "revitalization of religion" in the public sphere. Drawing on research conducted before and during the 2011 uprising in Egypt, this dissertation explores how one of the twentieth century's greatest writers aestheticized— both through novels and through film— the political transformations of his day and how his work might contribute to our understanding of the ongoing social transformations in the Middle East and beyond.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
List of Figures.....	ii
Introduction: On Reading Revolution.....	2
I. Children of the Alley.....	6
II. The Sixties.....	11
III. Why Film?.....	13
IV. A Readerly Methodology.....	18
Chapter One: Awlād Ḥāratinā and the Coming Revolution	
Introduction.....	24
I. A Brief History of the Text.....	26
II. Horizons of Interpretation.....	29
III. Al-Futūwa.....	35
IV. Conclusion.....	45
Chapter Two: Criminal Inclinations of the Good Society: Naguib Mahfouz and the Nineteen Sixties	
Introduction.....	49
I. Openings.....	53
II. Criminal Inclinations of the Good Society.....	60
III. Conclusion: On the Art of Order.....	70
Chapter Three: Criminality and the Public Sphere: Notes on a Post-Revolutionary Aesthetics of Film (1952-1957)	
Introduction: Three Screenplays.....	75
I. The Public in Squares.....	78
II. 1953: The Underground on Screen.....	84
III. Al-Futūwa.....	94
IV. Conclusion: The Vegetable Racket.....	101
Conclusion: The Quail and the Autumn :السمان و الخريف:	106
Endnotes.....	115
Bibliography.....	138

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Number	Page
1. “Belo” and Friends.....	3
2. Mubarak’s Enforcers.....	11
3. The Barricades.....	24
4. In the Absence of Police.....	45
5. Vigilante Justice.....	48
6. Police Vanish.....	59
7. Mubarak’s Party Headquarters.....	111

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To Family

Spring finds us on the tip of the abyss of annihilation. Gang wars rage through the alley and the spite between us and other quarters screams at fever pitch. Rancor boils, hearts seethe with hate, murder lurks everywhere, and all our tomorrows stink of disaster. Then at noon one sunny day, an inscrutable scene takes place on the cosmic stage. Unseasonable clouds gather dark on the horizon, pile up, and grow so dark they smother the soul. Towering to the very liver of the sky, they block the light of the sun. The clouds multiply, intermingle, merge, and slowly form up into mighty masses that build a roof of deep dark black. From streets, shops, and rooftops, puzzled eyes lift up to heaven, every face in wonder open to the sky. This dense black roof begins to roll, to wrestle, to heave like a sea of pitch fighting a horrible war. People rush into the street to see this enigma, ignorant of what it might birth, afraid of something even more dreadful. The air drinks blackness, grows yet darker, more ferocious, and then the sea begins to slobber long black tufts that fill the air and creep toward earth in eerie silence. From all surrounding districts people run to the great square where they hope to find some small sense of security in milling around and touching others. A noxious smell of dust inhabits our noses, reality disappears, dim demons hover over us—and then everything in the world plunges into pitch-dark murk.

Quavering voices cry, “Save us, Oh great God of grace!”

For an hour the awful dread of vast calamity engulf us all. And in that deep dark, hands reach out for other hands to clutch, and no one either knows or cares whose hand he holds (90).

-Naguib Mahfouz, *Hikāyāt Hāratīnā (Fountain and the Tomb, 1975)*

The infallible Jackson and the immortal Lincoln are dead, and the causes which they and their parties fought for have passed into the glorious archives of history. To ever look back upon the past, however worthy it may have been, and to claim present reward and praise for it, betrays a sickly self-consciousness as vitiating to political as to individual life (231).

-Henry L. Call, *The Coming Revolution (1895)*

Let anyone come to power— foe or friend— and I’ll support him provided he rids us of these criminals (191).

-Fathi Ghānim, *Al-Rajul Alladhī Faqada Zillah (The Man Who Lost His Shadow, 1962)*ⁱ

Introduction: *On Reading Revolution*

Just before midnight on 1 February, 2011, one week into the demonstrations that would eventually topple the thirty year-old regime of Muḥammad Ḥusnī Sayyid Mubārak (Hosni Mubarak), I stepped outside my apartment to join a group of locals who sat puffing a *shīsha*, machetes and clubs resting on their laps, beneath the darkened awning of the coffeehouse on the corner of Khayyrat and Al-Ismā‘īlī street, a block from the Ministry of Interior. The coffeehouse had been closed since the previous Friday, “*yawm al-ghradab*” (“The Day of Rage”), but one of the regulars, Aḥmed Mubelo known by his friends as “Belo,” was burning coals for the *shīsha* inside a broken cardboard box and boiling tea on a makeshift stove. Sitting with Belo and his friends was Maḥmūd, a retired taxi driver, who, now in his sixties, had lived in the neighborhood his entire life. I had met Maḥmūd a few days prior. With the airwaves full of warnings about outside agitators, he was skeptical about my presence at first, but we then got to talking and he had since seen me smoking with Belo and his friends and wielding a broken broomstick in the street the night the police vanished. He now greeted me with some affection, holding my hand and laughing knowingly as I surveyed the unusual situation. I gestured towards Belo— “*huwwa futūwak?*” I asked, is this your Don? ““*alāynā ḥayynā,*” Belo responded. “The barrio is on our backs.” Maḥmūd chuckled. He knew I loved Najīb Maḥfūz (Naguib Mahfouz, d. 2006) and knew enough about the work of the late Egyptian Nobel laureate to imagine what was on my mind.



“Belo” and friends on the night of 25 January 2011. Photograph by author.

The cultural resonance of the revolution may be an afterthought to the political machinations at work today.ⁱⁱ But 2011 also marked the centennial of Mahfouz’s birth and the coincidence of this important year on Egypt’s cultural calendar with what appeared to be the beginning-of-the-end for authoritarian rule in Egypt, illuminates an oft forgotten gauge of social transformation, that is: the point at which recognizable features of social existence cease to provide viable symbols of meaning for artistic expression, or, conversely, previously inaccessible, or even censored symbols of cultural communication acquire relevance once again.

The aim of this dissertation is to study the construction of meaning at work in Mahfouz’s writing, including his novels and screenplays, between the revolutionary upheaval of 1952 and Egypt’s military defeat to Israel in 1967. The level, and diversity, of his production reached new heights during this period and I make no attempt here to

discuss all of it. Although my reading of revolution through the lens of Mahfouz's work relies entirely on the artist's unique trajectory, as a "child of the 1919" revolution (Naqqāsh 171), a student of philosophy, of Islamic mysticism, of ancient Egypt, of the theater and cinema, of the public, of al-Jāhīz, of Muḥammad Muwayliḥī, of Jirjī Zaydān, Ṭāhā Husayn, Leo Tolstoy, Henri Bergson, and Franz Kafka, Mahfouz's work, as such, is not what this dissertation endeavors to explicate.ⁱⁱⁱ As with all great realism, a label I steadfastly defend in describing his work from this time, Mahfouz's literature centers on those "three-dimensional" instances of social and psychological synthesis: the unique *dureé* of the "complete human personality" that Georg Lucáks described as the "central aesthetic problem of realism" (7). As was the case with Tolstoy, "claimed by reactionary ideologies for their own," rendered "a mystic gazing into the past; into an 'aristocratic spirit' far removed from the struggles of the present" (14), the name "Mahfouz," for some time, has been frozen amidst the "wistful scene of languid palm-trees" that decorates the English edition of *Qaṣr al-Shawq (Palace of Desire, 1957)*. As Roger Allen has pointed out, it can only be this "Arabian Nights-type" marketing that explains the higher rate of sales for the second, rather than the superior first, volume of *Al-Thulāthiyya (The Cairo Trilogy, 1956-57)* (Allen, "Naguib" 18).^{iv} The perennial interest in his earliest, Pharaonic novels (both in Egypt and abroad) or even his first publication, *Miṣr al-Qadīma* (circa 1931), a translation of James Baikie's *Ancient Egypt* (1912), has kept Mahfouzian studies away from the question of pan-Arabism or the traditionalism of the Islamists. And while the work I discuss here, particularly that of the nineteen-sixties, reveals a certain cynicism towards the revolutionary project of Jamāl 'Abdel Nāṣir (Nasser), it is more

often than not a rejuvenating critique, a call for social introspection, something Nasser himself had identified as the key to the “second” and subsequent revolution (Nasser 41).

As true realism demands, Mahfouz’s types have no place in history. Their instance of inception binds them to the personal history of their author, but they are haunted by individual pasts, consumed by unfulfilled visions, overwhelmed by the shifting premises around them. Yet still they are part and parcel of society. In this way Mahfouz’s postwar masterpieces constitute his greatest achievement. His complete personality is a post-revolutionary creation, the embodiment of a “politics as action” and “self-invention” (Merleau-Ponty 4). As the products of a true transitional period, one of the greatest of the twentieth century, their process reveals that of other transitional types, the Jean Valjeans, the Ana Kareninas, the Horacio Oliveiras.^v More importantly, the concept of transition they inspire remains resonant today.

The disaster that besets Mahfouz’s protagonists of this period reveals the destructive properties of disillusionment, the shattering of the “poetic dreams” that is the face to face with “stark reality” (Lukács 1). But, it is through the disaster of transition that the “complete” personality becomes, by the epiphany of ignorance, a more human personality. The final lines of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* (*Children of the Alley*, 1959) recall such a paradox: “They held fast to hope, and whenever they were persecuted, they said, ‘injustice must have an end, as day must follow night. We will see the death of tyranny, and the dawn of light and miracles’” (448). That enlightenment and the revelation of mystery, or miracles, should coincide rang true with the campaign against corruption in 2011: in Egypt and around the world. In the week following the 2011 uprising, Cairene erected barricades of tires and bricks and bags of trash, threw stones at the street lamps to

darken the neighborhoods, designated couriers to guide information and people from one block to the next, from domain to domain. At night, with the cafes closed, and in the absence of cars, solitary voices echoed through the streets, a rare phenomenon in downtown Cairo. One could not help but feel transported to a more timeless reality. This dissertation is ultimately an appreciation of that perennial power of literature to communicate a well-rounded dispatch of reality to the future.

I. Children of the Alley

After the Tripartite war... corruption began to appear in the country. From then on, that's to say, between 1956 and 1960, I joined the force of internal politics. I became a futūwa.

-Sheikh Zāhir of Al-Azhar, quoted in Malika Zeghal (82)

It took Mahfouz nearly seven years to write his first novel after the 1952 revolution. Considering that he had produced a novel a year since 1943, along with numerous other works of short fiction, the gap between the publication of his *Thulāthiyya*, or *Cairo Trilogy*, in 1952, and the first installment of *Children of the Alley* in *Al-Ahrām* in 1959 was notable. And, indeed, most scholars who have written about the novel or this period of Mahfouz's career begin with that observation.^{vi} Although I take issue with the notion that he endured a period of silence prior to the novel— considering his level of production in the world of film— Mahfouz has said it took him seven years to truly digest what had happened during the revolution and to figure out a way to write about it. Once he did so, however, the impact on Egyptian literary life was profound.^{vii}

Children of the Alley, as I discuss in the first chapter, was banned until 2006. Cloaked in the guise of oral tradition, the novel describes a society thrust into chaos as successive revolutionaries emerge to unify and mobilize a disparate people living under a repressive and corrupt autocracy— the house of Jabalāwī. But as each new movement emerges, led by a succession of men who resemble the biblical and Quranic figures of Adam, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed and, exceptionally, ‘Arafā (the man of science), the house of Jabalāwī cracks down evermore ferociously.

Given the political history of *Children of the Alley*, it is no small irony that an Azharite official (from the above quote), speaking in the nineties, would recall his contentious stance towards the government of Nasser during the tumultuous period following the Suez War in terms of “internal politics,” referring, moreover, to the figure of the *futūwa* (*futūwāt* pl.) the “young urban adventurers,” who, in the colonial days, embodied an oscillatory spirit caught somewhere between “fraternalism and thievery” (Zeghal 83). According to Mahfouz, the publisher of *Children of the Alley* at *Al-Ahrām*, Ḥamdī al-Jammāl, originally read the work as a novel about the *futūwāt* and the world they dominate (Naqqāsh, *Pages* 121).^{viii} Indeed, in the end, it is the *futūwāt*, not the “great men” (i.e. the prophets) or the ageless Jabalāwī, who remain in power. Seven years after the Egyptian Revolution, *Children of the Alley* captured brilliantly the cynicism and the irony of Mahfouz’s response to the social revolution of the masses and to the shifting political atmosphere under Nasser. Like the geography its imagery advances, the novel occupied, at the time, a kind of no-man’s land, aesthetically and politically speaking. Breaking from the mode of social realism for which Mahfouz had become famous, a number of critics suggested that, in *Children of the Alley*, he had chosen the difficult path

of literary innovation. I contend the novel contains numerous characters and literary tropes that were well established in his pre-revolutionary literature and in his screenplays. But, to be certain, in its starkness, its stoic dialogues and kaleidoscopic descriptions of battles and riots, the novel represented a unique literary achievement that would set the tone for much of his subsequent work.

The principal conduit of continuity that I concentrate on— between his pre and post-revolutionary novels and screenplays— is the figure of the *futūwa*. As a historical phenomenon, the *futūwāt* effectively vanished from Egyptian streets in the mid-twentieth century. Their aggressive return in Mahfouz’s work appears at first to have been a hopelessly anachronistic gesture on the author’s part. But, unlike his Pharaonic novels of the forties, ensconced as they were in nationalistic sentiment and the imagined cosmology of a timeless antiquity, the reemergence of the *futūwa*, with its distinctly medieval connotations, fed directly into the ideology then flowing from the *Mogamma*.^{ix} “Ours is a scientific socialism based on science not on chaos,” Nasser once said. “It is not at all a material socialism. We have never said that it was, nor have we said that we were opposed to religion. What we have said was that our religion is a socialist one and that in the Middle Ages Islam had successfully applied the first socialist experiment in the world” (Baker 105). Much like the aestheticization of the masses in industrializing Europe, the *hāra* (quarter or alley) of *Children of the Alley*, and the depictions of life therein, centered on “the ordinary” (Rancière, *Politics* 34). But the *futūwa*, the champion (and menace) of the *hāra*, embodied a timely and dualistic logic of Islamic-oriented chivalry and corruption. To borrow a phrase from Fredric Jameson, it would become Mahfouz’s quintessential “ideologeme” of the post-revolutionary years, that is, “the

smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” (Jameson, *Political* 76).

Indicative of a kind of “political fatalism” (Irwin 164), the *futūwa* represented more a competing image of social cohesion than an antithetical one. In film, Mahfouz championed the inherent egalitarianism of the character, his inner strength and stoic devotion to divine justice. In his literature, however, he imagined the model of justice embodied by the medieval brotherhood once taken to its logical extreme. Considering the contradictory nature of these two gestures, it is not surprising that in the same year, 1959, Mahfouz would be appointed to the directorship of film censorship and see his novel about the *futūwāt* banned from the presses. Needless to say, he felt obliged to resign the position (Maḥfūz, 118).

The term *futūwa*, by definition, carries a paradoxical meaning, inferring both a sense of “manliness,” but also “thuggery,” and “racketeering.” In Mamlūk era Cairo, the *futūwāt* came to define the culture of urban artisan guilds. According to Sawsan El-Messiri, collaboration between the *futūwāt* and religious leadership in the urban quarters of al-Jamāliyya (where Mahfouz was born in 1911) enabled, in part, the two major uprisings in 1789 and 1800 that helped mobilize enough popular resistance to eventually bring down the Turkish Governor of Egypt, Ṭāhir Bāshā (who had collaborated with the French), and usher in the reign of Muḥammed ‘Alī (1805-49) (El-Messiri 243). Mahfouz recalled often the role of the *futūwāt* in the revolution of 1919, in particular the storming of a police barracks at the end of his street. A scene, he said, he would revisit throughout his writing career (Maḥfūz 30)^x

As I discuss in the third chapter of this dissertation, the role of the *futūwāt* as avatars of religious and popular revolt would find powerful resonance throughout Mahfouz’s career. As I discuss in the first chapter, his masterstroke in this regard was the evolution of the character Bayūmī. Appearing first in “*Futūwat al-‘Atūf*” (“The Thug from Al-Atuf,” circa 1936), Bayūmī would resurface throughout his career, assuming various hues of symbolism along the spectrum of meaning that is *futūwa*. The historical namesake was most likely a late eighteenth-century *shaykh* of Al-Azhar, ‘Ali al-Bayūmī, who preached a brand of Sufism concentrated on the notion of a “brotherhood of man” (Gran 17). Al-Bayūmī, the *shaykh*, became the patron of the destitute young men who shuttled water from the river and surrounding wells to the inhabitants of al-Ḥūsaniyya. Edward Lane identified his sect as the Bayyūmiyya, but noted that the carriers were also known as the Rifā‘iyya (“the lifters”) (Staffa 367).^{xi}

The term *futūwa*, particularly the dualistic connotation of the term, had been largely phased out of popular Egyptian vernacular by the time Mahfouz and his colleagues in the film industry revitalized it in the fifties.^{xii} In the past half-century, critical studies of the subject have tended to focus on the “corruption of the *futuwwa* [*futūwa*]” (Vatikiotis “Corruption” 6), the process by which the social phenomenon and the ideal transformed from the notion of “*chevalier spiritual*” to that of a *balṭagi*, or thug (Corbin 6; El-Messiri 248; Jacob 688). Ironically, it was the term “*balṭagi*” that flooded Egyptian and international news media in response to the counter-revolutionary tactics of Mubarak’s strongmen in late January and early February, 2011. The connotation of the *futūwa* as local protector, a chevalier of social justice, had gone full circle, shedding its spiritual origins and hardening into the cold, inscrutable justice of the club.



28 January 2011, Lazoghly, Cairo: contracted enforcers wield the ubiquitous club.
Photograph by author.

II. *The Sixties*

While *Children of the Alley* featured an allegorical reckoning with mass revolt, Mahfouz's subsequent works delineated a vision of Egypt's secular civil society increasingly at war with itself (*Al-Liṣṣ wa-al-kilāb / The Thief and the Dogs*, 1961; *Al-Summān wa-al-Kharīf / Autumn Quail*, 1962; *Tharthara fawq al-nīl / Adrift on the Nile*, 1966). His main literary conduit for this condition was the individual. His novels from the sixties— thin in size, fast in style, and sardonic in tone— gave rise among critics to a sense of “incompleteness,” not solely of the revolution, but of the lives of the characters in question (*Al-Shaḥḥādh / The Beggar*, 1965; *Al-ṭarīq / The Search*, 1966; *Mīrāmār / Miramar*, 1967). “What is the importance of a military victory where there is intellectual decadence?” wrote Ghālī Shukrī, a Marxist essayist and key critic of Mahfouz (Shukrī

Egypt 13). In *The Search*, Shukrī found a certain want of personal “dignity” and “peace” for the fatherless protagonist whose quest begins, as with the tripartite maxim of the Free-Officers (“Freedom, Socialism, Unity”), with “freedom.”^{xiii} His was the spirit of “counter-revolution,” a condition Shukrī identified with the Sadat years (1971-1981),^{xiv} but that was inherent to the revolution itself (Shukrī, *al-Mantamī* 375). Nasser spelled out as much in his *Philosophy of Revolution* (1955) where he wrote that July’s political/military victory would be followed by a second, “social revolution, involving the conflict of the classes” (Nasser 40). The outcome of the second revolution must be an end to the infighting, the “corruption, doubt, hatred and egoism” (Nasser 41). This vision of interpersonal corruption is nowhere more apparent than in Mahfouz’s post-revolutionary masterpieces. While his work from the ’60 has often been interpreted as critical of the revolution,^{xv} I suggest that it was an expression of revolution, no more dialectical in its vision of a post-revolutionary society than the ideology advanced by the intellectual and political leadership of the day. Even that which threatened to be his most controversial novel, *Adrift on the Nile*, was tacitly approved by Nasser himself.^{xvi} Yet, while the vision of social decadence apparent in the novels may have coalesced with revolutionary ideology in the abstract sense, the notion that the “world is considered to be in a process of constant deterioration” has arguably been a feature of cultural criticism in the Islamic tradition since at least the Golden Age of Islam (Peled 8). Mahfouz, who wrote only in *fushā* (classical Arabic), even relying on collaborators for the dialogue portions of his film scripts (Farīd “Najīb”), was not interested in the kind of radical upheaval of social customs, as illustrated by the fifth and final revolution of *Children of Alley*, for example, a vision that, over the years, has been conflated, mistakenly, with his own. Rather, as I

discuss in the third chapter, nostalgia for the past, and the past itself, are omnipresent features of his literature. The past lords over the residents of his novels like the great “unseen” Jābalawī (the mysterious patriarch in *Children of the Alley*). It torments the protagonists’ conscience and blinds their action. The missing father in *The Search*, the dream of revenge and redemption in the *Thief and the Dogs*, or the longing for youth, beauty, and simpler times in *Miramar* all speak to this dynamic. Still, an ironic note penetrates such post-revolutionary nostalgia. This is what you wanted, he seems to say, and now you have it! Through nostalgia he finds a haunting inevitability, a world confined to its own prophecy.

III. *Why Film?*

By most accounts the first film to be shown in Egypt was in 1896, a projection of a Lumiere short made in Lyon (Farīd, *Tarīkh* 6; Ḥasan 11; Thoraval 7). Whether the first screening occurred in the “salon of the Hotel Continental” in Cairo on January 27, or, in fact, at “a bathhouse beside the Garden Al-Ezbekiyya,” on January 28, 1897, or even as late as 1900 at a café in front of the Eastern Gate of Al-Ezbekiyya, courtesy of a man by the name of Francisco, who was accompanied by his wife, remains open to debate (Ḥasan 10). Between the screening of the first Egyptian sound film (which followed closely on the heels of the first silent films in 1922) and the end of WWII, approximately 150 features were made in Egypt, with the bulk of those appearing between the end of WWII and the 1952 revolution (Malkmus 31). The director of Bank Miṣr, Ṭal‘at Ḥarb (Talaat Harb), recognized the earning potential of film and in 1935 founded Studio Miṣr. Touring the major centers of film production in France and Germany, he sought to create a

“Hollywood of the Orient” along the Avenue of the Pyramids in Giza (Thoraval 18). By 1952, film was Egypt’s largest export, second only to cotton. It generated some 270 million pounds a year, making it the fourth largest film industry in the world (Thoraval 109). Film historian Samīr Farīd referred to this period as the “cinema of war profiteers,” noting the often clandestine accumulation of capital via illegal speculation (Malkmus 31). With this success came clear ideals of what films should look like. The Studio was nationalized in 1960 (Karawya).^{xvii} As the art historian Liliane Karnouk noted, the overwhelming majority of films made at this time fit the mold of the “*luqam*” genre, a style of light comedies named for the sweet morsels of pastry sold amidst the glittering lights of downtown Cairo (Karnouk 11). But a new, realist genre began at this time as well, and Naguib Mahfouz, already a successful novelist, quickly became one of its most important figures.

In a single decade, between 1947 and 1957, Mahfouz wrote or co-wrote some thirty-odd scripts, many of them among the most successful in Egyptian history at the time. He would go on, between 1959 and 1971, to serve as the Director of the Censorship Office, the Director and Chairman of the Cinema Support Organization, and the Counselor for Cinema Affairs to the Minister of Culture.^{xviii} On an artistic plane, as he discussed in later articles and interviews, the capacity for film to enumerate the flow of life, through montage, jump cuts, lighting and close ups, helped him to develop a darker, faster and more complex vision of society.

In recent years, thanks to writers and historians like Samīr Farīd, Madkūr Thābit and Wa’īl ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ, the importance of film to Mahfouz’s career has quietly become one of seminal interest in the Arabic speaking world.^{xix} There remains, however, limited

critical material on this aspect of his career in English. While the subject is likely to remain dormant (as subtitled versions of the films he wrote have yet to appear and copies are difficult to come by), the third chapter should serve as a useful guide for those wishing to better understand the practical and aesthetic significance of film writing to Mahfouz's career. It is, however, beyond the scope of the third chapter to address all of Mahfouz's screenplays. Rather, my aim is to identify the development, through film, of a single pivotal motif from his post-revolutionary writings: the *futūwa*.

By the late fifties, the *futūwa* had become Mahfouz's most recognizable theme. But unlike the earlier, pre-revolutionary manifestations of the character, his cinematic *futūwa*, most famously performed by Egypt's leading strongman Farīd Shawqī, had become increasingly connected to the question of social justice. Like many of the early collaborations between John Ford and John Wayne, Shawqī's portrayal of Mahfouz's *futūwa* formed the backbone of a new genre, referred to at times as the "*aflām al-futūwa*" ("Thug Films)."^{xx} Indeed, historians have tended to view this genre of Egyptian film as a "foster child of American film" (Shafik 313). But with their hybrid imagery of high-noon showdowns, urban syndicalism and sweeping battle scenes, the *futūwa* films took on a life of their own in the mid-fifties and, as Viola Shafik noted, they have enjoyed periods of renaissance ever since (Shafik 313).^{xxi} As I discuss in the context of post-revolutionary politics, they were also timely. Practically, and aesthetically, the films emerged from the ruins of the British-backed monarchy and a stringent new censorship law that prohibited the production or distribution of any film that "spread the spirit of rebellion" (Farīd, *Tarīkh* 58). As film historian Samīr Farīd wrote, the 1947 directives, or Farūq Code, designed in response to a series of hard-nosed productions about labor rights by the

newly created Studio Miṣr (these included Kāmal al-Tulamsānī's *Black Market*, 1943/47; Aḥmad Kāmal Murī's *The Worker*, 1943; and Kamāl Salīm's *Manifestations*, 1941), effectively defined as "criminal" any attempt to gain rights on the behalf of workers (Farīd, *Tarīkh* 58). Mahfouz's *futūwa* films, created after the overthrow of the monarchy, represented a celebration of popular justice and, in the case of *Al-Futūwa (Thug*, Ṣalāḥ Abū Sayf, 1957), a direct attack on the mismanagement, abuses and corruption of the old regime.

While Mahfouz's *futūwa* films challenged certain aspects of revolutionary ideology in Egypt, in another, more obvious sense, the films championed the Revolution's dissolution of the mixed-court system upheld under both Ottoman and British rule (Assad 210-212).^{xxii} Historically, the *futūwāt* were homeless youths, permanent inhabitants of the public sphere who became indoctrinated into Sufi brotherhoods and were later organized into sporting clubs (pigeon-training, in particular, according to Claude Cahen) by the Caliph al-Nāṣir (d.1225) (Cahen 238). Mahfouz's films, in turn, depict a certain trans-spherical ideology of justice, providing, in effect, an aesthetic precursor to both the Nasserite vision of secular authority that simultaneously sought to dissolve and co-opt the religious courts while championing the strongman doctrine of the Young Egypt Party, and the public, Islamic culture advanced by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. However, unlike his cinematic version, the literary image of the *futūwa*, as I discuss in my second chapter on *Awlād Ḥāritinā*, spoke to a powerful new social development in the early to mid-fifties: the political cooptation of the private religious sector and the clandestine imperative of those who would resist it.

Mahfouz began writing about the *futūwa* as early as 1936. While unique, in part, to Egyptian and Islamic history, the author's use of the figure and the conditions for its emergence onto the big-screen as a revolutionary icon, coincided with the development of similar fictional characters in other parts of the world. One such parallel I look at in the third chapter can be found in a pair of screenplays by Jorge Luis Borges. Like Mahfouz, Borges' literature was deeply impacted by cinema and, as with his Egyptian counterpart, his experiments in screenplay writing encapsulated the way he viewed the politics and possibilities of realism following the Argentine revolution of 1945. *Los orilleros* and *El paraíso de los creyentes* are set in the *arrabales*, or working-class suburbs of Buenos Aires. As with the films I discuss by Mahfouz, Borges' cinema of the *arrabal* became the staging ground for a new, larger-than-life typology, namely, the urban *gaucho*, the dispossessed migrant who travels to the city with no more than a will for success and a sense of pride. Borges' post-revolutionary *gaucho*, like Mahfouz's *futūwa*, embodied a universal humanism insofar as it was the product of a writer, who, as Georg Lucáks remarked of the great nineteenth-century realists, "delves deeper in order to uncover the true types of man... to unearth and expose to the eyes of modern society the great tragedy of the complete human personality." Such "completeness," for Lucáks, coincides with the realization that "every action, thought and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community," and that the "division of the complete human personality into a public and private sector was a mutilation of the essence of man" (9). The new politics of these types, though bound to religion, local myth, and nationalism, is, nonetheless, universally recognizable; the conditions for the possibility of their existence are inseparably tied to an age of desecularization. As the "revitalization of

religion” in the public sphere is now part and parcel of the American political process, the pseudo-sacred quest for justice embodied in these types should hold some resonance for American readers as well (Habermas, *Between* 115).

IV. A Readerly Methodology

There are two aspects of methodology I use in this dissertation that may not be readily apparent and that I think are worth drawing to the reader’s attention before continuing. The first concerns the question of language, in particular the meaning of language in contrast to the philosophy of language as such. While ostensibly similar, the difference between these two aspects of language study is pivotal to distinguishing the way I read Mahfouz, and the rationale that links together the set of literary theorists whose work I refer to throughout.

Common to writers like Georg Lukács, Raymond Williams, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Rancière, Louis ‘Awad, or Sabry Hafez, is a basic preoccupation with how we understand social phenomena. Literature and the arts offer a particularly nuanced way for interpreting the multiple layers of human experience. A caveat to this position is the somewhat non-obvious point that “language is the language of reason itself” (Gadamer 402). This is not to say that language overdetermines reason, but that it is our principal vehicle of reason. The act of interpretation, as Jorge Luis Borges captured so eloquently in “Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote,” is invariably an individual endeavor, one profoundly influenced by the culture and life experiences of the interpreter. But, the fact that interpretations vary according to the subjectivity of the interpreter, does not preclude the possibility of obtaining knowledge of the world through

language. In fact, as Gadamer and others have suggested, it is precisely the infinite variety of independent interpretations that establishes the preconditions for objectivity, however unattainable it may feel. In his rewriting of *Don Quixote* by memory, the fictional Frenchman Pierre Menard falls inevitably short of his goal, yet, through his failure, he is successful in his reproduction of the basic meaning of the text. What could be more quixotic than such a foolish ambition? “The interpretation as a whole is made up of a thousand little decisions which all claim to be correct,” wrote Gadamer. “An explicit interpretation in language would only approximate correctness and fall short of the rounded concreteness achieved by an ‘artistic’ reproduction. But this precludes neither the fact that all understanding has an intrinsic relation to interpretation nor the basic possibility of an interpretation in words” (402). In all its ambiguities, through its “structure of feelings,” to borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams, the work of art is the best approximation of the “rounded concreteness” of reality (Gadamer 402). But the inaccuracy of language, for interpreting both the artist’s original intention and the reality conveyed therein, does not discount the basic purpose of interpretation or its potential for achieving its aim.

Such a defense of hermeneutics is preliminary to addressing the most immediate question of language contained in a study like the present one, namely, how does translation affect the value of interpretation? From even just the brief definition of hermeneutics I have supplied above, my position should seem more or less straightforward. I will quote Gadamer, once more, as I share, closely enough, his same opinion on the matter:

Language is the language of reason itself.

One says this, and then one hesitates. For this makes language so close to reason— which means, to the things it names— that one may ask why there should be different languages at all, since all seem to have the same proximity to reason and to objects. When a person lives in a language, he is filled with the sense of the unsurpassable appropriateness of the words he uses for the subject matter he is talking about. It seems impossible that other words in other languages could name the things equally well. The suitable word always seems to be one's own and unique, just as the thing referred to is always unique. The agony of translation consists ultimately in the fact that the original words seem to be inseparable from the things they refer to, so that to make a text intelligible one often has to give an interpretive paraphrase of it rather than translate it. The more sensitively our historical consciousness reacts, the more it seems to be aware of the untranslatability of the unfamiliar. But this makes the intimate unity of word and thing a hermeneutical scandal. How can we possibly understand anything written in a foreign language if we are thus imprisoned in our own (403)?

Translating fiction, or writing in one language about fiction written in another, which I consider central to the task of Comparative Literature, pushes the “agony of translation” to its furthest extreme. In fiction, be it narrative or poetic, the author's distance from the meaning, or targeted reality, of his language is often great, i.e. Borges' story of Pierre

Menard is removed exponentially from the target of Menard's story, and the story of *Don Quixote* as told by Miguel de Cervantes, which, itself, is purportedly a translation of text, written in Arabic (and scattered through the markets of Toledo) by one "Cide Hamete Benengeli." All acts of interpretation are simultaneously an act of misinterpretation, regardless of the temporal or geographic distance between the moment of reception and reproduction. In this study, I discuss an instance of grave misinterpretation, in the reception of *Children of the Alley* that emerged just days following the initial publication of its first installment in a Cairo newspaper. The abstractedness of fictional writing merely emphasizes the importance of imagination and the acceptance of uncertainty in the act of interpretation. Moreover, as other comparatists will affirm, the emotional matter of fiction can at times be far easier to interpret than the hard facts of quotidian phenomena, i.e. a newspaper. Still, the point remains: no exposition, regardless of the language, should be viewed as beyond the realm of understanding, granted the basic tools of comprehension are in place. As Gadamer wrote:

The work of understanding and interpretation always remains meaningful. This shows the superior universality with which reason rises above the limitations of any given language. The hermeneutical experience is the corrective by means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and it is itself verbally constituted (403).

Such is the aim of this dissertation. It is also this defense of hermeneutics, as a "verbally constituted" escape from the prison of language, that supplies the philosophical impulse

for the second major component of the methodology I employ here: the use of transcontinental and trans-historic reflections, as well as personal experience, to flesh out the meaning of a text.

In this light, Mahfouz's post-revolutionary work is comparable to a score of artistic projects throughout history and from around the globe. How reminiscent is his Said Mahran from *The Thief and the Dogs* with Victor Hugo's Jean Valjean of *Les Misérables*, for example, or *Children of the Alley* with the masked political critiques of George Orwell's postwar allegories. Such comparisons reinforce the need for a defense of hermeneutics as free from the "prison of language." Mahfouz and his contemporaries in South America, for example, while exposed to comparable socio-economic experiences, share few formal legacies in common. What substantiates a viable comparison between Mahfouz and writers like Roberto Arlt or Jorge Luis Borges— two authors whose work I look at in the second and third chapters— is not the question of legacy or emulation, or the fact they were writing in the wake of two major revolutions, in 1916 and 1945. Rather, it is the aesthetic construction of meaning in relation to common social problems that binds their work together. Fraternalism in democracy and criminality in the public sphere are two such notions that I examine.^{xxiii}

Also apparent from a comparison of these authors' work is the import of their respective skepticism towards the notion of social or individual predetermination. There are no unconscious conspiracies, or accidental plans in their cosmology of modern social existence. Mahfouz's free-actors, his revolutionaries or counterrevolutionaries, pick their battles carefully. But it is in this sense that the author's greatest irony emerges: every conspiracy is subject to an even greater one, which, more often than not, obeys the laws

of nature, inexplicable coincidence, the chaos that is “God’s World.”^{xxiv} Mahfouz was one of those great men of letters who found in his depiction of freedom more humor than tragedy. And while murder, more often than not, serves as the unifying element to his heroes’ disparate agendas, it is the haphazardness of that final stroke, a sudden, Doestoevskian miscue that thrusts the conspirator once more into the vulnerable position of the unsuspecting citizen, and into flight. Along aesthetic and political lines, Mahfouz and Borges, in particular, diverge significantly. While the former favored the novel, robust dialogues, plots driven by human desire, error and self-correction, Borges’ primary medium was the short-story (which Mahfouz wrote as well) and his style was closer to that of a pointillist canopy, a constellation of names and images with heavy doses of philosophical exposition in between. But their literature shares much in common too, foremost of which is a distinct “absence of ghosts” in favor of a more phantasmagoric aesthetics of reality. As mentioned, I discuss this feature of their work, in the third chapter, as being tied to their brief, but meaningful, forays into cinema (Sarlo 41).

Chapter One

Awlād Ḥāratinā and the Coming Revolution



A neighborhood brigade in Cairo, 1 February 2011. Photograph by author.

Introduction

2011 marked the centennial of Naguib Mahfouz's birth. Celebrating in the shadow of the Arab Spring, it was a fitting coincidence for fans of the late great master, as Mahfouz was undoubtedly the most prolific chronicler of social transformation in modern Egyptian history. Recognized more than any author in the Arab world, most of Mahfouz's thirty novels have been translated into English (and many other languages) and works like *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* (*Palace Walk*, 1956) and *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* (*Midaq Alley*, 1945) have become staples of world literature classes. Despite this canonization, the controversy surrounding his first novel following the Free-Officers' revolution of 1952, *Awlād Ḥāratinā* (*Children of the Alley*, 1959),^{xxv} remains as poignant as ever.^{xxvi} Banned by the government of

Nasser and finally republished in 2006, just months after the author's death and Egypt's first "open" parliamentary elections, key aspects of the novel appear prophetic in the wake of 25 January 2011. As I suggest here, it is difficult to read *Awlād Ḥāratinā* today as anything less than an "aesthetic anticipation of the future," a material touchstone in Egypt's long struggle for democracy (Rancière, *Politics* 29).

The 2006 edition also throws into stark relief some of the critical bias that has long accompanied this novel. Describing it as the most "dangerous" piece of fiction in the Arab world, critics of the *Awlād Ḥāratinā* have typically concentrated on the author's perceived use of allegory, either political or religious (al-Naqqāsh, *Awlād* 139).^{xxvii} While religion and politics are self-evident features of the novel,^{xxviii} interpretations of it as religious or political allegory, as such, have evaded a more compelling reading of the work as a secular and "metaphysical" meditation on man's "public humanity," a notion Maḥfūz steadfastly defended (Maḥfūz, *Najīb Maḥfūz: Ṣafaḥāt* 142).^{xxix} Rajā' al-Naqqāsh, a writer and close confidant of Mahfouz, left this particular phrase out of his French translation of the interview he conducted with the author in the early 2000s, however. And it is not difficult to see why. The meaning of the term *al-insāniyyah al-‘amma* ("public humanity")^{xxx} is anything but self-evident. In this chapter I try to untangle what that might mean. What would such an aesthetics look like? How did Mahfouz construct it and why? At the core of his novel lie two quintessential features of the Nobel laureate's philosophical universe: Bergsonism and the moral disposition of the *futūwa*. Sustained through a concrete aesthetics of post-revolutionary Egypt, these two elements demand, in Fredric Jameson's language, a "third" or "universal horizon" of interpretation. It is

against this horizon of meaning that the novel can be defended, truly, as a modern chef d'oeuvre.

I. A Brief History of the Text

It is a known paradox in literary life that the most controversial work is often the least fortunate in terms of careful reading and critical analysis (Jacquemond 18).

Despite its ban, versions of *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, from Beirut or Jerusalem, have long been available in Egypt. Egyptians still recall seeing bootleg copies of the book being sold at stands along the highway to Alexandria (Abdel Nasser). Attempts were made to publish the novel over the decades, but always with the same result. According to Aḥmad Kamāl Abū al-Majd, Mahfouz routinely denied permission to publish. His reason, he said, was he did not want it distributed before receiving approval by Al-Azhar, the largest and most prestigious religious institution in Egypt and the initial advocate for its ban (Maḥfūz, *Awlād* 588). In later years, he specifically requested that Abū al-Majd, a former foreign minister under Anwār al-Sādāt (Sadat) and member of the Supreme Council of Research at Al-Azhar, write an introduction (Maḥfūz, *Awlād* 582). Mahfouz's longtime publishing house, Dār al-Shurūq, ultimately complied with the request.

The story of the novel is the rise and subsequent defeat-by-assimilation of five popular uprisings. Each generation produces a new "great man" who organizes a clan of followers to challenge the regime of his forefather Jabalāwī. But Jabalāwī remains unmoved by these uprisings (his name infers a mountain), which, in the end, amount to little more than a new order of *futūwāt* who control the alley in the name of his enigmatic

“Ten Conditions” (*shurūt ‘ashra*). This cycle, the narrator explains, repeats itself. It is only with the fifth revolution, and the destruction of Jabalāwī, that something starts to give. The catalyst of this change is not the traditional leader, a descendent of the “great house,” but an outsider, a “man of science,” by the name of ‘Arafa.

Although Mahfouz and others close to him argued to the contrary, many who read the novel as it first appeared in the pages of *Al-Ahrām* latched onto the idea that he had allegorized the history of religion (Mehrez 281). “The first installments passed with hardly any notice,” Mahfouz told Rajā’ al-Naqqāsh. “The crisis began after a writer for the literary page of the journal *al-Jumhūriyya* wrote that *Al-Ahrām* had begun to serialize a novel exposing the prophets... [people] began sending complaints and petitions to the public prosecutors and to Al-Azhar, even to the President of the Republic, demanding justice be brought against me” (Maḥfūz, *Najīb Maḥfūz: Ṣafahāt* 143). Mahfouz was finally told by one of Nasser’s representatives that the government could not allow the novel to be published without the risk of serious conflict with Al-Azhar. The editors at *Al-Ahrām* managed to complete the run. But the novel was banned immediately following its last installment (El-Bahrawi).

For the student of Arabic literature, the new edition of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* conveys, in nearly 600 pages (581 to be exact), the veritable weight of Mahfouz’s creation. But also apparent is the remarkable fluidity of his prose, the ease with which he pulls together a story that spans over five generations, an innumerable cast of characters, sprawling associational ties, marital disputes, political dealings, conspiracies, and wars. Clear as day are his perennial use of syntactical symmetry and mastery in fleshing out characters through action and dialogue. Peter Theroux’s English edition, while a major

accomplishment in translation, cannot help but obscure some of the author's more subtle tricks, the use of the familiar “*mu'allim*” (master) among the *futūwāt*, for example, or, as I discuss here, the complexity of the term *futūwa* itself. Apparent too in the new Arabic edition is the nature of Mahfouz's commentary on religion. The afterword by Abū Majd addresses this, emphasizing, mainly, the author's rejection of allegorical interpretations. But, the title of the preface, “*iftitāḥiyya*” (a word which translates practically as “editorial” but also invokes the opening *Sūra* of the *Qur'ān: al-Fātiḥa*), or the division of the novel into 114 chapters (the same number of Suras in the *Qur'ān*) also remind readers of the ways in which Mahfouz was using religion, not as the subject of allegory per se, but as a model of storytelling (Jacquemond 129).

Richard Jacquemond discussed the Quranic-like structure of the novel in a recent essay published, in Arabic, in the journal *Alif*. This speaks to another important aspect of the 2006 edition, namely, the wave of interest it generated in Mahfouz's post-revolutionary masterpiece at a moment in Egyptian history— between the first “open” parliamentary elections in Egypt since WWII, in 2005, and the miracle of Tahrir (the book was still featured in windowsills when the uprising began)— that was incomparably open to the genius of a piece of literature of this sort.^{xxxix} Al-Naqqāsh as well performed a wonderful service in his publication of *Awlād Ḥāratinā: Bayna Al-Fann Wa-Al-Dīn* (Children of Our Quarter: Between Art and Religion, 2008). In it he assembles a series of articles he wrote over the course of two years and in various journals and periodicals as part of a push to revive interest in the novel. What is clear from this collection, published in the prestigious *Dār al-Hilāl* series, is that while the novel generated some immediate and vociferous detractors, particularly among religious conservatives, a number of

Islamic scholars spoke out in its defense as well. Major Islamic thinkers like Muḥammad Salīm al-‘Awwā, the former Secretary General of the International Union for Islamic Scholars and an official contender for the Egyptian Presidency in 2012, have used the controversy surrounding the novel as a chance to denounce the use of Islamic rhetoric for violent ends and to argue that “freedom of thought” and “differences of opinion” are integral to the religion (al-Naqqāsh, *Awlād* 104).^{xxxii} Muḥammad Jalāl Kishk, a well-known conservative scholar with close affinities to the Muslim Brotherhood, wrote: “any Muslim who mistakes the despotic Jabalāwī for Allah needs to rethink his understanding of the latter” (al-Naqqāsh, *Awlād* 108).^{xxxiii}

The tragedy surrounding this novel is well known. By the mid-sixties, the initial controversy of its publication had subsided, but attention fell on *Awlād Ḥāratinā* once more in 1988, when rumors spread that Mahfouz had won the Nobel Prize for literature thanks in part to the novel. Soon after, ‘Umar ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān, an Egyptian Sheikh and founder of the outlawed group al-Jamā‘a al-Islāmiyya, then living in New York, issued a fatwa against Mahfouz in the Kuwaiti journal *al-Anbā’* (Maḥfūz, *Najīb Maḥfūz: Ṣafahāt* 144).^{xxxiv} Then, in 1994, a young man, who famously admitted he had never read the novel, attacked the author in broad daylight, stabbing him in the throat as he got into a car (Ghīṭānī xiii). Mahfouz survived, but was unable to use his arm to write. For the remainder of his life he would dictate all of his work (Maḥfūz, *Pages* 124).

II. Horizons of Interpretation

As Richard Jacquemond aptly noted, the sad irony surrounding the history of this novel is that much of the controversy appeared to have little to do with the meaning of the novel

itself. Yet this history serves also as a reminder that implicit to the reception of any work of literature lies the basic question: “how can a text be protected against misunderstanding from the start” (Gadamer 271)? While the author’s passing and the new edition of the novel, with its thoughtful afterword by Abū Majd, would seem to help turn the page on this history, it is also a book, that, in its strangeness and opaqueness, managed to harness a certain aesthetic of misinterpretation, capturing an air of emotional uncertainty that, by many accounts, conveyed quite accurately the social atmosphere in Egypt in the late fifties, a period of great industrialization, a rapidly shifting social landscape with the massive influx of migrants to the city following independence and, of course, the lingering scent of war from the Suez conflict. Amidst the Franco-British-Israeli air raids, Mahfouz himself had ventured into the streets, joining one of the armed neighborhood brigades that had been authorized by the Revolutionary Command Council to train people how to “handle a Belgian rifle” and to “fire projectiles” (Maḥfūz, *Pages* 159). Like his screenplays before it, *Awlād Ḥāratinā* is composed of a seemingly unending series of crises. It is a fitting testament to the period in this way. But it also tapped into an important undercurrent to the revolution that was only just beginning to take shape.

It was not until 1961 and Nasser’s program of “centrally directed comprehensive planning” that Egyptian authorities had effaced the economic vestiges of British liberalism for good (Vatikiotis, *Nasser* 211). Nor was it until the mid-fifties, following the attempted assassination of Nasser, and the subsequent arrest and persecution of thousands of members of the Muslim Brotherhood, that the most significant cultural fault lines in Egyptian society began to emerge. Writing prior to 1967, Luwīs ‘Awaḍ, a major

public intellectual and one of Mahfouz's most important literary critics, captured the overriding sentiment of Egypt's secular elite at the time.

Realizing that the essence of democracy is the transference of political power to the people, and realizing that political power is meaningless without economic power, the revolution of 1952 has chosen the path of Socialism in the same way as the revolution of 1919 had chosen the path of Liberal Democracy and the revolution of 1882 had chosen the path of the Egyptianization of the Turkish-controlled army and administration... At no time was it involved in a mystical faith in a divine right of something or other, or in flights of vision about a Utopia, but always took the bull by the horns and called things by their names. Above all, it has always been remarkably moderate, pragmatic, with very little theory about it, and certainly with no excesses or brutalities (Vatikiotis, *Egypt* 144).

For 'Awad, the post-revolutionary milieu could most easily be defined by "the militancy of reactionary thought."^{xxxv} He refers to these reactionaries as "the extreme right" and notes their animosity towards "the emancipation of women," their description of twentieth-century civilization as "a return to pre-Islamic paganism," and their call for "an armed Jihad to restore the kingdom of the spirit and the kingdom of God on earth" (Vatikiotis, *Egypt* 160). Like many of his colleagues, 'Awad saw the revolution as being at once victorious and deeply flawed; its advances were limited by its repetition of the past and its reactionaries were as entrenched in their religious ideology as the vanguard was bound to the dictates of their so-called pragmatism. Antagonism between the military

elite and the Islamists, the basic tension that defines the political landscape across much of the Islamic world today, began only after 1952, and it did not become a reality until 1954, after the British had left for good (Rogan 288).^{xxxvi}

Correspondingly, there exists an entrenched sense of anxiety in Mahfouz's novel. The miserable condition of the alley appears endemic and the need for religious leadership insatiable. This fragile alliance between misery and religion is sustained only by the indifference and disdain of the alley's "invincible protectors," the *futūwāt*. Not surprisingly, some of the richest interpretations of the novel to date have been developed by historians and geared towards just such a political horizon of interpretation.

In his 1985 essay "*Awlād Ḥāratinā: An Event in the World*," Jareer Abu-Haidar argued in favor of the basic realism of the novel. "There are no abstractions in *Awlād*," he exclaims. "I find little or nothing in it to make it qualify as a symbolic metaphysical quest, as many Arab critics have chosen to picture it, or still less, as 'an allegory on the history of religion,' as some students of Maḥfūz in the West have described it" (125). While this interpretation dismisses the author's stated intention of creating a "metaphysical perspective of common humanity" and the Western student he quotes is the Iraqi Jew and noted Mahfouz scholar Sasson Somekh, the general thrust of his argument provides what most interpretations of the novel have since lacked. Speaking of the cyclical rise, cooptation and eventual destruction of the novel's successive revolutions, he writes: "does not this present close analogies with repeated *coups d'états*, or so-called revolutions in many parts of the Middle East in recent history?" (124).

Abu Haidar's analysis, which leans heavily on the example of the Lebanese revolution (1971) and civil war (1975-1990), seems relevant and accessible in terms of

the general political climate in the Middle East. But his focus on direct correlations of the text to political eventualities, in literary terms, differs only slightly from the kind of religious interpretations Mahfouz so stridently rejected. The necessary condition for any strictly political or strictly religious analysis is that the work should contain a degree of “ideological closure,” or resolution, which functions only in relation to the surrounding social contradictions of its historical moment (Jameson 83). In such an analysis the arrival of ‘Arafa, the prophet of science, becomes symbolic of either A) Mahfouz’s desire for a modern, technocratic solution to the political failure of religion and despotic governance; or B) a critique of Nasser’s “scientific socialism,” based, as the leader once said, “on science not on chaos” (Baker 105). At the heart of the “political horizon” of allegorical interpretation lies the presumption that the work presents a unified contraposition to existent social contradictions. The implication of this analysis is that the author has built into his novel a distinctly utopist undertone of wish-fulfillment, an alternative vision for the nation. Since Mahfouz was a lifelong bureaucrat, a supporter of the revolution who only briefly left Egypt twice in his lifetime (to go to Yugoslavia and Yemen), it would be hard to mitigate such a claim with the reality of the author’s politics. A close reading of the novel also helps overturn this presumption. One need not dismiss the political horizon altogether, however.

In looking at Orwell’s *1984* (1949), Jameson made the point that the “political horizon” of analysis performs the task of connecting the novel to a particular socio-historic moment. But, he argued, a reader’s “will to read literary or cultural texts as symbolic acts” does not imply the restriction of that text to the expression of a “hidden master narrative” (Jameson 28). The “political horizon” establishes only the conviction

that the “literary or aesthetic act... always entertains some active relationship with the Real” (81). Moreover, this first horizon of interpretation lays the foundation for a “second” or “social” horizon of analysis that understands the author’s use of allegory in relation to a more abstract horizon of social engagement. In such instances, the implied resolution of the text functions not in relation to external contradictions, but to the “social discord” of the author’s own design (83). In this regard, the reader of Arabic might look to the analysis of a writer and critic like Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī, who saw in *Awlād Ḥāratinā* a prime example of what he described as “the static and the dynamic” of the Mahfouzian aesthetic. Jabalāwī’s agelessness, the fixedness of his mansion and his rule correlate dialectically, to the ebullience of the alley: its quotidian violence and cyclical revolutions. In essence a formalistic interpretation, Ḥaqqī’s analysis sees the conclusion of the novel as the resolution to a set of self-contained contradictions; a “*parole*” or speech act, in Jameson’s language, sensible only in the context of a greater “*langue*” of class discourse (85).

The social, or what Jameson also refers to as the “semantic” horizon of analysis, is often compounded with the “third” or “historical” horizon. But Jameson makes an important distinction between the two. On the semantic horizon of interpretation, the work is seen to represent the finished appearance of a “philosophical system” or, even more acutely, a “religious master code,” insofar as it attempts to synthesize those internal contradictions as part of a closed resolution, or theory. (Jameson refers to the situation in seventeenth-century England and the obligation of a persecuted intellectual class to disguise the social horizon of their discourse in the form of a “religious master code”) (88). While the philosophical undercurrent of Mahfouz’s creation is apparent, the

semantic horizon of analysis does not account for the political aspects of the novel and its resonance with the period in which he wrote it. The most salient horizon of analysis, then, as I have suggested, is the point of diffraction between the political and social horizons, what Jameson refers to as the “third” or “universal horizon” of allegorical analysis.

III. Al-Futūwa

For Jameson, the third horizon of analysis finds the content of a work to be indistinguishable from its form and sees its horizon of applicability only on an historical or universal level. He finds examples of this in Weber’s “iron cage,” Foucault’s “political technology of the body,” or the “cultural programming” of theorists like Vico, Hegel, Spengler, Althusser and Deleuze (90). In literary-aesthetic terms, one might see the third horizon of allegory in an author like Proust (a writer Mahfouz referred to often), where the rich, mnemonic prose, is, in essence, the content of the work. Or even in the “epoch” quality of a *War and Peace* with its “spacious composition, the cheerful, comfortable, leisurely relationships between characters” that could only be penned by Tolstoy and only at Tolstoy’s historical juncture (Lukács 148). In the late nineteenth-fifties, writing in the midst of revolution and counterrevolution, Mahfouz found just such an effect in one of his earliest (and most ingenious) literary creations: the *futūwa*.

The figure of the *futūwa* first burst onto the Mahfouzian scene in the early-thirties. Its earliest iteration can be found in a previously unpublished short story “*Futūwat al-‘Atūf*.”^{xxxvii} Here we find the story of Bayūmī, a street urchin, who, as a racketeer and a strongman, rises through the ranks of a local gang, eventually going on to control so much power in his neighborhood, al-Jamāliyya,^{xxxviii} that Sa‘d Zaghlūl, the leader of the

Wafd, the Egyptian party for independence, pays him to deliver votes on election day. He quickly turns around and betrays Zaghlūl, taking the money while also committing to a higher bidder. A literary ghost of sorts, Bayūmī “al-‘Aṭūf” (“the compassionate”) would reappear throughout the author’s lifetime.^{xxxix} Played by the great Farīd Shawqī, the cavalier hero of Mahfouz’s screenplays *Futūwāt al-Ḥusaniyya* (1957) and *Al-Futūwa* (1956) was a Bayūmī. Bayūmī was the name of the most brutal of Jabalāwī’s thugs in *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, and in *Ḥadrat al-Muḥtaram* (*Respected Sir*, 1975), a novel often thought to possess a heavy shade of autobiography, Bayūmī is the name of the protagonist: a spiritual recluse. In *Malḥamat Al-Ḥarāfīsh* (*The Harafish*, 1977), the ‘Aṭūf clan was one of the main *futūwa* factions. Traces of Bayūmī are apparent almost everywhere in Mahfouz’s work; however, as in this early scene from *Awlād Ḥāratinā*. Here, Idrīs, the son of Jabalāwī and the brother of Adham, like Cain, is cast from the home after murdering his younger brother. From the circle of Jabalāwī’s family, Idrīs falls into the world and the culture of the *futūwāt*.

He loitered outside the mansion, shouting the filthiest curses... naked as the day he was born, basking in the sun and singing the most indecent songs. He roamed the nearby neighborhoods, domain of the bullies and gangsters (*futūwāt*), menacing pedestrians with rude stares and starting fights with anyone who got in his way” (20).^{xl}

Idrīs’s expulsion from the mansion closely resembles Bayūmī’s first appearance in “*Futūwat al-‘Aṭūf*”:

As evening fell, Bayūmī the bean-seller, carrying a loitering notice, exited from the Ḥusaniyya Police Station. His chest cracking with anger he cried: ‘vagrancy I commit myself to you!’ He foamed at the mouth, feebly mumbling vague and beastly sounds that increased in volume the further he moved from the station, until reaching finally Faruk Square where the sounds became a curse, a raging torrent of frightening insults and violent defamations (Maḥfūz, *Futūwa* 97).^{xli}

Packed with colorful descriptives, the early, unpublished work lacks the precision of language Mahfouz would find by mid-career. But what stands out here is the author’s investment in emotive action as a driving force to his narrative. *Futūwa*, as the idea of not only a man, but a mannerism, one that emerges in opposition to the condition of freedom (from the mansion and the police station, respectively), captured, for Mahfouz, a basic paradox of modern human agency.

At the heart of Mahfouz’s *futūwa* aesthetic from the fifties was a philosophical preoccupation with the problem of political and cultural clandestinity, a topic derived explicitly from his perception of the social atmosphere in post-revolutionary Cairo. From the earliest days of the revolution, Mahfouz had become explicitly concerned about the secrecy of Nasser’s Revolutionary Command Council. In later years, he told Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī that he rejected the persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood— a group that he admittedly “hated” (Ghīṭānī 117) — and abhorred revelations that the government was disappearing members of Ḥasan al-Bannā’s group, as well as many Marxist political dissidents, to undisclosed prisons in the desert. The secrecy of the government and its

ever-increasing will to remain autonomous from the public— a subject he would revisit forcefully in novellas and short stories like *al-Liṣṣ wa al-kilāb* (*The Thief and the Dogs*, 1961), *al-Karnak* (Karnak Café 1974) and “*al-Tanzīm al-sirrī*” (“The Secret Organization,” 1982)— had generated a culture of secrecy, and the kind of extra-official religious organizations that would eventually pepper the social landscape under Sadat and Mubarak (Bianchi 158). Mahfouz told al-Naqqāsh he believed the best solution for quelling the threat of these “secret organizations” would have been to legalize their existence as political parties, inevitably exposing the real limitations of their ideological positions (Maḥfūz, *Najīb Maḥfūz: Ṣafahāt* 210). In the *futūwa*, he found an ideal expression of man’s will to secrecy, an antagonist that exists always, and ubiquitously, in all men. It is also this antagonistic spirit that generates in his characters, paradoxically, a will to transparency.

His use of the Bayūmī figure became increasingly abstract over the years, its significance reserved, almost solely, to a semantic horizon of allegory. But it is the ghostliness of the character that helped Maḥfūz to realize perhaps its seminal expression in *Maḥamat al-Ḥarāfīsh*. In the fourth tale, “*al-Muṭārīd*” (“The Hunter”), Maḥfūz reintroduces the figure as “al-Fulālī,” a loose reference to “*Futūwat al-‘Aṭūf*” where he first refers to the character as “*al-mu‘allim Bayūmī al-fawwāl*,” or “master Bayūmī the bean vender” (Maḥfūz, “*Fūtuwa*” 97).^{xlii}

In her translation, Catherine Cobham titles this section “The Fugitive,” a clever choice that places emphasis on the plight of the young protagonist Samāḥa, a descendent of the ‘Āshūr al-Nājī clan at the center of the novel. But Mahfouz’s original title is indicative of how central, if not irrepressible, the Bayūmī character had become. In the

first part of the tale, the *futūwa* announces his intention to marry Samāḥa's fiancée Mahalabiyya. The night before the unwanted marriage, she tries to escape with Samāḥa, but is killed before she can reach him. Fearing being blamed Samāḥa flees. Finding refuge in a neighborhood far from his home, he begins life anew. He grows a beard and marries a local girl with whom he has three sons. Time passes until one day he is revisited by his terrible fate. "Strange news reached Bulaq," the narrator reports, "the clan chief had struck up a friendship with a man called al-Fulali" (Maḥfūz, *Harafish* 164). The verb *sarā*, translated here as "reached," conveys a sense of twilight arrival (Maḥfūz, *Malḥamat* 235). Gazing onto the nighttime festivities that greet his enemy's cavalcade, an image Mahfouz would revisit time and again, Samāḥa realizes he is no longer safe, that the quarter has become "legal territory for his enemies" (166).

"Linking arms" with the local protectors and "flashing his gold teeth," the *futūwa* al-Fulalī becomes the catalyst for a cyclical-like interchange of private and public sovereignty, of life and death (Maḥfūz, *Harafish* 165). Far removed from the figures Mahfouz conflated with demonstrators as a child witnessing the 1919 revolution (Maḥfūz, *Najīb Maḥfūz: Ṣafahāt* 21), the *futūwa*, as an aesthetic concept, can never be "dead enough to have only historical interest" (Gadamer 298). He is an "ideologeme" in the fullest sense (Jameson 87), a closed and timeless system for thinking the "inevitability of change, including the need to accept old age and declining powers" (Cobham 125).

In 2011, the term *futūwa* still resonated in Cairo. When the security situation spiraled out of control on 28 January, 2011, following the disappearance of the police force, the men of Cairo, young and old, took to the streets to form popular brigades. Clubs of all shapes

and sizes appeared. Some were fortified with metal tips, others were little more than a broomstick. After a week or so the machetes appeared. I called some of the young men in my downtown neighborhood *futūwa* and they greeted the title with laughter. But, inseparable from popular connotations of the term as a kind of autonomous Mafia boss is the extent to which Nasser's government eradicated the institution. It is no small irony that Mahfouz once described Nasser as Egypt's most powerful *futūwa* and the United States, after WWII, as the greatest *futūwa* of them all (Maḥfūz, *Pages* 224). In his discussions with Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī, Mahfouz explained that his "use of the *futūwa*" was like his "use of the *ḥāra* (alley)" (Ghīṭānī 124). The latter embodied the impermeable character of the former and the former was inseparable from the timelessness of the street, the endless and concrete circulation of customs and traditions that may well have represented for Mahfouz the most powerful and persistent social institution in Egypt.

Etymologically the word *futūwa*, which infers, as I mentioned in the introduction, both chivalry and thuggery, is a derivative of *fatā* (pl. *fityān*) meaning "youth." The latter appears frequently in the Qur'an, but "*futūwa*" is far less common. Specifically, "the meditation of the people of *Futūwa*" writes Michel Chodkiewicz, hinges "on the occurrence of the word in verse 60 of chapter 21 (Sūrat al-Anbiyā', The Prophets), where it is applied to Abraham, who has just destroyed the idols worshipped by his people and so is about to be cast into the furnace by the infidels" (Chodkiewicz 21). In his introduction to Morteza Sarraf's collection of seven Iranian *futūwa* tracts dating between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Henri Corbin described the connection between Abraham and the *futūwa* (*javānmardī* in Persian) as part of a mystical cycle, which,

beginning with Abraham, the original *fatā*, concludes in the heroic, or chivalric, service of the Prophet's companion and son-in-law, Ali, "the *fatā par excellence*" (Sarraf 8).

In *Mouvements populaires et autonomies urbaines dans l'Asie musulmane du moyen âge* (Popular and Autonomous Urban Movements in Medieval Islamic Asia, 1959), one of the more widely cited studies of *futūwa*, published, curiously, in the same year as *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, Claude Cahen notes that, while textual evidence of the *futūwa* did not emerge until late in the Medieval period, its dualistic connotation, shown through two seemingly contradictory uses of the term *fatā*, was apparent in much earlier texts. Namely, Cahen writes, the later mystics applied the term to their description of medieval poets as "youths" living in "small collectives... outside of any familial (they are most often celibate), professional, or tribal association" (32). Throughout the following centuries sightings of these groups became increasingly rare. Sayf al-Dawla [d.circa 916], he wrote, discovered one such youth group while "under cover" (36). Instead, there began to appear in chronicles of the region, notably Syria, applications of the term *fatā* to a more motley mix of people, "the riffraff, the rabble, the *va-nu-pieds*," and he notes the increased usage of the word *fatā* as descriptive of an *'ayyār*, a vagabond, or loafer who lives outside the law (36).^{xliii} This unholy offspring, the *fatā- 'ayyā*, would soon be subsumed by a new, and increasingly orthodox Sufism which had begun to "permeate" and transform the nature of both cultures (Cahen 59). The Caliph al-Nāṣir ultimately capitalized on this new class of men, transforming the itinerant and the spiritual leanings of the *futūwa* into a kind of aristocratic sporting class (Cahen 238), a quality Mahfouz picks up on directly.

But equally present in Mahfouz's depiction is the "supreme idea" (*l'idée supreme*) of the *futūwa*. An aspect, according to Henri Corbin, most elegantly captured in the "mystical doctrine" of Ibn 'Arabī (Sarraf 101). There, the combative and the meditative, the "minor" and "major" *jihād*, as Corbin writes, work in unison. "That God and his chevalier cannot subsist without one another is entirely the idea of *sirr al-robūyat* (the secret of the divine condition of *Deus Revelatus*) and it is this secret that Ibn 'Arabī found in the act of hospitality: the philoxenia of Abraham elevated to its anagogical meaning: to nourish the divine Being of the ensemble of his creatures, and to nourish God through and with the ensembles of his theophanies" (Sarraf 101). The brilliance of Mahfouz's literature stems in part from the author's deep uncertainty that the "divine Being of the ensemble" can sustain itself without the regimentation of the *futūwa* and the "secret of the divine condition invested in man" (Sarraf 101). It is not surprising in this sense that the sentinels of Jabalāwī's rule derive their theological origin from the one major prophet of Islam that Mahfouz does not include in his succession of "great men."

Throughout Mahfouz's post-revolutionary work— from *Children of the Alley* to *The Thief and the Dogs*, or *The Harafish*— the embedded devotionism of the *futūwa* functions in conjunction with the historical militancy of the social institution. And often it is the presence of the former quality beneath the façade of the latter that most clearly distinguishes the Mahfouzian protagonist in general. In the *futūwa*, Mahfouz discovered what Jacques Derrida referred to as a "philosophical and metaphysical doublet," a kind of placeholder for a way of thinking that "'repeats' the possibility of religion without religion" (Derrida 50). Significantly, for Derrida, it is precisely this paradoxical role that

Abraham plays in the history of Western civil society. Guilt, faith, the “*mysterium tremendum*” of Abraham’s covenant: these qualities alone deliver society from the “orgiastic mystery” of the Platonic polis to the secret stability of Western democracy (31).^{xliv}

In *Awlād Ḥāratinā* the *futūwāt* maintain a monopoly on secrecy. “You say that you heard Gabalawi [Jabalāwī],” says Bayūmī to the Christ-like Rifā‘aa. “You said, ‘This is what Gabalawi wants.’ No one may speak in Gabalawi’s name except the overseer of his estate and his heir” (Maḥfūz, *Children* 229). A true guardian of the kallipolis, in Platonic terms, his mission as a *futūwa* is to preserve, through secrecy, the inherent order of the city. In the end, however, the mystery of the “Big House” is shattered when ‘Arafa, the man of science, succeeds in penetrating the fortress of the great “Unseen.”

In is a scene Maḥfouz would repeat multiple times (in *The Thief and the Dogs* and *The Search* most notably) throughout his career, the climax of the novel finds the protagonist in the midst of realizing a mission he had only vaguely imagined.

He lit the candle and saw two eyes looking at him. Despite his confusion, he saw that the eyes were those of an old black man who was lying on a bed facing the inside of the room. And despite his confusion and his terror, he saw that the old man was struggling out of the dreamland between sleep and consciousness; perhaps the sound made by striking the match had stirred him. Involuntarily, unfeelingly, he pounced at him and seized his neck in his right hand, squeezing with all his might (Maḥfūz, *Children* 401).

The sudden interface between imagination and action, conspiracy and reality, erases his ability to think rationally. As if paralyzed by his radical ability to act, ‘Arafa, once a beacon of hope, a healer of the sick, ceases to be a man of conscience and falls prey to the spontaneity of instinct. In Doestoevskian fashion, he agonizes over his feat after the fact, finding momentary relief when he learns that the man he killed was not Jabalāwī, but a servant. That moment is soon crushed, however, when he learns that Jabalāwī too dropped dead upon finding his dearest servant murdered. As with the previous revolutions of Adham, Jabal and Qāsim, ‘Arafa completes his revolution as an insider. His is a revolution of sheer chaos, however. And the novel’s final scene culminates in the full assumption of power by the *futūwāt*, who, after ravaging each others’ clans, finally unite together to punish ‘Arafa by burying him alive.



29 January 2011, Cairo: in the absence of police. Photograph by author.

Conclusion

As guardians of Jabalāwī’s mystery, the *futūwāt* preserve a kind of order. They murder to keep the peace. But the order they preserve— a militant hierarchy— can only be broken, it cannot bend or evolve. Mahfouz’s early philosophical master, Henri Bergson, concentrated on precisely this paradox of stability in human society in his 1932 masterpiece *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*).^{xlv} Mahfouz incorporated not only the philosophical backbone of Bergson’s work, but, in the seemingly endless descriptions of battle scenes, the philosopher’s key allegorical framework as well. For at the core of Bergson’s study is the subject of war: war in the historical sense, surely, as he was writing in the heat of the Interwar years, but also war as a threshold between man’s dual affiliation to “closed” and “open” societies. Bergson, like Mahfouz, saw resistance to fixed hierarchies of power as first, and ultimately, a metaphysical expression of man’s “open” morality. “It was in this way that some of the nobles collaborated in the French Revolution of 1789,” wrote

Bergson, and it is why “the upper-middle class, and not the working classes... played the leading part in the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848, aimed against the privilege of wealth” (281). For Bergson, revolution begins as a moral calling to openness, irrespective of class.

The great men of Mahfouz’s *Awlād Ḥāratinā*, like the prophets themselves, are revolutionaries *par excellence* precisely because they are part of the very system of power they upset. As with a figure like Bayūmī— the *futūwa* to the revolutionary *fatā*— the great men embody in their person a dual affiliation to the “closed” morality of the mansion and the “open” morality of resistance to Jabalāwī’s fixed hierarchy of power. And while war provides the moment of reckoning between closed and open moralities, modern democracy, for Bergson, like Mahfouz, is the quintessential expression of both. In democracy man is bound at once to the morality that initially compels him to resist fixed hierarchies of power and the static drive that leads him once more to his “anthill.” For while democracy, “of all political systems,” is “the furthest removed from nature,” as it is the only one “to transcend, at least in intention, the conditions of closed society;” democracy survives only under the auspices of “fraternity,” the guarantor of liberty and equality and that which stabilizes the “oft-noted contradiction between the two” (Bergson 281-82).

The paradoxical interdependency of mankind’s static and dynamic moralities permeates the entirety of *Awlād Ḥāratinā*. Far from fixed allegory, the novel is punctuated by the quotidian details of a neighborhood in Egypt: the clamor of street life, the routine courtship of young lovers, hunger, anxiety, ambition and all of the deeply humane depictions of social life, of our “common humanity,” that so distinctly

characterize Mahfouzian modernism. In an early article on the novel, the Egyptian critic 'Abd al-Mun'im Şubhī alluded to the author's odd mixture of allegory and realism, what he referred to as an aesthetic of "mythological realism" (Şubhī 410). It is not a philosophical system of the world, explained the author, but rather a unique metaphysics of a particular instance of social engagement, or, in other words, a metaphysical meditation on the experience of democracy in late nineteen-fifties Egypt. Its meaning is universal insofar as the experience of the intellectual, political and physical antagonism between a secular, socialist majority and a powerful sector of fundamentalists is an experience that is universally recognizable. And although *Awlād Ḥāratinā* presents us with a metaphysical reckoning between revolutionary era Arab secularism and its religious reactionaries, in its mediation on these two opposing forces, the novel forges, in however stark terms, a generic outline for a more universal, albeit post-apocalyptic, religious civil society, something akin to what Henri Bergson once described as a "religion of democracy" (Wahl 220).

Chapter Two

Criminal Inclinations of the Good Society:

Naguib Mahfouz and the Nineteen-Sixties



1 February 2011. Vigilante Justice in Cairo. Photograph by author.

For to have a judgment that when Callias was ill of this disease this did him good, and similarly in the case of Socrates and in many individual cases, is a matter of experience; but to judge that it has done good to all persons of a certain constitution, marked off in one class, when they were ill of this disease, e.g. to phlegmatic or bilious people when burning with fever, --this is a matter of art.

-Aristotle, Metaphysics Book I, Chapter I (255)

Introduction

It has been noted often that Naguib Mahfouz anticipated well in advance of many of his contemporaries the great “malaise” that would beset the Arab world after The Six Day War of 1967.^{xlvi} His skepticism towards the Free Officers revolution of 1952— already apparent in *Children of the Alley* with its religious-like heroes conspiring in their caves to change the course of history— increased with each new work throughout the sixties.

Perhaps not surprisingly, literary critics also frequently described this period of Mahfouz’s career as “existential.”^{xlvii} In the sense that the novels offered a kind of “study of existence,” as the French scholar Jean Wahl first described the philosophy, this may well be the case.^{xlviii} But, as I suggest in this chapter, in works like *al-Liṣṣ wa-al kilāb* (*The Thief and the Dogs*, 1961), and *Tharthara fawq al-nīl* (*Adrift on the Nile*, 1966), Mahfouz drew on a number of formal aesthetic and philosophical models to advance a vision of society that was more Aristotelian than Kierkegaardian, more concerned with the absence of order than the absence of meaning.

On an aesthetic plane, critics have suggested that this period of Mahfouz’s career signaled a digression from his previous works. Focused on the plight of individuals, as opposed to communities, the novels from the sixties gave rise, in Sasson Somekh’s words, to a “tragedy of a different kind,” one marked by a “deepening spiritual malaise” (156). Still, one can find in these works the author’s longstanding interest in realism, social and otherwise. Political reality frames all of the novels, but unlike those that composed *The Cairo Trilogy* (1952-1957) — a familial drama inherently comparable, as Mahfouz was so often reminded, to the sweeping epochs of Leo Tolstoy and Marcel Proust— the novels from the sixties possessed a distinctly picaresque quality. The

subjective perspective of highly kinetic protagonists illuminated the machinery of an increasingly aloof and violent central authority. And criminality, with all of its imaginative trappings, became an organizational motif to a seemingly disparate set of characters.

In the self-alienation of a political detractor like ‘Īsā (Isa) in *Al-Summān wa-al-Kharīf* (*Autumn Quail*, 1962), the lone rampage of Sa‘īd Mahrān (Said Mahran) in *The Thief and the Dogs*, or the hash-induced retreat of the disaffected government employee, Anīs, in *Adrift on the Nile*, Mahfouz captured the atmosphere of an increasingly autonomized public, a self-governed society destroying itself through the realization of its own precepts. This new aesthetic can be attributed in part to the influence of preexistent literary trends in Egyptian and world literature, the most significant of which I will discuss shortly. But as the spike in crime following the overthrow of Mubarak has shown— a comparison I take up in my discussion of *The Thief and the Dogs*— “criminal organizations and the challenge to democracy”^{xlix} may well be symbiotic phenomena.

More significantly, the mantle of secrecy, compounded at the highest ranks of Egyptian society, i.e. the pre and post-revolutionary machinations of the Free Officers, and found not only in the clandestine formations of the country’s myriad religious and political parties, but the basic networks of low-level criminal gangs, and drug and prostitution rackets, would suggest, by *quid pro quo*, the intermediation of not only basic economic contingencies (i.e. centralized market practices provoke the rise of black-markets), but new cultural pathways between the multiple spheres of society. As the historian Raymond Baker wrote, the “overriding concern” of Nasser and his men was the independence of their movement from “civilian groups.” The Free Officers began as a

secret organization within the ranks of the Egyptian military nearly a decade before the revolution broke out. And it was Nasser himself who, by setting up an elaborate schema of “secret cells,” formalized not only the strategic model of subversion that would ultimately prevail, but also the basic political infrastructure of government for decades to come.¹

Mahfouz, like many intellectuals at the time, witnessed the usurpation of government by this secretive group and was quick to integrate not only the subject of the actual revolution, but the ontology of its leaders: their methods of survival, the source of their power, their mannerisms and their hostilities. His interest was less in the “external circumstances” of the actual historical reality than the “intimate aspects of the crisis,” as Sasson Somekh wrote, the individual, often psychological experience of social transformation (157). Still, it can be argued, the latter redirected, if not directed, the course of his creativity.

Representations of criminal organizations (*Rayyā wa Sakīna* / Rayya and Sakina,^{li} *The Thief and the Dogs*), of decadent ports (*Rayyā wa Sakīna*, *Mīrāmār*), of cloistered and corrupt police forces (*The Thief and the Dogs*), or an upper-class circle of disaffected socialites (*Adrift on the Nile*), each of these spheres of action express a profound anxiety over what Raymond Williams expounded on so forcefully in *Modern Tragedy* (1966) as the “disintegrating or decadent society” (149). The alternating, seemingly conflicting spheres of individual and communal identity that pepper Mahfouz’s novels from the sixties can be seen as expressive in essence of what Jürgen Habermas described as the “autonomous public spheres” of modernity (Habermas, *Philosophical* 362). His criminal

circles push the notion of freedom to its logical extreme, surviving, paradoxically, at the cost of the very social phenomenon that first enabled their existence.

The “structure of feelings” conveyed by Mahfouz’s post-revolutionary literature has evident counterparts throughout the world.^{lii} The first great Argentine novelist of the twentieth century, for example, was obsessed with the subject of criminality. Like Mahfouz, Roberto Arlt’s work from the mid-nineteen-twenties falls at the doorstep of “modernity,” a moment of massive industrialization and the transformation of Buenos Aires into one of the great conurbations on earth (the economist Alan Beattie notes that, by the late twentieth century, 35% of all Argentines were living in the capital).^{liii} Also one of the most renowned journalists in Argentine history, Arlt wrote to capture not only the arrival of mass transport and electricity, but also “the experience of velocity and of light” (Sarlo, *Modernidad* 16). Raised in the marketplaces of Buenos Aires, a dense and colorful environment, which, like Mahfouz’s childhood neighborhood in Islamic Cairo, would inspire him throughout his life, Arlt’s major creation, a trilogy of novels,^{liv} came on the heels of the first successful democratic revolution in 1916 under Hipólito Yrigoyen. Like Mahfouz (a “child of the 1919 revolution”), Arlt was equally preoccupied with the “etiquette of the outlaw,” to borrow a phrase from Egyptian critic Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd (15).^{lv} As I explore in my discussion of Mahfouz’s *Adrift on the Nile*, Roberto Arlt—in his depiction of an urban terrorist organization in the novel *The Seven Madmen* (1929)—curiously lit upon the same historical metaphor Mahfouz used in his novel: a medieval Islamic sect known as the *Ḥashāshīn*.^{lvi}

In Mahfouz’s criminal entrepreneurs from the sixties, the instinct for individual gain reaches a metaphysical plane of individualism. Impoverished and abandoned by a

dying mother, the protagonist of *Al-Ṭarīq* (*The Search*, 1964) begins a quest to find his wealthy father, but conflates his mission with a plan to murder the husband of a woman who has seduced him. The plethora of choices in the city overwhelm the searcher. Using vivid, concrete images (in the end the protagonist only glimpses his father on a crowded street), Mahfouz produces a structure of feelings that can only be explained on a universal scale, one marked by a steady, singular pulse of time. His search is Bergsonian in nature, fluid yet motionless, melodic on an internal register that is nonetheless fixed by actions and their unpredictable consequences. Critics have typically sought in the psychological and emotional chaos of Mahfouz's novels from the sixties a prevailing "social" narrative. Ṣabrī Ḥāfīz, in an early essay on Mahfouz's last novel from this period, *Miramar*, wrote: the novel expressed "not the tragedy of an individual, but of a social strata (*shār'ih ijtām'īa*)" (Ḥāfīz, "*Mīrāmār*" 330). Still, as Mahfouz said, his target was never society in the literal sense. "My enemies include poverty, ignorance, disease, exploitation, despotism, falsity and fear," he told one interviewer (El-Enany 239). As I hope to show here, his model for conveying this antagonism constitutes one of the great literary projects of the late twentieth century.

I. Openings

According to economist Galal Amin, the middle class in Egypt was virtually non-existent before 1952, constituting just 19%, or approximately 4 million out of 21.4 million people. The vast majority, some 80%, lived in poverty and was subjected to a population density of nearly 1,600 people per square mile, the highest in the world at the time (Gunther 367). A survey by scientists for the Rockefeller Foundation found the average income for

villagers in Upper Egypt to be just \$87 a year (Gunther 368). At the time of the revolution the infant mortality rate in Egypt was thought to be a “staggering” 129 per 1,000. And according to John Gunther, reporting for the *London Observer* in 1954, 36% of all cultivable land in Egypt was in the hands of “one-half of one percent of the population.” 85% percent of the total population, some 21 million people, was landless. King Fārūk (Faruk), along with fewer than 2,000 families, owned 1/5 of all arable property (Gunther 368; Amin 32).^{lvii}

In light of such extreme inequality, Nasser and his Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) made huge advances. Although the middle class (above LE300 per family per month) had yet to exceed 20% of the population by the mid-fifties, by 1986, Amin estimates, it had grown to about 45%, with 53% still living in poverty (under LE300 per family per month) and 2% to 3% of the population constituting the upper class (LE10,000 per family per month) (Amin 33).^{lviii} Massive land redistribution efforts, rapid industrialization, an explosion of the construction industry, the creation of a Western style education system and the expansion of farmland, thanks in large part to the construction of the Aswan Dam, all created in turn an increased demand for a “variety of activities,” which, as Galal Amin writes, “had to be performed by the private sector, such as lawyers, engineers, accountants, traders, contractors, and intermediaries of all kinds.” “In the long run,” he writes, “perhaps the most important contribution of the 1950s and 1960s to the growth of the private sector was that period’s contribution to the acceleration of the rate of social mobility” (71).

This latter component, the experience of social mobility, implicit in the high powered modernization campaign initiated by Nasser, touches at the core of Mahfouz’s

literature from this period. Illustrative of the great socio-economic transformation underway, rapid social mobility, in Mahfouz's literature, constituted a new ontology, a modern and fast paced depiction of life guided principally by response and reaction, the pursuit of wealth, self-indulgence and pleasure. Perhaps the most profound example of this is found in the disparate collection of characters he assembles in *Miramar*. Written on the eve of the Arab defeat of 1967, the novel's portrayal of the great social division between tradition and modernity, between the revolutionaries and the reactionaries, and the haves and have-nots, is more diffuse and, in a way, more realistic in *Miramar* than any previous work. There are those who embrace the new order of society and those who resent it. Caught in the middle is one of Mahfouz's most brilliant heroines: Zuhra (Zohra).

A girl from the country, the province of Al-Beheiry, Zuhra fled her village, and the land she worked on her own, after her grandfather tried to marry her to an older man. In Alexandria, she works at the Pension Miramar as a maid. Her father, she tells the pious old Wafdist, Amer Wagdi, used to sell cheese and butter and chickens to the owner, Miriam. Unconvinced by the male lodgers who court her, she nonetheless allows herself to be seduced by Sarhan, another native of Al-Beheiry and a newly minted government employee. Sarhan is an accountant who, like many others of his generation, found himself politicized by the revolution and inspired by the possibility of achieving the previously unimaginable goals of great private wealth and social status. Both migrants and descendents of *fellaheen* (peasants), Zuhra and Sarhan have reinvented themselves in the wake of the revolution. She maintains a distinct affection for her old way of life, while he is driven by the constant possibility of new opportunities and greater wealth. His

ambition leads him into the hands of an upstart criminal, Ali Bakr, who draws him into a plan to hijack a textile truck. His desire to raise his status even further compels him to become engaged to Zuhra's tutor. Both plans backfire. He falls into drink and irreparable despair. "*Tamūt a-l'aba*," he tells himself in perfect *noiresque* fashion, "the gig is up" (*Mīrāmār* 200). Zuhra survives the blow of Sarhan's deception and suicide. She will carry on with her plans, she tells Wagdi, until she achieves what she wants (*Mīrāmār* 212; *Miramar* 177). "But how will you live?" He asks her. "I'm *exposed* to work (*ajid min 'alī 'amalān*) at every turn," she replies (212; 177). Like Sarhan, she is a responding soul, *open*, in the Bergsonian sense, to the possibilities the world presents her with. But unlike Sarhan, she retains a unique and transcendent sense of purpose that will, one presumes, carry her through the storm of society. In this way, she shares the internal conviction that drives the man who attempts to murder Sarhan (Sarhan beats him to it), the partially reformed communist, Mansour Bahy. But her conviction falls short of ideology. Rather, she is at once exposed to the world and its surprises and closed to the idea of fully relinquishing her mission.

Miramar is often described as a "depressing" work (Somekh 190). But it is also one of Mahfouz's most inspired defenses of women's rights, individualism and pragmatism. In many respects, the character Zuhra borrows from his 1959 screenplay of Ihsān 'Abd al-Qaddūs's short story, *Ana Ḥurra (I am Free)*. As in the movie, Zuhra is a departure from his earlier representations of fallen women: 'Aisha of *The Trilogy*, for example, or Ḥamīda from *Midaq Alley*. While the modern world ultimately destroys those women, Zuhra survives the onslaught of the city by retaining an internal sense of

dignity. Like the *futūwa*, she is capable of violent outbursts. But, also like the *futūwa*, her outbursts are justified by an unspoken commitment to a higher calling.

Zuhra's stoic sense of dignity also characterizes Mahfouz's protagonist from his first novel of the sixties, *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961). In many respects, Sa'īd Mahrān defines himself in opposition to the vanguard of the revolution's new elite. Imprisoned before the revolution and released afterwards, Mahrān enters a world in which his old accomplices now hold positions of authority. In seeking revenge for the betrayal of his former crime boss, Ra'ūf 'Alwān, who has taken the editorial position of a major state-run newspaper (and his assistant, 'Alaysh, who moved in with his wife and daughter while he was in prison), Mahrān, now a free man, is transformed once more into an outlaw, but this time for his refusal to accept the authority of the criminals with whom he once worked. After several failed assassination attempts— he twice murders an innocent victim by accident— he flees to the outskirts of the city, finding refuge with a prostitute who hides him from the police and the state-run newspapers that are chronicling his ordeal. The story of Sa'īd Mahrān, Mahfouz tells us, was based on real events (Ghītānī, *Mahfūz* 107). In light of recent news coverage of the post-revolutionary situation in Cairo today, it is easy to see why he elected this story for his first, explicitly realist novel following the revolution.

In the Shadow of Tahrir

In the immediate aftermath of “The Day of Rage” (“*Yaum al-Ġaḍab*”), Friday 28 January, 2011, Egyptian state news media were inundated with phone calls from residents throughout Cairo, clamoring for information about the police, who had abandoned their

posts. Information emerged that the Minister of the Interior, Habīb al-‘Ādlī, the same man whose image had graced the front page of *Al-Ahrām* on the first day following the demonstrations, with the announcement that the culprits behind a recent Coptic Church bombing had been caught, disbanded the police and opened the gates at a maximum security prison in an attempt to strike fear into the hearts of Egyptians (“Al-Adly”). He was successful and their fear was not unwarranted. Stores were looted throughout the night, reports of robberies at police barracks and attacks by armed men against ill-prepared neighborhood watch-groups filled the streets and the airwaves. By early May, just two months after President Mubarak stepped down, reporting about the spike in crime had become a regular feature in the news media. David Kirkpatrick wrote for *The New York Times* that authorities had reported “at least five attempted jailbreaks” during the previous two weeks, “at least three of them successful” (Kirkpatrick, “Crime;” Elmeshed “Crime”). Mohamed Elmeshed for *Al Masry Al Youm* quoted the manager of a private security firm as saying: “they [the criminals] are using weapons that we never saw used before this year in Egypt” (Elmeshed “Crime”). In addition, the sectarian violence that had set off the New Year resumed its course at a fever pitch, with street battles between Muslims and Copts breaking out across the country. The typical byline in foreign news media had become: “a surging crime wave in post-revolutionary Egypt has emerged as a serious threat to its promised transition to democracy.” “Businessmen, politicians and human rights activists say they fear that the mounting disorder — from sectarian strife to soccer riots — is hampering a desperately needed economic recovery or, worse, inviting a new authoritarian crackdown” (Kirkpatrick, “Crime”). The *coup de grâce*, then, for both local and foreign media who had covered Tahrir was the rising

influence of the Islamists; their new-found liberty and their seemingly superior ability in filling the void of social governance.^{lix}



29 January 2011: police vanish from the streets (view of Khayrat and Al-Ismā'īlī streets).
Photograph by author.

Mahfouz's post-revolutionary literature from the sixties dealt in many respects with these same anxieties. Perhaps more than any other subject, criminality underscored fundamental questions about the meaning and sustainability of justice in a democracy. As with the Mubarak regime, the overthrow of King Fārūk's government also brought down a complex system of corruption and nepotism that scores of aspiring citizens, like Mahfouz himself, had learned to navigate over the years. With the "social edifice" that once preserved order no longer in place, Mahfouz, like many of his generation, feared not only the outbreak of chaos per the fifth and final revolution in *Children of the Alley*, but

the influence of secretive organizations, like the Muslim Brotherhood, whose presence in the informal sectors of society was already well established (Carré 21).

Mahfouz's focus on crime in the realist novels of the nineteen-sixties intersects not only with current events in Egypt, but with a score of comparable situations around the world. The gangs and prostitution rackets that circulate around the perimeters of novels like *Miramar*, *The Search* and *The Beggar*, the corrupt circle of upper-class drug abusers in *Adrift on the Nile*; the murderous underground of his 1953 film *Rayyā wa Sakīna*; or the *futūwa* Mafias of *Children of the Alley*, present a world very much akin to Slavoj Žižek's description of Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union as a place where "ersatz legality," and organized crime had quickly filled the void created by the disintegration of the "complex network of implicit, unwritten rules which sustained the entire social edifice" of the old system (161). The increased influence of criminal organizations was not the result of a change in the legal code, Žižek argues, but rather of the loss of confidence in the competence and credibility of the governing authorities. As in Egypt, new "social complexities" established new modes of social conduct (Žižek 160), but in the early years of the revolution, those networks were still in formation. It is here, then, in the post-revolutionary years, in the ambiguous interstices of associational ties and collective identities, that Mahfouz's long fascination with the metaphysics of social existence truly comes alive.

II. Criminal Inclinations of the Good Society

In *La haine de la démocratie* (*Hatred of Democracy*, 2005), Jacques Rancière challenges proponents of the so-called "Republican thesis," advocates of a new pastoralism, who

find in modern European democracy an end of transcendentalism and the triumph of limitless consumerism underscored by a kind of chaotic and entrenched *penchant criminel* (“criminal inclination”). Targeting a text by Jean-Claude Milner, *Les penchants criminels de l’Europe démocratique* (The Criminal Inclinations of Democratic Europe, 2003), Rancière provides a compelling defense of the democratic model based, in essence, on the same rationale employed by its detractors. “Plato knew... that chance cannot be so easily pushed aside,” he writes (43). “If aristocratic republicans and thinkers little concerned with equality accepted it, that is because the drawing of lots was the remedy to an evil at once much more serious and much more probable than a government full of incompetents: government comprised of a certain competence, that of individuals skilled at taking power through cunning” (42). As Rancière points out, Milner suggests that the once perceived contradictions between Totalitarianism and Democracy have evolved since the latter half of the twentieth century, into a mutual front against the chaos of unchecked freedom. The critique of democracy’s “criminal tendencies” is “correct on one point,” he writes, “Democracy signifies a rupture with the order of kinship” (45). But rather than accept the Israeli model, as Milner does, that would presumably mitigate the “limitlessness” of democracy (Rancière points to the advances in reproduction rights for women as emblematic of democratic freedom) through the order of kinship, while also defying the totalitarian model that denies any allegiance alternative to the State, Rancière argues that implicit to the Republican critique is “exactly this rupture that realizes, in the most literal manner, exactly what this critique calls for: a structured heterotopy between the principle of government and the principle of society.” The “criminal inclinations” of Democracy signal not a “modern ‘limitlessness’ which allegedly destroys the heterotopy

necessary to politics. It is on the contrary the founding power of this heterotopy, the primary limitation of the power of forms of authority that govern the social body” (45). Even criminality provides, in effect, a system of “checks and balances” not only to the power of the governing body, but also to the freedom of action inherent in the democratic model. The central philosophical defense of democracy that Mahfouz develops through his stories of people who abuse or manipulate freedom complements the notion, as Rancière spells out, that “revolutionary terror” did not undermine the Revolution; “it was consubstantial with its project— it was a necessity inherent to the very essence of the democratic revolution” (Rancière, *Hatred* 13).

In *The Thief and the Dogs*, the revolution creates a window of opportunity, not only for the social mobilization of individuals, but also for the assumption of power by organizations who, by their very cohesion, threaten the increased freedom that enabled their existence in the first place. Not surprisingly, the underlying commentary of the novel, as Mahfouz told Rajā’ al-Naqqāsh, was a warning to the public “against the danger of brotherhoods.” “...Some had found after the revolution a subterfuge to circumvent the ban on their party. Groups who had no belief in peaceful Sufism, chose this path, convinced it would somehow permit their resorting to violence” (Maḥfūz, *Pages* 191). To illustrate this, Mahfouz turned once more to his well-trodden *futūwa* trope.

Like the protagonists of his *futūwa* screenplays from the mid-fifties and his early short story “*Futūwat al-‘Aṭūf*,” the protagonist of *The Thief and the Dogs*, Sa‘īd Mahrān, is introduced into the public sphere as an orphan. Under the influence of Ra’ūf ‘Alwān and a Sheikh, Ali al-Junayd, he learns at once a sense of social justice and of personal salvation: “we continue learning from the cradle to the grave,” the Sheikh tells him, “but

at least start out, Sa‘īd, by keeping close account of yourself and making sure that from whatever action you initiate some good comes to someone” (230). He also learns that some theft is “perfectly justified” (232). “You certainly followed his counsel as best you could,” Sa‘īd tells himself, “though you only brought it to complete fulfillment when you took up burglary” (232).

Long fascinated by the easy transition to the realm of politics by the Mafia-like Sufi order that once controlled his childhood neighborhood of Jamāliyya,^{lx} Mahfouz found in the paradoxical celebration of crime and honor that had come to define the term *futūwa*, a perfect analogy for the leaders of the revolution. In the Sheikh’s direction to Sa‘īd— that he “take account of himself” and attempt always to generate “positive action”— there is more than a hint of Nasser’s voice from his *Falsafat al-Thawrah* (*Philosophy of Revolution*, circa 1954) where he recollects his tormented mental state (“tossing on my bed in a room now full of smoke and permeated with emotions”) after a failed attempt to assassinate the king.^{lxi}

I answered myself with certain conviction: I mean that our method must be changed. What we have been doing is not the positive action (*al-‘amal al-‘ijābī*) to which we are dedicated... From that time on, our thinking was directed to doing something more deeply rooted, more important and further reaching. Thus we began to draw the outline of the picture which materialized on the night of July 23rd: a revolution springing from the heart of the people, following the same path they had already envisioned as the great highway to freedom (Nasser 58).

In both form and substance, the din of Nasser's "philosophy" is resonant in Mahfouz's novels from the sixties. It is easy to find in the ill-fated attacks by Sa'īd Mahrān in *The Thief and the Dogs*, or the reckless attempts at murder by the protagonists of *The Search*, *Miramar* and *Children of the Alley*, the voice of the young Colonel agonizing in his smoke-filled room, "waiting anxiously for the morning paper" to know whether "the man whose assassination I had planned was out of danger" (Nasser 58). In each of these novels, unlike Nasser's story, the target of assassination dies not by the hand of the conspiring protagonist, but as the result of chance.

This element of chance, of "drawing lots," becomes, in Mahfouz's prose, part of a symbiotic narrative constructed around the dualistic social problems of order and freedom (Rancière, *Hatred* 41). At its core, his literature from this period tackles Socrates' notion that democracy's "insatiable desire for what it defines as good"—for freedom—is "ultimately what destroys it" (Plato 232). Nasser's moment of reckoning speaks precisely to this perceived paradox of limitless freedom. And it is fitting that Mahfouz would compose, with such a close literary parallel, a story about a criminal who must confront the moral hazard of camaraderie, as it is the instinct to resist chaos and criminality that constantly feeds the self-legitimizing justice of his principal counter-revolutionaries, namely, the *futūwāt*.

Such transcendent conviction rests at the core of virtually all of his protagonists. They possess an air of Abrahamic secrecy that constitutes a source of both power and torment. In a show of ironic reversal, the secret that binds them is more often connected to selfish ambition than religious duty, however. Such is the case in *al-Qāhirat al-Jadīda* (*Cairo Modern*, 1946) where the protagonist, Mahgub, conspires to transcend his poverty

at all costs, even marrying his best friend's fiancée, who herself is the victim of another man's secret affair. And what is the feared patron of *The Cairo Trilogy* but a stark example of this quality? When Yasīn rapes the family maid and throws himself on his wife's servant, Ahmad Abd al-J'awaḍ laments the behavior of his son, not for his lack of ethics, but for his failure to keep his infidelity secret. In Mahfouz's post-revolutionary literature, however, the *secretum* of religion has been replaced by the *secretum* of political resistance (Derrida 31). That the Free Officers (as a tightly knit order within the ranks of the military) began in secret pervades his literature of the period (Baker 27). Against this backdrop, the *futūwāt* appear, then, as forsaken authority figures, guardians of Jabalāwī's (Gabalawi) mystery and intent on dashing false idols. "You say that you heard Gabalawi," says the Bayūmī to the Christ-like Rifā'aa.

And you said, 'This is what Gabalawi wants.' No one may speak in Gabalawi's name except the overseer of his estate and his heir. If Gabalawi wanted to say anything he would have said it... You simpleton, how can you despise power, majesty and wealth in the name of Gabalawi when these are his own attributes? (Maḥfūz, *Children* 229).

Rifā'aa tries to establish himself, metonymically, as an arbiter of Jabalāwī's power, but to redirect the mystical cycle of the *fatā* from its divine course towards power, majesty and wealth, to the cause of "atrocities" and the downtrodden (*al-maṣā'ib*). He enrages the *futūwa* by his very being; he is a "creature that's neither man nor woman" (Maḥfūz, *Children* 224). Yet, the *futūwa* knows it is precisely this new dimensionality of Rifā'aa's

person that enables such complete veneration by the people of the alley. As he explains to the overseer: “the people he treats believe it, even if they make a great secret of it” (224).

But against such conspiracies, a powerful degree of unpredictability invades his work from the sixties as well. With the exception of *Autumn Quail*, all of his novels from this period arrive at the common destination of murder and, in each instance, it is a death unexpected, but strangely, in its arbitrariness, inevitable. The indiscriminateness of the stricken man, it seems, emphasizes the relative gravity of everyone else’s existence. Such is the case in *Adrift on the Nile*, where the victim (an anonymous peasant), struck by a vehicle, is literally propelled upwards (“*yatayyar*”), as though in flight, while the rest are kept in repose. The black road that carries the gang and the peasant to their respective fates, like the twilight graveyard of *The Thief and the Dogs*, or the predawn invasion-homicide in *The Search*, offer a counter-aesthetic to the bright sunshine of Camus’s beach in *L’Étranger* (*The Stranger*, 1942), or Ghassān Kanafānī’s *Rijāl fī al-shams* (*Men in the Sun*, 1963). While the nihilist undertones of Mahfouz’s “existentialist” works are present, the film noir lighting and late night reckonings with fate preserve for his readers the sanctity of the workaday world. Ḥusayn Kamāl’s politically correct cinematic adaptation of *Adrift on the Nile*, in which the protagonist renounces drugs, was not completely amiss in this regard. But the true implication of Mahfouzian existentialism is more ominous, and arguably more political, than his European and Arab counterparts.

In *The Thief and the Dogs* and *Adrift on the Nile* Mahfouz interrogates the limitations and self-limitations of freedom: “even madness must reach its limit” shouts an unnamed passenger to the driver of the murderous vehicle in *Adrift*. But these strange pioneers of the social periphery, like the *futūwāt* of old, who were charged with enforcing

and expanding the frontiers of the Caliphate, delineate the order and shape of society by their transgression of its ethical and legal limits. The Mahfouzian aesthetic of existentialism is closer to what Raymond Williams identified in his reading of Beckett as the expression of a “dying social order.” Šabrī Ḥāfīz intimated as much in his 1976 essay on Egyptian literature from the sixties, where he describes Mahfouz’s protagonists as “suffering from a radical perversion in the scale of social and ethical values” (68). The challenge in reading Ḥāfīz’s work is that this declarative holds true, however quietly, over and above his categorization of Mahfouz’s work from this period as focusing on the “personal problems” and the “individual spiritual aspirations” of a single character (74). Still, the paradox in Ḥāfīz’s reading is merely ostensible. It is the coexistence of individual and collective suffering that render this period of Mahfouz’s career so seductive. Beneath the facade of formal innovation— the first-person narratives, the internal monologues, etc.— his novels from the sixties outlined the boundary of a singular, evolutionary force in his aesthetic universe, namely, the metaphysical code of justice that preserves order before and after any single act of man.

Fittingly, the institution of government is merely a specter in his novels from the sixties. *Adrift on the Nile*, perhaps his greatest commentary on social order, follows the protagonist, Anīs Zakī, who, like Mahfouz himself, is a government employee, the holder of a “*miri* job,” or government clerkship that, at one time, would have spelled success in Egyptian society.^{lxiii} But he is disaffected by the monotony of his work; the ambiguous reports he is charged with writing relay nothing and are addressed to no one. “Report on Incoming Correspondence for the month of March— for the attention of the Director General of the Archives Department,” is the nondescript title of one such document. On

the houseboat, we soon find, he still feels alone, despite the nightly company of socialites that join him to smoke. The houseboat, anchored on the shore of Zamalek, an upper-class enclave in the heart of Cairo, is little more than a room with voices. Echoes of Beckett resound more pointedly in this novel than any other of Mahfouz's works. The contrast between night and day is stark. But for Anīs, the *miri* post is little more than a distraction, a sometimes sober interlude between his shifts in the houseboat as the “master of ceremonies.”

In his interviews with Rajā' al-Naqqāsh, Mahfouz said that some critics had correctly identified the houseboat club as an allegory of the *Ḥashāshīn*, or the *Nizārī Ismā'īlīyah*, also known as “The Assassins,” an eleventh-century *Shī'ite* sect and precursor to the modern-day order of the Aga Khan (Mahfūz, Pages 191). In his monumental study of the subject, *The Order of the Assassins* (1955), Marshall G. S. Hodgson noted that the legend of the *Ḥashāshīn* bore much “imaginative fruit” over the centuries. The group entered into “Western lore,” he writes, with Edward FitzGerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's poetry, and it would become so embedded in the Western imagination by the twelfth century that Richard I of England (d. 1199) “was accused of imitating the Old Man of the Mountain in training murderers; and found it necessary to have a group of men in England plead guilty to such operations against himself” (Hodgson 138). Jirjī Zaydān, the editor of the cultural journal *al-Hilāl* and an influential precursor to Mahfouz, featured the group in his novel *Ṣalāḥ Al-Dīn Al-Ayyūbī* (Saladin, circa 1920), part of his famed *Riwāyāt Tārīkhiyya* (Historical Novels) series.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the Argentine novelist Roberto Arlt also drew on the legend of the *Ḥashāshīn* in his 1929 novel, *The Seven Madmen*.

Buenos Aires had been the recipient of a steady stream of Arab immigrants since the turn of the century (Arlt himself described on numerous occasions the Arab and Jewish butchers and merchants of the city), and there is a strong likelihood that he was exposed orally to the history of the *Hashāshīn*. Arlt would maintain a thorough interest in Islamic culture, traveling to Morocco as a reporter for the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* in 1935, and later producing a collection of short stories (*El criador de las gorillas*) set in the Muslim world. In *Los siete locos*, Arlt introduces a terrorist cell, which, as its infamous leader explains, has been modeled on a “ninth-century Persian sect” (his dates are understandably imperfect). The terrorist boss, “the Astrologer,” and his followers, conspire to carry out a chemical attack with money raised through prostitution. Like Mahfouz, Arlt also explored the philosophical dimensions of Ḥaṣṣan al-Ṣabbāḥ’s sect. The Astrologer’s way, we are told, represents an alternative source of “reason” operating beneath the skin of society: he is “someone to worship, making a pathway through this forest of stupidity” (94). “The gods exist,” the narrator tells us. “They live hidden beneath the outer shell of those men who remember life on the planet when the earth was still young... What would the presiding judge say if he replied: ‘I sin because I bear a god within?’” (96). The violence of this ultra Nietzschean rationale is that, in his analogical doubling of society, his creation of a utopia that defines itself by its very distance from society, the Astrologer (who also likens his group to the KKK) can only be satisfied with total destruction.^{lxiii}

Mahfouz’s houseboat party, in contrast to Arlt’s terrorists, or the *Hashāshīn*, for that matter, is hardly utopian. Their act of transgression, the blood on their hands,

happens merely by chance. Yet, Mahfouz's group comes closer, in theological terms, to the character of the *Hashāshīn*.

In his hash-induced daydreams on the order of the universe, amidst “feelings of immanence” and “notions of eternity” (Maḥfūz, *Adrift* 70), Anīs's philosophizing offers an ironical take on the Assassins' ninth and final degree of doctrinal initiation in which the initiate, focusing largely on Greek philosophy (presumably in ancient Greek, though translations of the Greeks into Persian and Arabic were available as early as the mid-tenth century), and, by transcending the *zāhir* of the text (“the outer formula”) for its *bātin* (the hidden meaning of the text), would seek to obtain “Universal Reason.” Anīs has no aversion to this ideal. “Last night I believed totally in eternal life,” he says, “but on my way to the office I forgot the reason why” (71). But he cannot countenance murder. His effort to speak out is crushed in the end, met with a “laced” drink to silence him (Allen 145). The integrity of the group is what remains; its secret prevails at all costs.

Conclusion: *On the Art of Order*

The *Hashāshīn* and the *futūwāt* constitute two sides of the same coin in Mahfouz's literature. It is inconsequential that one was *Sunnī*, the other *Shī'a*, or that one group was formed into social clubs to strengthen the Caliphate (under al-Naṣīr), and the other to assassinate caliphs. Nor is it important that one coalesces with an aesthetic of crime and the other with an aesthetic of bacchanalia. At the heart of his work from the post-revolutionary period is a preoccupation with criminality as part of a greater, esoteric concern with initiatory societies. As Argentine critic Beatriz Sarlo wrote of Roberto Arlt's work: “The presence of the secretive in the public world of the modern city”

signals a profound anxiety over the ordering of the democratic process (Sarlo, *Escritos* 217). Mahfouz would dedicate himself to the psychological undercurrents of this problem in his short story “The Secret Organization” (1982) and another great Argentine writer in the wake of Arlt, Jorge Luis Borges, in stories like “The Sect of the Phoenix,” would continue to develop the theme of the clandestine organization as a quintessential motif for describing, in a dialectical sense, the alienating experience of modernity. One valuable study of secrecy as a social phenomenon of modernity is Sissela Bok’s *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (1983). In it she writes:

What unites [members of secret societies] is not any one purpose or belief... [but] secrecy itself: secrecy of purpose, belief, methods, often membership. These are kept hidden from outsiders and only by gradual steps revealed to insiders, with further secrets always beckoning, still to be penetrated. In this way the secret societies hold out the possibility of exclusive access to the forbidden roots of secrecy, and promise the brotherhood and community feeling that many lack in their everyday life. Few experiences of secrecy are more intense, or give insiders so stark a sense of separation from outsiders (46).

For both Mahfouz and Arlt, the “initiatory society” exposes the fragmenting experience of the modern world through its false creation of brotherhood. As Arlt’s Astrologer says of an earlier sect, one he identifies with “Maimun”: “they lied to people right and left. They promised the Jews the Messiah’s arrival, the Christians the Paraclete, the Moslems the Mahdi... so a bunch of people with totally dissimilar opinions, social backgrounds,

and beliefs were all working for this big scheme but very few knew what the point of it was” (142). In the act of conspiracy, the initiatory society builds fraternity. The substance of their secret may ultimately be irrelevant, as Bok points out, but it is the condition of secrecy that creates community, clandestine or otherwise. It is in the universalistic potential—the *dunamis*—of the criminal and the clandestine to maintain fraternity at the expense of liberty and equality that underscores the Mahfouzian aesthetic of democracy as one of perennial resistance and self-reasoning.

What remains offstage in Mahfouz’s novels from the sixties, the authority that is not, but “should be,” epitomizes what Raymond Williams identified in his afterword to *Modern Tragedy* (1966) as a generational shift towards the decadent last days of the industrial revolution. For Williams, it was the demography of the postwar metropolis, the new urban masses whose spirit was that of subservience, of “managed affluence” turned “managed but perhaps unimaginable depression” that most acutely underlined the new, irreversible tragedy of modernity (Williams, *Politics* 96). Writing at the same moment as Mahfouz, Williams touched on precisely what the former outlined in the pitiless plights of Sa‘īd Mahrān and Anīs. His protagonists are anti-heroes, but they are designed to convey, nonetheless, a kind of tragedy. They are drawn to circles which, through their emulation of order, disrupt the order of time, the fluid yet fixed horizon towards which all men must march. No image is more emblematic of this than Jabalāwī’s agelessness. The timelessness of his mansion— with its eternal gardens behind sealed walls— replicates an image of paradise the likes of which the great poet of *Hashāshīn* folklore, Omar Khayyam, described of that group’s recruitment ritual: to drug a man, to bring him to such a garden and then to remove him again before waking. The image, like a dream,

resonates within and against time and suffocates his will to be in the world, his first and most basic duty as a citizen.

Sa‘īd Mahrān’s ordeal in *The Thief and the Dogs* becomes a headline, a point of conversation in coffee shops. But in his eyes, his tragedy is almost entirely absent of meaning. As he is gunned down by his enemies’ cronies— the police— atop the tombstones of the City of the Dead,^{lxiv} he searches, physically, to grab hold of something: “to exert one last act of resistance. To capture one last recalcitrant memory” (279).

There are glimmers of Camus here: a dying protagonist, consciously battling with the weight of the universe. But, as Ṣabrī Ḥāfīz suggests, one can easily find in these individualistic narratives the author’s greater social commentary on society (Ḥāfīz, “*Mīrāmār*” 330). The monopolization of revolutionary tenets by the regime, like the cooptation of religion, as discussed in the first chapter, emerges in Mahfouz’s literature as a sort of radical social ennui, a Sartrean aesthetic without the call to action. For while the “willing of freedom,” as Sartre wrote, entails the realization that freedom “depends entirely on the freedom of others,” and vice versa, Mahfouz’s protagonists position their fight in contraposition to the liberation, or the liberators, of the nation (Sartre 48). Like the *Ḥashāshīn* or the *futūwāt*, they strive for the execution of justice, not as a convention but as a covenant. In *The Thief and the Dogs*, it is only with his last breath that Sa‘īd Mahrān utters the word “indifference” (*mubāla*). In stark contrast to the final epiphany of Camus’ Mersault from *The Stranger*, that the “universe is indifferent,” indifference becomes for Mahrān a mantra that carries his story to its logical extreme: only through total indifference, a radical and strictly vertical commitment to faith, can he transcend the law of the land.

The quiet ray of hope to this novel also remains offstage. Fittingly, it is embodied by the leading female character, a prostitute, dragged into Sa'īd Mahrān's murderous nightmare. Her name, Nūr, means "light." His death enables her survival, which, in its simplicity, is perhaps Mahfouz's greatest commentary on the meaning of freedom.

Chapter Three

Criminality and the Public Sphere:

Notes on a Post-Revolutionary Aesthetics of Film (1953-1957)

Film, by its very nature, speaks to crowds; it speaks to them about crowds and about their destiny.

-Jean Paul Sartre, from *Situation of the Writer in 1947* (p. 216)

The first film I remember seeing in my life was in 1918... After leaving the theater I turned around to look for the heroes I had seen on the screen, believing they were real.

-Najīb Maḥfūz, from “*Anā wa al-Sīnamā*” (“The Cinema and Me”) in *Thābit* (335).^{lxv}

Introduction: *Three Screenplays*

Naguib Mahfouz’s screenplays from the fifties provide a bridge between his pre- and post-revolutionary work, creating a window onto the role of cinema in the maturation of novel writing in Arabic in general, but more importantly, for the purpose of this dissertation, illuminating central tenets of the author’s post-revolutionary aesthetics.^{lxvi} As I discuss in this chapter, in films like *Rayyā wa Sakīna*, *Futūwāt al-Ḥusayniyya* (The Troughs of Al-Husayn, 1954), and *Al-Futūwa* (The Tough, 1957), it becomes clear how Mahfouz’s focus on criminality and the clandestine developed in response to a combination of technological and social developments inseparable from the shifting political climate of the fifties. In contrast to the many scholars who have dismissed this period of his career (1952-1959) as “seven years of silence,” I argue in this chapter that

Mahfouz's turn to screenplay writing represented anything but a "*crise de la parole*."^{lxvii} His contribution to the cultural milieu of the nineteen-fifties, through the medium of film, constituted a seminal force in Egypt's post-independence push for an aesthetic vehicle of national consciousness alternative to the nascent cultural agendas of the divided Cold War powers.^{lxviii} However, distinctive from other quintessential works of the Third Cinema movement—Egypt's Youssef Chahine would more readily fill that role^{lxix}—the films I discuss here also helped push the boundaries of realist experimentation, creating a framework for the author's subsequent novels of the sixties.

Although both Mahfouz and Abū Sayf point to their first encounter as the critical point of departure for Mahfouz's career in film, Samīr Farīd, a film curator at the Bibliotheca Alexandria and one of Egypt's leading film critics, noted recently that it was likely an early set of essays by and about Jean-Paul Sartre, published in *al-Kātib al-Maṣrī*, that prompted Mahfouz to begin writing film in earnest (Farīd).^{lxx} In its apparent *apriori* presentation of reality, film offered unprecedented opportunities, not only for the conveyance of social or political narrative, but also for its artistic horizon of engagement. From Mahfouz, to Yūsif Idrīs, Ghāssan Kanafānī, or Jabrā Ibrahīm Jabrā, artists across the Arab world sought to confront the new kineticism of the post-war city with a similarly dynamic artistry, to capture the "revolutionary fire" of the times and to rattle the quiescence of traditionalism that, in the eyes of many, had allowed for the loss of Palestine (Jabrā, "Jabrā" 54).^{lxxi} Unlike the traditional arts— from poetry to architecture— there was no expectation of the filmmaker to "deliver what the people felt was beautiful in and of itself," wrote Salāḥ Abū Sayf. Yet, there was no sense, at first,

that films could be untruthful. For all intents and purposes, movies depicted reality like no previous art form (Abū Sayf 5).

Mahfouz made no bones about the pragmatic appeal of writing for film. “I got a hundred pounds for a script,” he told an interviewer in 1966. “Literature did not pay enough to live on and my salary was minimal” (Thābit 336).^{lxxii} However, the potential for a new, more complete realism through the medium also captured his imagination. In particular, as he told the Italian filmmaker Anna Albertano, he was drawn to the way films altered and controlled the representation of time.

The principal difference between the two [screenplay and novel writing] is that, with a screenplay, time is limited. You count the script in seconds because everything is limited by time, whereas in a novel you can really give the work the length that you desire, it can be long or short according to the subject, but in a film, all films have to be the same length... The most important effect that writing for the cinema had on my literary work, I believe, is that it made me learn better how to be brief, how to concentrate things, I learned this while writing screenplays (Albertano 134).

As early as 1959, the renowned French critic André Bazin pointed out that the American novelist too had fallen under the spell of cinema, and for much the same reason (Bazin, *Qu'est* 14). While it is difficult to determine, as he wrote, whether the art of Dos Passos or Hemingway preceded the kind of narrative innovations ushered in by the Seventh Art—*montage* and the *changement de plan* (jump cut), most notably—“the age of the

American novel” reflected a “certain vision of the world, a vision informed, no doubt, by the relationship between man and technology (*la civilisation technique*)” (16). The impact of the new, mechanical aesthetics was equally pronounced in Egypt and around the world. Writers were turning to film, not as an alternative but as a complementary medium of expression to a modernist project increasingly overwhelmed by the incommunicability of the fast evolving modern experience. As Edgardo Cozarinsky wrote of the Argentine Jorge Luis Borges, who also began writing film scripts in the fifties, “film (or rather the idea of film) in Borges’ world becomes associated with the practice of narrative, even the effacement of narrative” (Cozarinsky 10). Above all, wrote Cozarinsky, it was the prospect for a new narrative of reality, one based on montage, on jump-cuts, and above all, an enumerated score of time, that most captured the author’s imagination.

I. The Public in Squares

By the early sixties, the new Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) had nationalized almost all sectors of its economy and embarked on the country’s single greatest piece of industrial modernization, the Aswan High Dam. Economist Gamal Amin wrote: “we have all been tempted at one time to treat the decrees of July 1961 as another Egyptian Revolution, transforming the Egyptian economic system from a predominately private to a predominately public enterprise system” (Amin 41). The transformation, he noted, began in 1956 with restrictions on “private activity in building” and intensified through 1958 with the ban on the creation or expansion of any industry without approval from the Ministry of Industry (Amin 41). By 1962, according to P.J. Vatkotis, the state had

retained ownership of “all financial institutions, public utilities, transport (excluding taxicabs), industrial concerns, insurance, department stores, large hotels, the media and the press, export-import trade and the marketing of major agricultural crops... A series of decrees in 1964 completed the state’s take-over of the economy” (*Nasser* 213). In addition to the transformation of Egypt’s political and economic infrastructure, the streets of Cairo were undergoing a sea change as well. In 1947, the average population density of a Cairo neighborhood “exceeded two persons per room” (Simms 50). In al-Jamāliyya, the setting of most of Mahfouz’s novels and screenplays, the population density was more than 2.5 persons per room. With the rapid increase in migration to the city following the Revolution, these numbers increased to 2.3 persons per room and, in areas like al-Jamāliyya, sometimes more than three persons per room (Simms 50).

Fittingly, the focus of Mahfouz’s screenplays became, to some extent, the experience of social existence itself, the associational ties and networks of authority then developing in the wake of the colonial powers. But, significantly, the subject matter of his films dealt almost exclusively with pre-revolutionary Egypt. From the violent underbelly of Alexandria’s teeming textile market, to the chaotic and semi-autonomous vegetable market of Cairo’s Rawd al-Farag district, the storylines unfold through crowds and scenes of social upheaval, which, prior to the revolution, were prohibited in Egypt. But from this new aesthetic emerges a point of visible disparity between the “empirical proletarians” and the “proletarian discourse” meant to tie the stories to the triumph of the revolution (Rancière, *Staging* 22). Mahfouz’s entry into the world of cinema, and his subsequent departure from it, illustrate both the institutional demand for an aesthetic of political transformation and the inherent artistic limitations of any such program. If the

genius of Mahfouz's literature can be defined by its openness to the ambiguities of human experience, his films explore the boundaries of cinema in achieving that same objective.

Filmic representations of the public sphere have a troubled history in the Middle East. In 1947, the British-backed government of King Farūq passed a series of directives in response to a string of films during the war years about the struggle for labor rights. All produced by the newly created Studio Miṣr (1935), films like *Black Market* (Kāmal al-Tulamsānī, 1943/47), *The Worker* (Aḥmad Kāmal Mursī, 1943), and *Manifestations* (Kamāl Salīm, 1941), tapped into the inherently political power of the realist tradition, a genre Salīm first introduced to Egyptian audiences with his 1939 *Al-Azīma* (*The Will*) (Farīd, *Tarīkh* 58). Salāḥ Abū Sayf, then just twenty-four years old, worked on the film as an assistant to Salīm. Of *The Will*, he said:

Real people were drawn from local settings and were represented on screen as never before: the barber, the butcher, the baker, the simple worker and the humble peasant. Even though the scenes were shot in the studio, we reconstructed scenes so faithfully that everyone thought we had shot the film out on location" (al-Ariss).

The film advanced "a reflection of the social situation of the period," exposing the corrupt relationship of the "urban petit bourgeoisie" and Cairo's political elite (Thuraval 24, also quoted in Malkmus 30). Abū Sayf would revisit this theme directly in his most

powerful production of the post-revolutionary period, *Al-Futūwa* (*Thug*, 1957). Written by Mahfouz and drawn, in large part, from his “*Futūwat al-‘Aṭūf*” (discussed in the first chapter), the film was a celebration of popular justice and a direct attack on the corrupt relationship between the then ousted Wafd party and the vegetable wholesalers of Cairo’s crowded Rawd al-Farāg district.

Such harsh depictions of the urban masses and corrupt elite were impossible prior to the revolution, however. Amidst the postwar boom of the cinema industry in Egypt, the creation of over a hundred new cinema houses between 1935 and 1949, and the exponential increase in domestic production to over 50 films year by 1952,^{lxixiii} the 1947 directives outlawed any film that inspired or contained “communist propaganda against the Royalty, or the existing system of government, or social probity (*al-‘adālat al-ijtimā‘iyya*).” The legislation, which became known as the Farūq Code, prohibited any display of “social revolutions, demonstrations, or squalidness” and banned images of “dirt lanes” and the “homes of poor peasants.” The legislation forbade scenes of “workers on strike,” or “attacks” by workers against their employers and “vice versa.” Significantly, it also targeted images “of crime in favor of workers,” or that “spread the spirit of rebellion among them as a means to claim their rights” (quoted in Farīd, *Tārīkh* 58-59).

The Farūq Code was hardly unprecedented, however. In *Tārīkh Al-Raqābah ‘alā Al-Sīnimā Fī Miṣr* (The History of Film Censorship in Egypt, 2002) Samīr Farīd, now an executive curator at the Bibliotheca de Alexandria, traces the origin of film censorship laws to 1904, whence it appeared as an extension of an 1881 decree against press coverage of the then two-year-long ‘Urābī revolt (1879-1882) (Farīd, *Tārīkh* 6).

Prohibitions of this sort can be seen throughout the history of British colonialism in the Middle East. In 1990, the Royal Photographic Society in Bath, England revealed a stunning collection of photographs by the editor of the major oppositional newspaper in Iraq, *Al-Ahālī*, during the rule of King Faysal II (1921-1958). Kāmil al-Jādirjī, who also founded the Iraqi National Democratic Party in 1949, was imprisoned in 1952 shortly after a series of demonstrations in Baghdad that, on the heels of the Egyptian revolution that same year, nearly brought down the monarchy (Batatu 668). After his release from prison following the 1958 Free-Officer coup that ousted the government, al-Jādirjī wrote that at the core of his opposition to the policies of the monarchy was a struggle for “individual freedom for citizens, the creation of democratic parties, freedom of press, a parliament that represents the people adequately and governments that are established from all of the above” (Jādirjī, *Fī ḥaqq* 332).

Tactfully organized to convey a message of indignation, his images delineated a clear political vision. In one, we see a child, almost naked, though covered just enough to photograph him. The ruthlessness of his apparent abandonment is carefully held intact. In another a group of children appear angelic, haloed by the humble doorframe of the mud hut they appear to be living in. While al-Jādirjī’s Baghdad home had become a center for what Abdul-Salaam Yousif described as an “age of enlightenment” in the nineteen-forties and fifties (Yousif 193), the pages of his controversial journal remained devoid of his photography.

In Egypt, photography of the public sphere appeared just prior to al-Jādirjī’s. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the journal *Al-Hilāl* (1885-), run by the Lebanese born Jurjī Zaydān, whose work I referred to in the previous chapter, was

publishing the most sophisticated, if not controversial, material in the Arabic speaking world.^{lxxiv} Significantly, Zaydān’s independent publication was the first to include photography. (*Al-Ahrām*, for example, did not begin including photography until 1926).^{lxxv} Yet, the images that appeared in *Al-Hilāl* were, initially, exclusively of the ruling elite, or powerful foreign leaders.

In the spring edition of 1919, however, something radically different appeared. On the first page of the May first issue, the editors at *Al-Hilāl* published a photo of S‘ad Zaghlūl, the president of the Wafd Party, which had tried to get permission to represent the Egyptian case for independence before the Allied assembly at the Versailles Peace Conference in January. The British promptly exiled Zaghlūl to Malta and massive demonstrations broke out across the country that March. In the same issue appears a small, grainy image. The simple caption reads “*al-Nisā’a fi mudhāhrāt al-Qāhira*” (“Women in Cairo Demonstrations”), referring to the massive protest led by Zaghlūl’s wife, Safiyya. From my research, this is the first image from the public sphere to appear in an Arabic language journal.

Similar to these early images of the public sphere, realist cinema appeared at the doorstep of great social transformation in Egypt and did not fully take root until after the revolution had succeeded in ousting the monarchy for good. The legislative process behind the Farūq Code remains murky, but the political implications of its collapse and the subsequent power of realistic depictions of public life are self-evident. Images of crowds and social upheaval provide verification of a rumor. They help to establish a narrative, to alienate the disinterested, to give a sense of direction and purpose to the

hesitant onlooker. But, perhaps most significantly, as with the image “*al-Nisā’ a fi mudhāhrāt al-Qāhira*,” the aestheticization of the public sphere signaled an attack on the strict division of public and private life that had become, first under Ottoman and then under British rule, an omnipresent source of tension in Egyptian society and a major point of interest in Mahfouz’s oeuvre.

II. 1953: The Underground on Screen

When Salāḥ Abū Sayf’s *Rayyā wa Sakīna* first appeared in February of 1953, reviewers for the April Cine Film Review (*Majala Sīnā Fīlm Abrīl*) wrote:

This is the first time we have seen modern realism on the big screen in Egypt... Salāḥ Abū Sayf’s story about the discovery of the gang led by two female criminals [Rayyā and Sakīna] and the undercover police officers disguised as vagrants who gained access to the house in Al-Libān to arrest them... while incomplete... [is] nonetheless... realistic and the depiction of events was successful in its realism (Thābit 86).^{lxxvi}

They gave the film and its director an enthusiastic “*jayyid jidān*” (“very good”) and Mahfouz singled it out, along with *al-Waḥsh* (The Monster, 1954) and *Iḥnā al-Talāmidha* (We the Students, 1960), as one of his most memorable screenplays (Naqqāsh 114).

The movie chronicles the real-life murders of women in the northern city of Alexandria, in 1922. An abrupt opening—a woman bursts into a small police station, pleading for help as her daughter has gone missing— followed by a sharp cut to a stack

of newspapers and an omniscient narrator who reads: “Panic and terror gripping the city of Alexandria,” sets the pace of the story to come. The protagonist, a detective (“Aḥmed Yusrī”) played by Egypt’s then pre-eminent star, Anwar Wagdi, is there to receive the woman. A certain degree of melodrama surrounds this relationship. He pays a visit to the woman’s house where he meets her other daughter, who, according to the girl’s brother (who admires the police and dresses like a police officer), wishes to marry an officer. The film ends on this note, a dramatic rescue scene, followed by a long embrace between the two. Beyond this, the plot is driven by action. Tracing the missing girl’s path, the detective is led into the chaotic world of Alexandria’s textile market, where he goes undercover, first as a *futūwa*, and then, once part of Farīd Shawqī’s gang, a blind cigarette seller charged with providing a lookout for the gang’s petty criminal activities. Along the way he meets “*al-kātib*” (“the writer”), a debonair student played by Shukry Sarhan, who seduces women into Rayyā and Sakīna’s lair, where they are drugged and murdered before a nefarious group of clients. While the coincidences are sometimes painfully contrived, the overall effect of the plot is unmistakable: the film depicts a network of underground conspirators, a seditious world of violence and corruption that is interchangeable with the marketplace, but that is more exploitative than industrious and, of course, is hidden from the eyes of the law.

Throughout the film, the story cuts to headlines from *Al-Ahrām*, a technique Mahfouz would revisit in *Al-Liṣṣ wa al-Kilāb* (*The Thief and the Dogs*, 1961). The news clips, and the omniscient narrator who reads them, serve as a kind of interstitial chorus to the narrative, mirroring the events of the story as they unfold. “What is the fate of the missing, oh guardians of security?”^{lxxvii} reads one headline. Or: “Alexandria is under

threat of losing all of its women!”^{lxxviii} “Young woman from a big family disappears... Is there a connection with the crimes?”^{lxxix}

Abū Sayf allots little time to background. The characters are revealed by their level of discourse and their environment, which is divided primarily between two spheres of action. The first, the home of the missing girl, is a well decorated and brightly lit apartment with Western furnishings and servants, a style typical of an upper-class home at the time. The other, the markets, alleyways, and to some extent Rayyā’s and Sakīna’s place, is a public sphere. The men and women wear the *galābiyya* and Farīd Shawqī the baggy, trademark pants of the *futūwa*. As with many of Mahfouz’s characters from the *ḥāra* (alley) novels, these characters are introduced as part and parcel of the neighborhood they live in. With Shawqī and his gang, we see them first as the detective enters the local coffeehouse. Occupying a corner of the room, they banter and smoke, taunting a young dancer who Al-Kātib will eventually take to Rayyā’s and Sakīna’s. The sisters are introduced in a similar fashion, guiding their clients— and future victims— through the labyrinth of their cavernous home. But, the sisters’ space presents a kind of anomaly to an otherwise neat division of internal and external spheres of action. Their home stands in sharp contrast to the apparent ebullience of the marketplace and the coffeehouse. The murder of the young dancer is a good illustration of this. At the coffeehouse she moves freely across the room, collecting tips and praises. Once inside the house she is trapped inside a circle of onlookers. A pulsing, rhythmic drum beat, combined with the laced drink fed to her by Rayyā, keeps her locked in a trance.^{lxxx}

Apparent from his earliest *futūwa* fiction (c.f. my discussion of “*Futūwat al-‘Aṭūf*” in the first chapter) and central to works like *Al-Qāhira al-Jadīda* (*New Cairo*,

1946), *Zuqāq al-Midaqq* (*Midaq Alley*, 1947), *Bidāya wa Nihāya* (The Beginning and the End, 1949) or *Palace Walk* (also written prior to the revolution), is a vision of symbiotic growth between socio-economic modernization and criminal syndicalism. The entreaties of the underground, re-enforced by economic desperation (*New Cairo, The Beginning and the End, Midaq Alley*), reaches a culmination of sorts with the cinematic story of *Rayyā and Sakīna*.^{lxxxix}

A true-crime story of national proportions, a certain historical prescience underlines Mahfouz's film. *Rayyā and Sakīna*'s dungeon presents an inversion of the market world they inhabit during the day, a division prominent as well, though somewhat less markedly, in the behavior of the philandering patriarch of *Palace Walk*.^{lxxxii} The invasion of this space by the detective-hero and the dramatic finale of the film, in which a street gang from the missing girl's neighborhood, alongside the marketers and local inhabitants of Al-Libān, storm the house with pitchforks and clubs, coincides with a more general revulsion in post-revolutionary Egypt towards the colonial division of public and private spheres of justice, the strict division between what can be governed and what cannot. This vision of public justice is capped off with the closing shot: a silhouette of two lynched bodies.

Rayyā wa Sakīna was not the first collaboration between the famous novelist and the rising star of Egyptian filmmaking. In 1945, Mahfouz wrote the screenplay for Salāḥ Abū Sayf's *Mughāmarāt 'Antar wa 'Abala* (The Adventures of Antar and Abala), *Al-Muntaqim* (The Avenger) in 1947, and in 1951, *Lak Yawm Ya Zālim* (You'll Have Your Day Oh Tyrant!), which was based on the story of Émile Zola's novel *Thérèse Raquin*. But *Rayyā wa Sakīna* stood out for several reasons. Mahfouz wrote story and script, the

first time that a literary author had been responsible for the entirety of the screenplay (al-Nahas 166). It was also with this film that Mahfouz began to recycle material from his previously unpublished literary corpus. Farīd Shawqī's role as a *futūwa* who wears a single black eye-patch, for example, comes directly from the early, unpublished short story "*Futūwat al-'Aṭīf*" (discussed in the first chapter). The "One-Eye" would reappear throughout his career, often as a sort of progenitor and specifically as the predecessor to the Bayūmī character.

In popular imagination, the *futūwa* became virtually synonymous with Shawqī's portrayal (Farīd). A powerful, collaborative image constructed by Egypt's leading artistic entrepreneurs, the motif helped establish a visual vanguard of sorts within the budding film industry. Like Marion Mitchell Morrison (a.k.a. John Wayne), the actor and his character floated between directors and scripts but remained, like their American predecessor, unambiguously connected. The character was stoic, defined by his confidence, his silence, and his physical might. The symbolic import of the *futūwa*, his dual affinity to corruption and honor— a trait found in the young protagonist of *New Cairo* (1946)— or ostensibly contradictory codes of family honor and public depravity— as seen in the patriarch of *Palace Walk*— though present, were far from explicit in Mahfouz's early work. It was not until his films, and with the success of casting Shawqī, that Mahfouz would discover the full "ontologico-aesthetic" import of the character.^{lxxxiii}

The resurrection and transformation of the teleological hybrid— the *fatā 'ayyan*— or Ṣūfī street urchin— into an historical criminal in one film (*Rayyā wa Sakīna*) and into a hero of the under-class in another (*Futūwa al-Ḥūsaniyya*), speaks to the complexity of aesthetic choices facing Mahfouz in the post-revolutionary years. The shifting meaning of

the character, a trait that would ultimately define it, is not unique to Mahfouz's literature and reflects a pattern common in the development of revolutionary-era aesthetics. In Schiller's letter "On the Aesthetic Education of Man," Jacques Rancière identified a similar, seemingly contradictory instinct on the part of the author. For Schiller, modernity, or the meaning of modernity, is no more or less than a "time devoted to the material realization of a humanity still latent in mankind." The aim of Schiller's "aesthetic education" was to resuscitate and develop a secularist vision of humanity, but, as Rancière points out, he refocuses his aim in light of the French Revolution. The Jacobian institutionalization of the humanist argument, Robespierre's "Cult of the Supreme Being," created an ontologico-aesthetic model of Schiller's philosophy that became, in effect, a "new paradigm for the revolution," "a brief but decisive encounter between the artisans of the Marxist revolution and the artisans of forms" (Rancière, *Politics* 27).

For Mahfouz the realization of the *futūwa*, or rather, the impossibility of realizing the full meaning of the *futūwa* whilst the character rose to the level of a national icon, may well have contributed to his subsequent retreat from screenplay writing and indeed realism in general. In Hans Gadamer's language, Shawqī's *futūwa* served to fix the type (137). Once manifested on screen, the idea was transformed into an aesthetics and consequently a politics— a politics of the *hāra*, of traditionalism and of machismo. For Mahfouz, by 1957, the Shawqī / *futūwa* paradigm was already a remnant of itself, a ghost from a bygone era. But it is in this phantasmagoric form, to borrow one last term from Rancière, that the character would continue to fascinate the author.

Though not the first “realist” film,^{lxxxiv} *Rayyā wa Sakīna*, according to Hashim al-Nahhas, was the first Egyptian film to be drawn from actual events (al-Nahhas166). Equally significant, the production and reception of the movie signaled an important shift in popular aesthetic discourse in Egypt. Perhaps because of the film’s obvious connection to history, or because, like in Europe, “realism” had become among reviewers a topic of political discourse as well, the question was not only did the film accurately depict the well known historical events, but was it “successful in its realism” (Thābit 84)? Though subtle, the implications of this inquiry are significant.

In an early, influential essay on the anti-Hegelianism of Anglo-American pluralism, the work of William James and Alfred N. Whitehead most notably, Jean Wahl (Jean-Paul Sartre’s teacher) wrote: “At the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel tells us that which passes for being concrete and particular is, in reality, abstract and general and the greatest source of wealth to the empiricist and the realist is, in reality, what the world most greatly lacks.” Foreshadowing Jacques Derrida’s famous concept of “*différance*” (Wahl oversaw Derrida’s earliest publications with the College de France, which the former created along with Emmanuel Levinas), he added:

Hegel’s argument, indeed Hegel himself, embodied a consciousness founded essentially on the question of language. If I write: “it is now night” in a few hours it will be day and the phrase will be false. So should we conclude with Hegel that language reveals an unreal concrete, that the concrete is no more than an intention destined never to be realized and that here, in language, as with everything for Hegel, work, as constituted by man, refutes the indefinite nature of aspiration,

present in man's purely subjective intentions? Likewise, should we not then say that language, far from being revelatory of the real, it reveals itself, but is powerless (Wahl 29)?

At the core of the existentialist inquiry— what Wahl originally described simply as the “study of existence”— is the problem of verisimilitude. James, he noted, held that empiricism was the art of particulars: “Science shows us the back of the tapestry, the inverse that appears at first to be a continuity, or quasi-continuity, of assembled grains” (Wahl 30). In the intellectual movement “towards the concrete,” a movement that constituted the origins of existentialism and channeled its way directly into the Sartrean apogee that “the engaged writer knows that words are action” (Sartre, *What* 37), the truth of existence had become increasingly interlocked with the art of truth telling. And it is the telling of reality, the front of the tapestry as it were, that becomes responsible for explaining the relation of parts. Sartre based his understanding of hermeneutics on the notion that empirical knowledge is indivisible from human interest. In his 1949 essay “La Nationalisation de la littérature,” the first to appear in Arabic, he wrote: “a novel is not first and foremost an application of the American technique, or an illustration of Heidegger's theories, or a Surrealist manifesto. Neither is it an evil action, or an event heavy with international consequences. It is the precarious undertaking of a single man” (Sartre, *What* 279). Rather than discredit the objectivity of the writer, or the incapacity of the writer to document reality, the subjectivity of the artist, the writer, or the filmmaker, reaffirms dialectically the radical existence of an intact and objective reality wholly apart from the grip of the artist.

Commitment as a mode of good-faith and recognition of the subjectivity of narrative, however objective its aim, would surface ever more strongly in Mahfouz's post-cinematic work. In this sense, Mahfouzian existentialism, as I addressed in the previous chapter, differed starkly from that of some of his major contemporaries, most notably Jabrā Ibrahīm Jabrā, who interpreted the idea of commitment as a literal call to action, specifically in regard to the situation in Palestine.^{lxxxv} Cinema, once a virtual *res ipsa loquitur* for the young Mahfouz (one recalls the quote included at the beginning of this chapter), disappointed him in an important way, compelling him to return his attention once more to the transcendental task of novelizing the world and man's place in it (a decision that would lead directly to the creation of his masterpiece *Awlād Ḥāritnā*). But, he would not abandon screenwriting before completing some of his wriest commentary on the art of truth telling.

In the 1954 film *Futūwāt al-Ḥusayniyya*,^{lxxxvi} Mahfouz and director Nīyāzī Muṣṭafā take their audience into a smoke-filled coffeehouse in the Ḥusayn quarter of old Cairo. Here, a newly minted *futūwa* boss, Bayūmī, sits with his cohort beside the recently defeated rival gang. A rebecc^{lxxxvii} player enters and begins to sing the story of Bayūmī's rise to power. The rival gang protests, forcing the player to alter his story. Bayūmī's gang interjects, forcing him to change it again, and so on, until the coffeehouse erupts into a brawl.

Mahfouz would transfer this gesture directly into the structure of *Awlād*, which, at its philosophical core, challenges the timelessness of religious history by thrusting it into the din and *durée* of the coffeehouse.^{lxxxviii} “What sign is there, besides the coffeehouse stories, that any of them [the great men] accomplished anything?” exclaims the narrator

of the novel (363). *Futūwāt al-Ḥusayniyya*, in its entirety, appears to manifest precisely this idea. Just as the coffeehouse thugs impose their opinion on the telling of history, reality itself is compromised by the pretense of story to provide a “detailed explanation of everything.”^{lxxxix}

At issue is the simultaneously creative and destructive power of fictional representation, what Jacques Rancière describes as the phantasmagoric quality of fiction to break apart, or reconfigure, reality (Rancière, *Politics* 34). Yet within this fictional tale, Mahfouz and director Niyāzī Muṣṭafā play on the “non-mimetic” power of the photographic arts— and by extension film— to control the history of narrative, to guarantee a certain “decomposition and re-composition of the elements of the mimetic effect by reducing the communication of ideas and the ecstatic explosion of sensory affects to a common unit of measurement” (Rancière, *Film* 25). As the rival *futūwa* factions battle one another in the street, the owner of the local café frantically swaps back and forth his portraits of the chief *futūwa* rivals, poised on their respective horses. “Bayūmī,” the upstart *futūwa*, played by Shawqī, rides a white horse, a gesture that smacks of the Hollywood Western. Indeed, the final battle begins with Bayūmī and his rival squaring off for a high-noon showdown. The motif is usurped by an unflinching political gesture on the part of the filmmakers, however. The café owner ultimately removes his portraits of the *futūwāt* in favor of an officer on horseback raising a baton (instead of the dreaded club of the *futūwa*). Here, as in the other films, it is the police that ultimately intervene to resolve the inter-factional warring. Again, the driving force of the conflict is the indeterminate and alternating spheres of legal sovereignty: the extra-

judicial and fluid sphere of the *futūwāt*, represented, in a sense, by the *ḥāra* (the alley) itself, and the extra-*ḥāra*, or “national” justice of the secular authorities.

III. Al-Futūwa

Working in the increasingly political world of cinema, Mahfouz’s films echoed the language of the revolution.^{xc} Nasser’s axiom that July’s political victory would be followed by a second revolution “involving the conflict of the classes” resonates through Mahfouz’s stories of crime, corruption and class warfare (Nasser 41). Unlike his subsequent novels—the violence that succeeds the final revolution of *Children of the Alley*, or the drug-induced confusion that undermines the protagonist’s will to justice in *Adrift on the Nile*—chaos and infighting, for the most part, are countered in these films by the might of the law.

But a certain crisis of confidence underlines the politics of his post-revolutionary actors. At almost every critical juncture one finds an increasing uncertainty between what Northrup Frye described as the distinction between “sin” and “crime.” Inherent to the meaning of any revolution, and, in a sense, preliminary to its success, is a moral conviction that precedes and, ultimately, supersedes the constriction of existing laws. It is for this reason that martyrdom becomes not merely a tool for revolutionary change, but a prerequisite.^{xc1}

The significance of the revolution which appears at the beginning of so many legal codes, of Israel in Egypt, of the American, French, and Russian revolutions of our times, is that a revolution repudiates an existing structure of law and

authority. Christianity holds that Jesus was without sin, yet he was put to death as a criminal. This means that crime represents a social judgment, but society is never wholly capable of making such a judgment. It has no standards, in itself, for distinguishing what is below the law from what is above it: it cannot tell a prophet from a blasphemer, a saint from a witch, a philosopher from a teacher of subversive doctrines. Hence the martyred careers of Jesus, Joan of Arc, and Socrates (11).

In *Palace Walk*, a novel that culminates in the revolution of 1919 and that was first published in the immediate wake of the 1952 revolution (though written well before), Mahfouz ironized the meaning of martyrdom. The seemingly senseless murder of the young law student Fahmī, occurring during a peaceful protest held weeks after the March revolution (1919) had achieved its primary objectives, articulated more a “mockery of fate” than the obfuscation of legal and ethical boundaries (Somekh 111). The tragic irony of the event which is told through the experience of his father Al-Sayyid Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Jawwād, who listens helplessly to the story, becomes ever more apparent as it was the father’s relentless orthodoxy that had kept the son from participating in the earlier protests. The rest of the *Trilogy* advances from this singular, ironic point of departure. As the children leave the strict confines of the house, they are met with the uncertainty and violence of the external world, the apogee of which is the denigration of ‘Aisha, the youngest daughter, who turns to drugs after being seduced and abandoned by the British officer she runs away with.

While his post-revolutionary literature would concentrate on the interpersonal and ethical ambiguities of justice and authority in a secularizing society, a theme fleshed out, perhaps most masterfully, through works like *The Thief and the Dogs* and *Adrift on the Nile*, his screenplays helped to illuminate the arena of authority itself. The effects of secularization— not as a “differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms,” or a “decline of religious beliefs and practices,” but as the “marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere”— became the driving force of conflict in most of his postwar writing (Casanova 211).^{xcii}

Underlining this tension, as I discussed in the first chapter, was the growing entente between Nasser’s government and Al-Azhar, an effect that created, in part, a “compartmentalization” of extra-official religious sects that proliferated under the regime, despite its “irritating defense of associational autonomy” (Bianchi 28). While ostensibly this appears unique to Egypt, Roberto Bianchi makes a compelling comparison between the cooptation of the religious sphere and the subsequent proliferation of extra-official groups in Egypt with the corporatist initiatives of Juan Perón’s government in Argentina. “Like Peron, Nasser relied on corporatist associations to create a mass movement whose core has survived its leader’s demise (28).” For an artist like Mahfouz, or Jorge Luis Borges, for that matter, such massification of the public sphere entailed a certain ghostly property, an absent signifier in the Lacanian sense that, in the realm of aesthetics, readily coalesced with the motif of secrecy. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that one finds in their disparate post-revolutionary corpora two, almost identical, short-stories depicting the initiation rights of an enigmatic and underground organization: “*La secta del Fénix*” / “The Sect of the Phoenix” (1952) and “*Al-Tanzīm al-sirrī*” / “The

Secret Organization” (1984). It is also fitting that both authors, at virtually the same moment, would turn to film writing. In projecting the human magnitude of the populist experiments, film provided an unprecedented opportunity for thinking about secrets, and the present, yet hidden experience of the “*re-morts*” (“the ever-dead”) (Bazin, “Death” 30). As André Bazin wrote in 1958, “a photograph of a bullfight might have some documentary or didactic value, but how could it give us back the essence of the spectacle, the mystical triad of animal, man, and crowd?” (Bazin, “Death” 29). In film, reality and mystery become consubstantial.

As with Mahfouz’s *futūwa* films, Jorge Luis Borges’ and Bioy Casares’ screenplays are fundamentally about crowds and authority. *Los orilleros* (The Outskirts) and *El Paraíso de los creyentes* (Paradise of the Faithful) appeared in 1955, the year of Perón’s exile (1955-1973). As the Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau points out, it was the absence of Perón, his role as an “empty signifier” (a term borrowed from Jacques Lacan), or “quilting point” (Laclau “Subject”), that signaled the transformation of *Perónista* nationalism into Argentine populism (Laclau 215). Through cinema, Borges and Casares (like Mahfouz and his contemporaries) sought to address the metaphysical impact of the revolutionary experience, constructing an iconography of the masses that both dignified the hunger of the itinerant and migratory subject— *la cabecita negra* (similar to the *ibn balad* in Egypt)— while also commenting on the danger, or deathliness, of social existence en masse. The opening of *Los Orilleros* captures the essence of the aesthetics:

The camera focuses on a face that covers the entire screen. It is that of a real gangster (*malevito*), slightly overweight, hair greased back with gel, collar turned

up above the lapel, an insignia atop the buttonhole. Then, turning, it focuses on another face: one with sharp features, an intellectual type, emaciated, with curly hair, glasses. The camera then turns again and focuses on the face of Julio Morales. This face, that should contrast with the others, has an air of dignity from another time. It is the face of an old man, decent, with gray hair. These three people are in a bar. It is 1948. We hear a demonstration, the sound of vain agitation, high-pitched remarks. The fat *malevito* stares outside, fascinated. We see a street with buses, cars, trucks—the sound of music rises from a loudspeaker (Borges, *Orilleros* 13).

Like Mahfouz's *futūwa*, *los tipos* of Borges' *Los orilleros* are larger than life. They represent a new, undeniable presence. They are the human parts of a revolutionary fervor that surrounds them; they are the product and witness of a fast-paced modernity that, in an instant, gives context to their existence. There is a music that emerges from this world as well. The term "*malevito*" speaks of tango, an indigenous, industrial music of the marketplaces, of the hustlers and thieves that populate Argentine literature. The power of such montage thinking had long been an important feature of Borges' literature. On John Ford's 1935 *The Informer*, he wrote: "I understand that verisimilitude is what is sought after, but directors – and novelists— tend to forget that copious justifications (and the many circumstantial details) are counterproductive. It is not reality, but our perception of reality that is vague." He praised Welles' *Citizen Kane* for its "forms of multiplicity," its "disconnectedness," and the revelation that the "fragments are not governed by a secret connection: the hated Charles Foster Kane is a simulacrum, a chaos of appearances"

(Cozarinsky 65). In a subsequent essay on “Film and Theater” he spelled out perhaps his clearest elucidation on the connection between film and literature. “Must the time of art and the time of reality correspond?” he wrote.

The answers are multiple. Shakespeare— following his own metaphor— set the years of his fiction on the back of an hourglass; Joyce inverts the procedure and shows us a single day of Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus about the days and nights of his reader.^{xciii} More pleasing than efforts to shorten or lengthen a [time] sequence, are those that try to turn it upside down, that shuffle [between] different times. In the realm of the novel, Faulkner and Joseph Conrad are the authors that have best handled such inversions; in film (which, as was aptly noted by Allardyce Nicoll, is uniquely capable of such labyrinths and anachronisms) I can recall only Spencer Tracy’s *The Power and the Glory*. This film is the biography of a man with deliberate, and moving, omissions of chronological order. The first scene is of his burial (Cozarinsky 48).^{xciv}

Borges has said that his earliest exercises in fiction were inspired, in part, by the cinema of Von Sternberg.^{xcv} But, perhaps nowhere is the influence of cinema as evident in his work as in the 1945 short story “El aleph.”

On the burning February morning Beatriz Viterbo died, after braving an agony that never for a single moment gave way to self-pity or fear, I noticed that the sidewalk billboards around Constitution Plaza were advertising some new brand

or other of American cigarettes. The fact pained me, for I realized that the wide and ceaseless universe was already slipping away from her and that this slight change was the first of an endless series.^{xcvi}

Here, within the same sentence, a woman has died and the narrator becomes aware of a new advertisement on a billboard. These seemingly independent events are bridged together only by the narrator's haphazard, almost unconsciously subjective, stance. The reader would struggle in vain to attach any kind of deductive logic or symbolism to the juxtaposition of events. The death of Beatrice Viterbo was not the result of smoking or cancer. But we may assume that in some inexplicable way, the narrator associates or is forced to associate the new information (displayed on billboards) with his understanding or misunderstanding of her death. As a result he is struck by a mournful sensation: the infinitude of the universe. The aestheticism appears purely cinematic, but there is a certain Bergsonian undertone of radical individuation, a sense that time is subjective and subject to individual perception.

Much the same could be said of Mahfouz's relationship with the medium. Thinking through film helped him to establish a thematic infrastructure capable of evading direct allegory (the actors, the setting, the story is immediate and apparent on screen), while enhancing a fundamentally new, and realist, aesthetic that conveyed not simply the story of a detective and his suspects (*Rayyā wa Sakīna*), for example, but a freedom of articulation, a controlled and "enumerated" narrative that could deliver, in succinct fashion, and to an incomparably wide audience, a temporal and individuated vision of the world (Albertano 134).

Conclusion: *The Vegetable Racket*

As Jacques Rancière points out, the philosopher's defense of *engagement* as an act of good faith relied firstly upon his counter-stance to the “*ethical regimes*” of art, the proto-nationalist contrivances of the proletariat masses in the war years that so easily coalesced with the campaigns of the Third Reich and the Nationalist Fascist Party (Rancière, *Politics* 20). In Egypt too, the century-long attack on Kantian idealism that characterized the existentialist movement “towards the concrete” had become part of a political shift away from the liberalism of the Wafd, a move yet further intensified by the perceived cooptation of the Parliament by the British-backed monarchy and the increasing power of the Muslim Brotherhood's religious doctrine in the realm of private family law. Hence, one finds in the writings of someone like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn an increased emphasis on “individual responsibility” as not a political right, but an Islamic prerogative and a natural condition invested in man (Yāred 71). The post-liberal philosophical discourse on individualism became commonplace among secular intellectuals of the post-WWII period (DeYoung “Influence” 27). But it was the grand confluence of technology, greater political freedom and money, brought forth by the revolution, that allowed for a new aesthetics of the secular age to truly emerge.

Mahfouz and Abū Sayf's cinematic masterpiece of the fifties, *Al-Futūwa*, starring, of course, Farīd Shawqī, illustrates precisely the “democratic” model of stability also apparent in the strange circle of thieves we find at the opening of *Los orilleros*. Expressive of the “structure of feelings” of its day, the sense that Egypt's revolution had liberated man from the injustices of colonialism, but not the injustices of society find a ready subject matter in the vegetable market. The film complements Lukács's notion that,

in great realism, “every action, thought and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community, i.e. with politics” (Lukács, *Studies* 9). The *futūwa*, as an individual, was imagined as the very conduit of such politics.

Al-Futūwa pushes the aesthetics of realism even further than its predecessors and directly lays the groundwork for the image of “public humanity” he would pursue in *Children of the Alley*. There are no interior scenes in this movie, never a moment of private reflection, or private life. The first shot is of the hero, played by Shawqī, as he disembarks from a felucca on the bank of the Nile, in the heart of Cairo. It is the last solitary shot of a single actor. With no more than a knapsack he heads directly to find his Uncle in the dense old neighborhood of al-Ḥusayn. There he is immediately thrust into a scene of communal anger towards a vegetable peddler, who, as his Uncle’s wife explains, is selling old produce at exorbitant prices. Shawqī intervenes. Vegetables are his business, he says. The peddler explains that the prices are beyond his control as they are set “from above” (*min fawq*). A second peddler says that he is still waiting to collect his wholesale goods because his donkey is ill and he has no money for a new one. Shawqī volunteers to drive the cart. This takes the group across al-Ḥusayn Square to an elaborately staged marketplace on the edge of al-Jamāliyya. The large wooden vegetable carts are lined up for delivery beneath an arcade. The full energy of the city appears now on screen for the first time. From a kinetic crowd of vendors and hawkers, a man steps behind the passing group and delivers a blow to the back of the newcomer’s neck. A young woman— a market girl and the soon-to-be heroine— springs forward and explains to him that he has just been cut down to size and that the only response for one blow is two. Shawqī obliges. An elder *futūwa* races past in his horse drawn-carriage, nearly

colliding with the peasant. It is Abū Zayd the vegetable king. The camera now leaves Shawqī to follow Abū Zayd as he opens his office inside the arcade — a nook with a desk, a chair and a hookah surrounded by boxes of produce, banana branches and a sea of laboring subjects. Abū Zayd is a wholesaler. Unabashed in his price fixing, he whips anyone who questions his decisions. Within the first five minutes of the movie, the setting, the mood, the antagonists, and the protagonists are all clearly defined. So too is the conflict.

Shawqī continues to labor as a donkey until a real donkey replaces him. Out of work, he takes a job with Abū Zayd. The latter gives him a cart and sends him to the outskirts of the city, the high-rises of Giza, where he tries to peddle the overpriced produce. When he questions the latter about the quality of the goods, Abū Zayd attacks him. With the encouragement of his love interest, the market girl, he gathers a convoy of camels and starts bringing produce to market directly, challenging Abū Zayd's monopoly. His enterprise is quickly broken up by the police, a reminder, once again, that no individual is truly in control of his own destiny.

The reality of the characters Mahfouz searched for as a child outside the theater had become for the mature writer, a carefully imagined *mise en scène*, a tightly sequenced chain of events, set within a fixed time frame.

An aerial shot displays a surging crowd, followed by a close-up of Shawqī. The epigraph reads: “The events of this story took place in a time when the well being and daily bread of all was at the whim of a few.” Coming into focus is the full potential of film as a narrative medium. Assembling snapshots of life into a history of society, the filmmaker conveys a story about generations and, to some extent, classes. The rivalry

between the upstart *futūwa* and Abū Zayd grows into a micro civil-war. It generates a division of alliances between old and new factions of the quarter. Set in an anachronistic al-Jamāliyya (like *Children of the Alley* or *The Harafish*), Mahfouz has said that Abū Zayd and his tyranny over the vegetable market were based on a real story drawn from the early years of the twentieth century.^{xcvii} This struggle for power in the marketplace however, reaches even further back. The scenes of warring factions echo stories of the internal wars between rival Mamluk households in the early decades of the eighteenth century.^{xcviii}

With film, Mahfouz found a new aesthetics of history. The “homogenous empty time of modernity”^{xcix} captured by the camera, conveyed, even more succinctly than the novel, an independent and incongruous sense of amalgamated parts, a vision that stood in direct opposition to the national and timeless narrative of the State. The most striking feature of Abū Sayf’s and Mahfouz’s films is the relative homogeneity of the cast—a technical feature, perhaps—but still one that works to their advantage. There is no quilting point, no imaginary crime that exists outside the actions of the actor-culprit. Such a vantage point refigures the imagination: Mahfouz as a child leaving the theater and searching for the characters in the street. Just as film challenged presumptions of time as an external and unceasing current—showing real people in a vacuum, in an edited and abbreviated world context— one finds in the films a new, more “scrupulously honest” vision of the human individual as less profound and more closely connected to those around him (Rancière, *Film 2*). He would never again revisit the intimately revelatory, yet studied and objective life stories of *Cairo Modern* (1946), *Midaq Alley* (1947), *Beginning and the End* (1949), and *The Cairo Trilogy* (1956-57). What develops in the

fifties and sixties is a new aesthetics for describing man as an imperfect actor, defined more by his circumstances than his history.

Conclusion

السمان و الخريف:

The Quail and the Autumn

In 1985, Roger Allen published his translation of Mahfouz's *Al-Summān wa al-Kharīf* (*Autumn Quail*, 1962). In a 2004 lecture for the Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture in Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Washington he said he had decided on translating the novel, from a list of possible titles he and the author drew up, because he was "fascinated by the way it treated the Egyptian revolution itself and its aftermath" (4). As this dissertation has endeavored, in part, a hermeneutic of Naguib Mahfouz's post-revolutionary writings from a post-revolutionary standpoint, this quintessential novel seems an appropriate place to conclude. Likewise, as a reader who first came to Mahfouz through translation (though I cannot say that reading Mahfouz in the original Arabic was the sole impetus for my study of the language), it seems appropriate to conclude this project by looking at Allen's translation and to consider as well the tremendous effort that has gone into introducing Mahfouz's work to the West.

Autumn Quail epitomized a key feature of his work in the post-revolutionary period. While apparent in virtually all of his novels from the sixties, Mahfouz's taste for the narrative power of film and his attempt to merge a larger-than-life aesthetics with the metaphysical narrative of a disconsolate citizenry, reaches an apex of sorts in this novel. The neatly set backdrops of anonymous bureaus tucked away in the city, the old-world

parlors of “classical-style furniture, which seemed to be shrouded in a kind of dignity” convey a sense of cinematic phantasmagoria (Autumn 299). “*Where is the ministry? Where is the military?*” (299)? ‘Isā’s austere dialogues and inner monologues float along in a cloud of *noiresque* disinterest. The bold enumeration of time— over four years transpire, an aspect, as Allen noted, that garnered some criticism— and, perhaps most distinctly, the reproduction of scenes from his screenplays, convey a sense of retrospection on the author’s part more apparent here than at any time since *The Trilogy*. The following comes from a memorable scene in which ‘Isā, a Wafdist and former parliament member of the old regime, is asked to appear before the new revolutionary Purge Committee (*lajna al-taḥīr*).

Then he was summoned to appear before the Purge Committee. It was seated behind a green table that stretched across the room in the office of the legal adviser to the ministry. The secretariat occupied one end of the table; he was asked to sit down facing the members of the committee, who sat on the opposite side. On the wall behind them, he noticed that God’s name in a frame had taken the place of the King’s picture (*Autumn* 331).

The historical basis for the scene is well known. As the journalist John Gunther wrote at the time, members of the Wafd, along with political leaders from the Liberal Constitutional and Saadist Party who held seats in parliament, were being “deprived of all political rights” under the Revolutionary Command Council, a feature of political life that persisted until 1964. In addition, the revolutionary tribunal “purged” “dozens of Army

officers, career diplomats, and university professors” (Gunther 370). Mahfouz’s aestheticization of the history highlights another, perhaps more subtle aspect of post-revolutionary politics. As Joel Gordon points out, the author’s focus on the framed inscription behind the committee (also featured at the beginning of Ḥusām Muṣṭafā’s filmic adaptation but with ‘Isa accepting a bribe while a portrait of the King “stares approvingly”) appeared previously in *Al-Futūwa* (Gordon 89), though, its first manifestation was during the swapping of the *futūwāt* portraits in *Futūwāt al-Ḥusayniyya* (1954). But in the novel, the swapping of the King’s picture for the name of God contains a more timely critique than the film’s image of royal cooptation and Wafdist corruption. Framed in bold letters is the author’s boldest commentary on the on the so-called secularism of the new regime. Fouad Ajami and others have commented extensively on Mahfouz’s “nostalgia” for the past. The former described it as a “Mahfouzian trademark,” and quotes the author’s interview with an American journalist in the mid-eighties. “They don’t have our dreams,” he said of the youth of the time. But such nostalgia could never be entirely free of irony. Nor, seldom, was it static. The following is from *Ṣabāh al-Ward* (Morning of the Roses, 1987), a short novella published just prior to his winning the Nobel Prize.

Life went on, equally good and bad, modest and difficult, until World War II. The winds of change blew over the country and life became more and more expensive. Overwhelmed with bitterness, Mohammad dispensed his anger on everyone... But while he challenged all politicians, Mohammed concentrated his attacks on those who governed, assuming always the stance of opposition. Wafdist today, royalist

tomorrow, it did not matter. His blows were always directed towards those higher up. He said this phrase, which became famous as he repeated it often: “There will be a bloodbath!” A bloody revolution demolishing the rich and those in power. When air attacks intensified and, night after night, we met in the underground shelter, we said to him: “Your prophecy will come true, and blood will flow, but it will be ours, not the rich and those in power!” Absorbed in his recitations... he paid no attention to our comments. I will never forget his jubilation after the burning of Cairo... “The earliest drops announce the deluge!” That is when the revolution broke out in July, and its remarkable social achievements emerged, he saw it as a miracle born from his own beautiful eyes (Maḥfūz, *Matin* 86).

Though peppered with the occasional “yearning” for a distant past (one need look no further than Amer Wagdi’s Alexandria in *Miramar*, that “core of nostalgia steeped in honey and tears”), his literature moved closer to a real politics than ever before. The grand causes of history were reduced to personal conspiracies “inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community” (Lukács 9). Everyone’s experience of the revolution was the revolution, “born from his own beautiful eyes.” His depiction of the revolutionary committee’s religiosity, framed on the wall, is yet another expression of this common phenomenon. Amidst the uncertainty of the changing times, religiosity, or traditionalism, provides substance for the future. This observation, on the author’s part, is less a nostalgic expression than a pragmatic one. With radical social upheaval some beliefs become prophecy, just as other convictions are rendered mere things of the past.

Such was the atmosphere in 2011. By April, Cairo's powerful media apparatus including the "reformed" *Al-Ahrām*, and the independent newspapers *Al-Maṣrī al-Yūm* and *Al-Sharūk* and the news broadcasters at the once staunchly pro-Mubarak headquarters of Nile TV, had run out of new developments to discuss and began to focus almost exclusively on the fate of Egypt's former first family. By mid-April, much of the old guard was behind bars, including, most notably, Mubarak's two sons Gamal and Alaa, both being held in Egypt's notorious Tora prison. The former President, who suffered a heart attack at the outset of investigations into corruption and embezzlement charges, was being held in police custody at Sharm El-Sheikh hospital. Suzanne Mubarak was eventually detained as well. Reports surfaced that if tried and convicted, the deposed President could be executed.

"It's a new chapter in the 25 Revolution," wrote Amira Howeidy.

Little has been revealed since the prosecutor-general's decision last Wednesday to remand the three in custody for 15 days pending investigations into their role in the killing of peaceful protesters, graft and corruption. And yet the entire print media has made it a habit to provide readers with front-page daily 'reports' and headlines with anything that includes the name of Mubarak (Howeidy).

For Howeidy and others at *Al Ahrām Weekly* the focus of Egyptian media on the fate of the Mubaraks became something of a "fetish." She quotes Amr Hashim Rabie, the head of Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies unit for democratic transformation: "All eyes are on Tora Prison, which now houses the symbols of the

outgoing regime... The heads turned there are not looking at the future, they're focused on the past" (Howeidy).



29 January 2011: Mubarak's National Democratic Party headquarters (left). Photograph by author.

Autumn Quail captured just such a sentiment. Speaking to his compatriots (some of whom, including the protagonist, are members of the liberal Wafd party that ran Egypt's parliament at the time of 1952 revolution), the pro-revolutionary journalist Ibrahīm Khayyrat, exclaims: "The truth is... although my mind is sometimes convinced by the revolution, my heart is always with the past. I just don't know if there can be any settlement between the two" (398). Such ambiguity finds a ready host in the Mahfouzian imagination. By the sixties, the revolution had come to signify for Mahfouz a metaphysical divide between two modes of social existence. Not unlike today, he saw society wavering between a dual affiliation to the precepts of the revolution and the stability of an imagined past. He was far from alone in exploring this apparent paradox. Tawfīq al-Hakīm, the author of *Return of the Spirit* ('*Ard al-rūḥ* 1929), the man and the novel to which Nasser dedicated his *Philosophy of Revolution*, would write in *Thawrat Al-Shabāb* (The People's Revolution, 1970), some four years before his infamous '*awdat Al-Wa'ī* (*The Return of Consciousness*), that the "the spirit of the times," in the wake of

the revolution, was not one of contemplative rediscovery, but of “hustle and bustle” (*waṣakheb*), of great change and uncertainty (Hakīm, *Thawrat* 6). The vanguard was out of step with the reality it had created. “The movement became a revolution, and there came to be a council of the revolution which issued laws in closed rooms without any opposition and without any public debate” (Hakīm 7, *Return*).

Mahfouz would elevate the ambiguity of the revolution’s trajectory to a metaphysical plane. For ‘Isā, of *Autumn Quail*, the divide between the stability of an imagined past and the uncertainty of Egypt’s new social reality becomes an existential crisis. While walking the streets of Cairo he notices he is being followed by a “young man” “from the war days” who he had interrogated “in his official and party capacity” for some unsaid crime. The young man, he remembers, was found to be innocent, but sent to prison anyway.

What could he be doing now? Had he secured a senior position in the new regime? Or was he still a revolutionary? Why had he smiled? It was quite clear that he remembered him; should he expect some sudden act of violence? He decided to put the man out of his mind, but some irresistible impulse made him turn toward the fruit juice corner. He saw the man standing there facing toward the inside of the place; he was holding a glass of mango juice in his right hand and looking inquisitively in his direction. His eyes seemed to smile sarcastically. Isa looked outside again; he felt utterly depressed. It was as though, with that look, the past were pursuing him.

Before long he got up and left the place. He headed straight for the Corniche. It did not occur to him to go home; indeed it seemed to him that he no longer had any home at all. After walking a considerable way, he headed toward the square and sat on a bench under S‘ad Zaghlūl’s statue. Most of the benches were empty. The cold breeze blew gently around the wide square and toyed with the palm trees. The stars were shining in the enormous vault above him, and the night was as fixed as eternity itself. He had not yet succeeded in erasing the memory of the young man from his mind, but he resolved to devise a plan for the future. However, he had hardly buried himself in his own dreams when he was aware of someone sitting by his side. He looked around with a suppressed feeling of annoyance and saw the defiant young man. He started in alarm, thinking that he must have followed him every step of the way and was planning to do him harm. He sprang up to defend himself but at the same time felt ashamed at the thought of slinking away. Just then, the young man spoke to him in a throaty voice. “Good evening, Ustaz Isa,” he said kindly, “or rather, good morning; it’s a few minutes past midnight” (460).

The appearance of the “young man” from the past illuminates ‘Isā’s ambivalence towards the revolution. Will Egypt’s future leaders remember the sacrifices and complex ideological advances of the previous generation? Yet, this confrontation also captures the *élan vital* of Mahfouz’s post-revolutionary protagonist. Very much akin to what Jorge Luis Borges described in his famous essay “Borges y yo” as “the other man” (*el otro hombre*), the young man of this passage is an external reflection of the protagonist’s

internal sense of doom; a reminder that he cannot sever himself from his past, nor, consequently, his inevitable demise. In the young man he sees his own singular trajectory, the being of his existence, rather than its becoming. The crisis of *el otro hombre* (a phrase Mahfouz would also employ for the title of his 1979 short story “*Al-Rajul al-Thānī*”) for Borges was also a crisis of becoming, or rather, not becoming. It is a crisis provoked by the realization that, as “Spinoza held,” “all things try to keep on being themselves; a stone wants to be a stone and the tiger, a tiger” (279). Reminiscent too of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s *face à face* with the mysterious *fatā*, or young man, at the foot of the Kaaba in his famous twelfth-century Sufi tract, *Al-Fūtūhāt al-Makiyya* (The Meccan Illuminations), Mahfouz’s young man mysteriously meets him not in the shadow of the Kaaba, but a statue of S‘ad Zaghlūl, the patron saint of his fading political identity. By his very youth, his presence is a source of torment and ultimately terror. Mahfouz concludes the novel with ‘Isā running off wildly into the night. “You haven’t made up your mind to open your heart to me yet,” the young man tells him. Indeed, he cannot “open his heart” to the young man because to do so would be to recognize the completeness of his existence. To recognize the completeness of his existence, which he demands and which the revolution demands of the old guard, would mean to accept his own, finished form and thus his imminent expiration. As with Borges, the implication is that re-creation is ultimately a delusion, a slight evasion from one’s singular and predetermined path from which we can run but never outrun.

Endnotes

Introduction:

ⁱ Also quoted in Baker (18).

ⁱⁱ At the time of writing, Egypt had just completed its first round of voting for the presidential election and was headed towards a run-off between the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Moḥammed Mursī and the last Prime-Minister under Mubarak, Aḥmed Shafik. The election came on the heels of a decision by the High Election Commission under the auspices of the ruling interim military council to strike down the bid of three leading Presidential contenders, including Mubarak’s former intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, the leading candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood, Khairat al-Shater, and Hazam Salah Abu Ismail, an ultra-conservative candidate. Seven others were excluded as well (Kirkpatrick, “Authorities”).

ⁱⁱⁱ Rasheed El-Enany discusses Mahfouz’s intellectual influences at some length in *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning* (1993), 11-22.

^{iv} Mahfouz had completed the trilogy by 1952.

^v The protagonists of *Les Misérables* (Victor Hugo, 1862), *Ana Karenina* (Leo Tolstoy, 1873-77), and *Rayuela* (Julio Cortázar, 1963).

^{vi} C.f. Rima Sleiman, “Le Lieu De La Parole Dans” (290); Rasheed El-Enany, *The Pursuit of Meaning* (99).

^{vii} Among the most notable works of the sixties generation, the generation subsequent to Mahfouz’s and the one most influenced, arguably, by the novel, Jamāl Ghītānī’s *Al-Zaynī Barakāī* (*Zayni Barakat* 1975) and Nawāl Sa’dāwī’s *Suqūṭ Al-Imām: Riwāyah* (*The Fall of the Imam*, 1987) are the most likely candidates for a study of influence. As Ayman al-

Desouky pointed out in a recent article, Ibrāhīm Fargālī's fictional *Abnā' Al-Ġabalāwī: Sīrat Riwāya* (Our Father Gabalawi: A Biography 2009), was written in direct reference to Mahfouz's novel.

^{viii} In the following I refer frequently to the collection of interviews compiled by al-Naqqāsh under the title: *Najīb Mahfūz: safahāt min mudhakkirātihi wa aḍwā' jadīdah 'ala adabihi wa-ḥayātihi* (1998). A version of these interviews was published in French (*Pages de mémoires*), but in a reduced and sometimes altered form. I refer to both sources.

^{ix} Located in Tahrir Square, the Mogamma (the Egyptian colloquial for *Mujam'a*) was the seat of Egypt's Revolutionary Command Council following the revolution and continues to be an icon of Egyptian bureaucracy.

^x The great historian of the Napoleonic era 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī described the scene in his chronicles of the French occupation: "The riff-raff gathered, forming discussion circles, and talk and their rancor was stirred up and their hidden fanaticism came to light. They were joined by great crowds of rabble, ruffians, inhabitants of al-'Aṭūf and al-Ḥusayniyya" (al-Jabartī 84).

^{xi} Most closely associated with the teachings of Aḥmad al-Rifā'ī (d.1182), the Rifā'iyya, which began in Southern Iraq, but quickly spread across the Middle East, became known for some of their more eclectic practices, such as walking on burning coals, swallowing snakes and body piercing (Geoffroy 104).

^{xii} Wilson Chacko Jacob argues that the full usurpation of the Sufi tradition by that of the criminal one was the result of a single instance of murder on May 28, 1936, of a popular night club singer and dancer in Alexandria, Imtithal Fawzi, by a "band of assassins" and

the “failed businessman and weight-trainer Fuad al-Shami.” The labeling of Al-Shami as “futuwwa” (*futūwa*) in the local press signaled for Jacob the moment in which Egypt’s new reality of “colonial modernity” could no longer sustain the paradoxical meaning of the concept.

^{xiii} Regarding the origins of the Free-Officers movement, historians often point to Egypt’s failed war effort in 1948 against Israeli and British forces as the impetus for the internal rebellion of some four-hundred young army officers that would lead to the electoral coup of the Egyptian Army Officers Club in 1951 (Gunther 364). However, Nasser claimed, in his *Philosophy of Revolution*, that the true origins of the movement can be found only by retracing the entirety of Egypt’s colonial past. The slogan— *ḥurrīya, ishtirākiyya, waḥda* (“freedom, socialism, unity”)— was a distinguishing characteristic of Nasser’s philosophy and the order of its wording, as Muḥammad Haykal points out in *The Road to Ramadan* (1975), was of no small import. “His [Nasser’s] point of view being that you cannot have unity unless you are free, so that freedom must come first” (69). The saying was used to interpret the initial dispatches from Libya following the 1969 coup that ousted the monarchy of King Idrīs. According to Haykal, “the first clue to their identity [the leaders of the coup] came from the radio monitor at *Al-Ahrām*.” The revolutionaries used the slogan to distinguish themselves from the Baathists of Iraq and Syria whose maxim was “unity, socialism, freedom” (69).

^{xiv} Muḥammad Anwar al-Sādāt (1918-1981) was the third President of Egypt, following Muḥammad Najīb (1901-1984) and Nasser (1918-1970).

^{xv} C.f. Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel* (116).

^{xvi} Samia Mehrez recounts the story of Nasser’s consideration of the novel, as discussed between Mahfouz and Ghalī Shukriī, in *Egyptian Writers Between History and Fiction* (1994), 26-27.

^{xvii} Ownership of the Studio was transferred to the High Council of Culture and the Ministry of Culture and later, in 1994, to the Holding Company for Housing, Tourism and Cinema under the Ministry of Investment. In 2000, it was “rented” to a private company, El-Exceer and in 2010 it was put up for auction (Karawya).

^{xviii} C.f. Al-Nahas, Hashim. “Dūr Najīb Maḥfūz fī al-sīnimā al-maṣriyya.” *Al-Hilāl*. 1.2 (1970): 182-191.

^{xix} The 2011 Abu Dhabi Film Festival featured a panel with the above critics and served as a book launch for their book *Najīb Maḥfūz: Rājal al-sīnamā* (Naguib Mahfouz: Man of Cinema).

^{xx} Though not directly referential to the American gangster film— the term “thug” is merely a loose translation of the more complex term *futūwa* (as I discuss in the first chapter)— there are, nonetheless, a number of striking parallels between the *futūwa* films and American works like *The Gangster* (1947), or *I Walk Alone* (1948).

^{xxi} Among the most notable recent *futūwa* films is Aly Badrakhan’s *Al-j‘aou* (The Hunger, 1986), based on Mahfouz’s novel *The Harafish*. For additional titles see: Viola Shafik (313).

^{xxii} Talal Asad, Farat Ziadeh, Saba Mahmood and others have focused on the bipolarization of secular and religious spheres of governance in Egypt, a practice that began under Ottoman rule and continued into the late nineteenth century. In 1883, a year after coming to power, the British moved to consolidate the mixed court system the

Ottomans had in place. The Ottoman system, in the most general terms, had allowed religious groups to determine and administer their own legal codes and courts of law. Based, as Asad notes, on a modified Napoleonic Code and intended largely to protect the interests of British subjects living in Egypt— including the banks that had steeply indebted the Egyptians in their push to modernize (Rogan 101)— British authorities, in the late nineteenth century, created a national court system. However, in the area of family law, they left in place the *sharī‘a* courts (for Muslims) and *milliya* courts (for Jews and Christians) (Asad 211). The division of mixed and national courts persisted in Egypt until 1955, just a year after Nasser formally took office (Asad 212, Ziadeh 115).

^{xxiii} The comparative study of modern Arabic and Latin American literature has matured in the last decade. A special issue of *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (American University in Cairo Press), under the title *The Other Americas* (2011), was loosely devoted to the subject and included essays by Wail Hassan and Tahia Abdel Nasser that engaged a comparison of modern Arabic and Latin American literature directly. Elliot Colla’s “*Miramar* and Postcolonial Melancholia” iterates the value of Latin American socio-historic critiques to the question of national allegory. Comparative studies of Mahfouz and others in Spanish have been limited, though a good collection put together by the well-known *Estudios Arabes Contemporáneos* (Contemporary Arabic Studies) group at the Universidad de Granada includes a long essay, by several authors, examining Mahfouz’s work alongside that of the great nineteenth-century chronicler of the Spanish urban milieu, Benito Pérez Galdos (c.f. del Amo).

In sharp contrast to the field of literature, the social sciences have a long history of comparative analyses between these two regions. Allan Beattie’s *False Economy: A*

Surprising Economic History of the World (2009) and Roberto Bianchi's *Unruly Corporatism* (1989) are two leading examples I draw on in this dissertation. Though limited primarily to Diaspora studies, Ignacio Klitch and Jeff Lesser have each produced a series of robust works on cultural identity and patterns of Arab and Jewish immigration to Latin America. However, Christina Civantos' work is perhaps the best example of scholarship, in the United States, that addresses the intersection of Arab and Latin American imaginaries, what Civantos described, in a 2001 article, as "Custom-Building." Her book *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (2006), traces, in part, the Arab imaginings, or orientalism, of some of Argentina's greatest writers, from Sarmiento and Lugones, to Arlt and Borges. She covers a range of critical junctures in Arab-Argentine cultural history, assembling a comprehensive set of Arab Argentine writers from the twentieth century. She also includes a brief account of "*al-Rabita al-Adabiyya*," or the "Literary Union" group of the nineteen-twenties, which included people like Zaki Qunsol, Ilyas Qunsol, Jurj 'Assaf, and Jurj Saydah. (The latter regularly contributed to Egypt's leading cultural journal of the time, *Al-Hilāl*). Already an explicit subject in Borges' literature, Civantos' book helps shed light on what a recent reviewer described as the "semishared colonial past" of Arab and Latin American culture. Of this subject, perhaps the leading figure to date is the Moroccan scholar Abdelfattah Kilito, whose essay *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language* (2008) (translated and introduced by Waïl Hassan) examines the intersection of the Spanish picaresque and the Arabic *maqāmah*. James T. Monroe also explored this subject in *The Art of Badī Az-Zamān Al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative* (1983), as one of

several, parallel literary traditions to have emerged from the time of al-Andalus (the Iberian peninsula under the province of the Umayyad Caliphate, C.E. 711-1492).

Regarding modern Latin American and Arabic cultural production, ready comparisons exist in the novels of Mohamed Choukri and Rodrigo Rey Rosa, both disciples of the American Paul Bowles. Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī and others from the sixties generation in Egypt have long talked about writers like García Marquez and others from Latin America with great interest. Mahfouz said he had read García Marquez (in English) before the latter won the Nobel Prize in 1982 (Maḥfūz, *Najīb Maḥfūz: safahāt* 337). Arturo Ripstein's cinematic adaptations of Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* (*El Callejón de los milagros*, 1999) and *The Beginning and the End* (*Principio y fin*, 1993) continue to be a subject of much interest to scholars and the general public alike. At the 2011 Dubai International Film Festival, Ripstein sat on a panel that discussed the Arabic and Mexican film versions of the novels. He reiterated his great interest in Mahfouz's work, particularly the striking similarities between Mahfouz's Cairo and his own vision of Mexico City.

^{xxiv} *Dunyā Allāh* (*God's World*) appeared in 1963.

Chapter One:

^{xxv} The literal translation of *Awlād Ḥāratinā* is "Children of Our Alley." Philip Stewart's 1983 translation, the only one prior to Peter Theroux's 1996 version, took the title *Children of Gebelawi*. For this project, I refer to Theroux's translation.

^{xxvi} The former Presidential candidate, Muhamed al-Baradei, recently defended the importance of the novel and Mahfouz's work in the context of Egyptian democracy after

members of the Salafī party in Egypt, Salafī al-Nūr, suggested once again banning the work (Majdī).

xxvii For recent examples in English, see: Ruth Roded, “Gender in an Allegorical Life of Muhammad: Maḥfūz’s Children of Gebelawi” (2003); or Nabil Matar, “Christ and the Abrahamic Legacy in Children of the Alley” (2012). Unless indicated by an English title, all translations are my own.

xxviii As numerous critics and commentators have pointed out, the names of Mahfouz’s characters easily allude to the religious figures. The correspondence of Adham with Adam is apparent. Jabal, meaning mountain, clearly alludes to Moses; Rifā‘aa , meaning “resurrection,” relates easily to the story of Christ; and Qāsim or Abu Qāsim was the Prophet Mohammad’s nickname. The fifth protagonist, ‘Arafa, whose name means simply “to know,” has been thought to represent modern man, or the man of science (Allen 115; Ṣabḥī 409; Somekh 139).

xxix Unless indicated by an English title, all translations are my own.

xxx “Common,” or “universal humanity,” are two other viable translations of this phrase.

xxxi Jacquemond’s article “[revolutionary Fiction and Fictional Revolution: a New Reading of the Children of Gabalawi]” (2003), offers the most thorough hermeneutic of the novel to date. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Jacquemond advances a structuralist reading of the novel, suggesting, among other things, that the design of the work reveals the author’s intention of breaking apart preexistent hierarchies of power, both formal and social.

xxxii Al-‘Awā’s most well known book is *Fil nizām al-sīyāsī lil-dāwla al-islāmiyya* (On the Political System of the Islamic State, 1978) (Abdel-Latif).

^{xxxiii} Kishk's book: *Awlād Ḥāritnā: Fihā Qawlān* (Two Sides of *Children of the Alley*)

was published in 1989.

^{xxxiv} Al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya was implicated in the murder of Anwar al-Sādāt and later the Luxor Massacre. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān was eventually given a life sentence by the United States for "seditious conspiracy" for his involvement in the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 (*Naguib Maḥfūz: The Pursuit* 40).

^{xxxv} The irony here is that 'Awaḍ would ultimately be imprisoned by the Nasser's government for challenging the notion of "Arab nationalism" in his university classroom (*Maḥfūz, Pages* 119).

^{xxxvi} By the end of WWII, the Muslim Brotherhood was the only active resistance force in Egypt. The now universal organization— whose offshoots include the current governments of Sudan and Gaza— grew with rapidity from just a few hundred members in 1929 to an estimated two million by 1949 (Carré 21). Their fame peaked during the 1948 war in Palestine, where they sent armed guerilla units to battle the British and the Zionists. In the early fifties, along with members of the Communist Party and with approval of the Wafd— the governing party who had once led the way for partial independence under the leadership of S'ad Zaghlūl in 1919— the Brotherhood began attacking British positions along the Suez Canal. These clashes culminated in the "slaughter of the Buluks al-Nizam" on 25 January at Ismailiyya where two-hundred and fifty Egyptian police officers were killed by British forces. The following day massive demonstrations, and then fires, engulfed Cairo and dozens were killed and wounded during the British response. According to historian Eugene Rogan, "Black Saturday" "transformed the Free Officers movement." The march towards revolution became

inevitable and six months later, under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser, they launched a coup d'état, leveling the final blow to British occupation.

^{xxxvii} In 2001, Muḥammad Jibrīl helped arrange the publication of the story along with other previously unpublished short works from the thirties in a thin collection of the same name with the publishing house Maktabat Miṣr.

^{xxxviii} Al-Jamāliyya is the part of old Cairo where Mahfouz grew up. He wrote about it throughout his career.

^{xxxix} Al-‘Aṭūf is also the name of a neighborhood in Al-Jamāliyya

^{xi} كان يدور حول البيت ليقتذفه بأقذع الشتائم. أو يجلس على كئيب من الباب, عارياً كما ولدته أمه كأنما يتشمس, وهو يترنم بأفحش الأغاني و كان يتجول في الأحياء القريبة في خيلاء الفتوات, يتحدى كل عابر بنظرات هجومية, ويتحرش بكل من يعترض سبيله (25).

^{xli} عند هبوط المساء غادر المعلم "بيومي" الفوال نقطة بوليس الحسينية يخمل "إنذار التشرذم", يكاد يتصدع صدره من الغضب والغیظ. وكان يرغى ويزبد ويتمتم ويدمدم بأصوات كالخوار, خشنة مبهمه, مازالت تعلق وتتميز كلما باعدت الخطا بينه وبين نقطة البوليس, حتى صارت في ميدان فاروق لعنا وسبابا وقذفا وصريخاً مخيفاً عنيفاً (97).

^{xlii} In *Hikāyāt Ḥāratinā*, which foreshadows *The Harafish*, he names this character ‘Aṭūf: an even more direct reference to the early short-story.

^{xliii} In his late twelfth-century *riḥla* (travel narrative), the Andalusian geographer Ibn Jubayr, already using the term “*futūwa*,” described what he observed as a bizarre and violent sect. “The *futūwa*,” he wrote, prey on the Shi‘ite sect of the Rafidites. “They kill these Rafidites wheresoever they find them” (Ibn Jubayr 292).

^{xliv} While the Quranic version of the story reveals Abraham telling his son of his plans, the vertical design of authority implicit in Derrida’s discussion of the episode still complements the trans-generational dimensions of the conspiracy.

^{xlv} Mahfouz's earliest publications, a series of articles in Salāma Mūsā's journal *Al-majalla al-jadīda*, were devoted to the subject of continental philosophy, including the work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson. The influence of Bergson's thought on Mahfouz has been well documented by Rasheed El-Enany and others. According to El-Enany, *L'évolution créatrice* (*Creative Evolution*, 1907) and *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 1932) played particularly important roles in shaping Mahfouz's art (El-Enany 15).

Chapter Two:

^{xlvi} Trevor Le Gassik: "A Malaise in Cairo: Three Contemporary Egyptian Authors" (1967); Sasson Somekh, *The Changing Rhythm* (157).

^{xlvii} Rasheed El-Enany, *The Pursuit of Meaning* (106); Sasson Somekh, *The Changing Rhythm* (156).

^{xlviii} Jean André Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism* (1949).

^{xlix} The phrase comes from the title of a recent collection: *Criminal Organizations and the Challenge to Democracy*, ed. Felia Allum and Renate Siebert (2003).

¹ The ease of their eventual takeover, writes Baker, "did much to reinforce significant traits of the movement, such as habits of secrecy, personalization of power relationships, reliance on the military, and the absence of independent civilian allies" (27).

^{li} Though it was directed by Salah Abū Sayf, Mahfouz wrote the screenplay to the 1953 film *Rayyā wa Sakīna*. As I discuss in the following chapter, Mahfouz's screenplays from the fifties anticipated the philosophy and underlying aesthetics of many of his subsequent literary works.

^{lii} Raymond Williams uses this phrase throughout his work, I take its meaning here from his usage in *Marxism in Literature*, where he explains it in relation to the role of literature as a formal medium of “individual variations” designed for the articulation of a social moment (Williams, *Marxism* 191).

^{liii} Alan Beattie, *False Economy: A Surprising Economic History of the World* (64).

^{liv} *El juguete rabioso* (*Mad Toy*, 1926); *Los siete locos* (*The Seven Madmen*, 1929); *Las lanzallamas* (*The Flamethrowers*, 1931).

^{lv} Sa‘īd’s *Min Adab Al-Jarīmah* (*On the Literature of Crime*, 1964) concentrates on the cultural codes of crime literature in the Arabic tradition.

^{lvi} Founded in the late eleventh century by Ḥaṣṣan al-Ṣabbah (d. 1124), who would become known in legend as the “Old Man of the Mountain,” the *Ḥashāshīn* were a breakaway Shī‘ite sect devoted to the assassination of political leaders of any kind. The name *Ḥashāshīn* is thought to come from the group’s use of hashish for the purpose of fulfilling both the spiritual and physical dimensions of their mission. The *Ḥashāshīn* assassinated numerous political figures, including Nizam al-Mulk (d.1092), the vizier of the Seljuk Empire and two Caliphs: Mustarshid (d.1135) and Rāshid (d.1138) (in Hodgson). As Mahfouz noted with Rajā’ al-Naqqāsh, they also attempted to murder Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (*Maḥfūz*, *Pages* 191).

^{lvii} Tarek Osman, quoting Assem al-Desoky, increases this figure even more, to one-third of all fertile land owned by .5% of the population (Osman 45).

^{lviii} Amin notes that as much as 50% of the middle-class should be considered “lower middle-class,” with an average family income of less than LE600 monthly (Amin 36).

^{lix} C.f. Robert F. Worth's long essay in the *New York Times Magazine*: "Egypt's Next Crisis" (27 May, 2011).

^{lx} In *The Tomb and the Well* and in his interviews with Jamāl al-Ghītānī, Raja al-Naqqāsh and others, Mahfouz recalls in great detail the wedding parades of the *futūwa* bosses and the storming of a local police annex by the *futūwāt* in the midst of the 1919 revolutionary turmoil. He also recalls witnessing the 1919 demonstrations from the window of his childhood home in Gamāliyya and mistaking the march for a *futūwa* wedding procession (al-Ghītānī 68).

^{lxi} The text was ghostwritten by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal, but approved by Nasser.

^{lxii} On *miri* posts, see Galal Amin (66).

^{lxiii} Nietzsche is another Westerner who makes use of the *Ḥashāshīn* in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). His text is also a possible source for Arlt, who referred to the German's work on numerous occasions.

^{lxiv} A large, ancient cemetery between Islamic Cairo and the Muqqaṭam hills.

Chapter Three:

^{lxv} كان ذلك في عام 1918 على ما أذكر شهدت أول فيلم في حياتي بسينما الكلوب الحسين.. وأذكر بعد خروجي من السينما أن درت حولها باحثاً عن الأبطال الذين ظهروا على الشاشة اعتقاداً مني أنهم حقيقيون.

^{lxvi} In a recent article published on the occasion of the author's centennial, the film critic Samīr Farīd, also a consultant for Cinema affairs at the Bibliotheca Alexandria, noted that Mahfouz had begun writing for the screen by 1946 and continued even after returning to literature with *Children of the Alley* in 1959. This suggests, as Farīd wrote, "film" for Mahfouz, was not a substitute for the literature, but "parallel to it" (Farīd). More

surprising than his decision to begin writing for the screen at the height of his career as a novelist (the publication of *The Cairo Trilogy* had just appeared), and in the heat of the revolutionary years, was his decision to return, once more, to the heavy lifting of novel writing.

^{lxvii} C.f. Sleiman, Rima. “Le Lieu De La Parole Dans Awlād Hāritnā.” *Arabica*. 57.2 (2010): 290-308.

^{lxviii} Hashim al-Nahas’s article “The Role of Naguib Mahfouz in the Egyptian Cinema,” first published in a special edition on Mahfouz in the journal *Al-Hilāl* in 1970 and later translated as part of the collection, *Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz* (1991) edited by Trevor Le Gassik, though brief, remains the most comprehensive article on Mahfouz and cinema in English. Al-Nahas points out that eleven of the “hundred best films in Egyptian history, as selected by the critic Sa‘ad al-Dīn Tawfīq,” were either written by Mahfouz or adapted from his novels (al-Nahas 164).

^{lxix} C.f. Malek Khouri’s *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine’s Cinema* (2010).

^{lxx} C.f. Terri DeYoung, “The Influence of the Colonial Encounter: Self, Identity and Other in Modern Arab Intellectual Discourse.” Tracing the evolution of discourse on the “self” in the postwar, Arab milieu, DeYoung identifies the translation of Sartre’s “La nationalisation de la littérature,” and the subsequent articles by Najīb Baladī as the earliest work by and about the French philosopher to appear in Arabic.

^{lxxi} While widespread among Arab intellectuals and artists of the postwar period, this sentiment is well illustrated in the oeuvre of Jabrā Ibrahīm Jabrā, one of Mahfouz’s leading contemporaries. For more on this subject, see my article, “Political Modernism,

Jabrā, and the Baghdad Modern Art Group,” *CLC WEB: Comparative Literature and Culture* (2010).

^{lxxii} كنت أتقاضى مائة جنيه عن السيناريو .. وكان الأدب لا يغطي حياتي.. ومررتى أيضاً كان قليلاً

^{lxxiii} Lizbeth Malkmus and Roy Armes noted that between the screening of the first Egyptian sound film (which followed closely on the heels of the first silent films in 1922) and the end of WWII, 150 features were made in Egypt (Malkmus 29). Samīr Farīd referred to this period as the “cinema of war profiteers,” noting the often clandestine accumulation of capital via illegal speculation (Malkmus 31). Works like those of the realists were an exception to the norm at this time. As art historian Liliane Karnouk wrote of al-Tulamsānī (Black Market), who turned to filmmaking from painting: the realist genre stood out in sharp contrast to the much more abundant cinema “*luqam*” and flew in the face of the “local profiteering mafia” (Karnouk 11).

^{lxxiv} According to Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Al-Hilāl* emerged during the Interwar period as arguably the “best-known” cultural journal in Egypt. Emīl Zaydān, who took over after his father’s death in 1914, retained the journal’s identity as secular, but with a distinctly Arab-nationalist slant, a marked departure from its original emphasis on the dissemination of Western thought (62). A fitting reflection of this shift was the journal’s publication of a poll it conducted in 1931 showing that, among Egyptian “notables,” identification with the “Arab and Muslim” dimensions of Egyptian life overshadowed their “Pharaonic” or “Western” identity (28).

^{lxxv} Here too photography was limited at first to portraits of high ranking officials of the Monarchy. In *Jarīdat Al-Ahrām: Tarīkh Wa-Fann 1875-1964* (Al-Ahrām: Art and History 1875-1964, 1964), Ibrāhīm ‘Abduh noted that when images of events were

photographed— the first to appear was an image of a celebration marking the end of WWI— they were accompanied usually by a subsequent close-up of individuals participating in the event. The placement of an “event” (*ḥādīth*) image just above or beside that of a “character” (*shakḥṣ*) image, with the latter situated as though it were in the corner of the former, was intended to create a connection between the two images for those who are illiterate (610).

^{lxxvi}The name of the spice market area in Alexandria, Al-libān is also a kind of incense: Frankincense. A smoldering cauldron at the entrance to the dungeon-like lair where Rayyā and Sakīna lure their victims is filled, presumably with burning frankincense, an image that no doubt helped symbolize the sisters’ memorable locale in the heart of the market.

^{lxxvii} ما مصير هؤلاء المفقودات يا حفظة الامن؟

^{lxxviii} الاسكندرية مهددة بفقد جميع نساءها!..!

^{lxxix} سيدة من عائلة كبيرة تختفى ... هل لاخنفأها علاقة بالجرائم؟

^{lxxx} Although the viewer knows little of the sisters’ backgrounds, there appears to exist a logic to their crime. During the first murder, the film cuts to the slaughter of a goat. Viola Shafik suggests the image may refer to the East African possession ritual known as *Zār*. The burning of incense and the drug-induced hypnosis the victims are lured into would seem to affirm this. According to Shafik the subject of *Zār* was recurrent in Egyptian cinema at this time. It was often depicted as farcical, like in *Darb al-Mahabil* (Fool’s Alley, 1955, Mahfouz / Tawfiq Ṣaleḥ), if not dangerous, as in *Rayyā wa Sakīna*. In 1964 the Nasser government all but outlawed the ritual by forcing groups to obtain licenses to practice it (Shafik 149).

^{lxxxii} For background on the true history of Rayyā and Sakīna, see Shaun Lopez:

“Madams, murders, and the media: Akhbar al-Hawadith and the emergence of a mass culture in 1920s Egypt,” in *Re-envisioning Egypt 1919-1952*, ed. Arthur Goldschmidt, Amy J. Johnson, and Barak A. Salmoni, (2005).

^{lxxxiii} One possible social commentary to be drawn from this motif is the dualistic impact of mixed, or religious courts (put in place by Ottoman rule) and the secular, or national court system (developed under the British) on family and public life, respectively. For more, see my discussion of Nasser’s abolition of the mixed-court system in 1955 in the introduction to this dissertation.

^{lxxxiii} I borrow the term “ontologico-aesthetic” from Rancière’s *Politics of Aesthetics* (27). In discussing Schiller’s retraction from his original, secular aims set forth in the “Aesthetic Education of Man” following the Reign of Terror and the subsequent rise of German Romanticism as a counter-revolutionary aesthetic, he writes: “the failure of political revolution was later conceived of as the failure of its ontologico-aesthetic model. Modernity thus became something like a fatal destiny based on a fundamental forgetting; the essence of technology according to Heidegger, the revolutionary severing of the king’s head as a severing of tradition in the history of humanity, and finally the original sin of human beings, forgetful of their debt to the Other and of their submission to the heterogeneous powers of the sensible” (28).

^{lxxxiv} According to Viola Shafik, *Al-‘azma* (The Will, 1939), directed by Kamāl Selīm, was the first film to garner the description of “realistic.” Abū Sayf also worked on the film (Shafik, *Arab* 128).

^{lxxxv} One might argue Sartre himself later interpreted his theory in much the same way, and even to the same end, with his unbending, somewhat inexplicable attachment to Benny Lévy.

^{lxxxvi} See: Najīb Maḥfūz, Niyāzī Muṣṭafā, and Hudā Sulṭān, *Futūwāt al- Ḥusayniyya*. Cairo: Niyū al-Aṣḍiqā' (1980). Muṣṭafā was a forerunner of the Egyptian film industry in the postwar years. He was the chief editor of Studio Miṣr at the time of the revolution and would go on to direct some 80 odd films. Salāḥ Abū Sayf recounts meeting Muṣṭafā in 1934, when the latter was filming a documentary about the textile factory, owned by Bank Miṣr, where Abū Sayf worked (Al-Ariss 28).

^{lxxxvii} a classical Egyptian bowstring instrument.

^{lxxxviii} This film in fact may be the closest antecedent to *Awlād Ḥārītā*. Not only do we see in it a clear and early image of the dualism of the *futūwa*— juxtaposed between an antagonist and a protagonist— but Mahfouz introduces here some of the more enigmatic qualities of his literary masterpiece. An elderly figure, “Mu‘alim Ibrahīm,” functions as a sort of “overseer,” comparable to Jabalāwī’s overseer in *Children of the Alley*. As Bayūmī asserts his authority, the rival *futūwāt* flee to an encampment of huts beyond the Muqaṭim Hills overlooking the old city, a locale that is typically associated in Mahfouzian scholarship with the flight of the second “great man” (Jabal), prior to his triumphant return at the end of the second section.

^{lxxxix} The quote comes from the twelfth Surah of the Quran, Sūratu Yūsuf.

The verse is well known as the Surah of narrative in that it addresses the question of *tasdīq*, or truthful verification.

^{xc} Writing from his official position as Literary Adviser to the Cinema Foundation, Maḥfūz argued in a 1966 article published in the journal *Akhir Sā‘a* (The Last Hour) that cinema could play an important role in the “formation and education” of citizens in an “Socialist-Humanist” State. Although his remarks appear entirely sincere, the irony of his position on the eve of the publication of his most vociferous indictment of the revolution, *Adrift on the Nile*, is more than ironic. In essence, this brief article hints at the coming crisis in Maḥfūz’s philosophical universe. The italics are mine.

My first dream, or first my hope, is for a film academy. I want it to be well rounded with foreign faculty to meet the needs of teaching and with its foundations grounded in scientific [methods]. My second hope is for a cinema city, a place for the production of Arab and foreign films in our country. In turn, I want our theaters to become first class, with as many as 2000 on the ground in addition to another 5000 basic setups [projectors] in villages around the country, where people feel they have deprived the privilege of cinema. As for distribution, I want Egyptian films to find their way onto the world market first and foremost by way of their self-worth, for the technique [of its practitioners] to reach the highest levels of esteem. In terms of the subject matter, I want the content of film to play a critical part in the formation and education befitting an Arab citizen of a socialist-humanist state (*dawla ashtarākiyya ansāniyya*). *Regarding commitment I can say that we are, as of now, resoundingly committed*. Complete artistic expression of the human pulse, though we may find it difficult at times, is an artistic effort that requires us to be doubly committed. At the same time, such

commitment should not come in the form of a sermon. Uncommitted art, in the minds of some, still means just that, merely a sermon. In the area of writing, I hope we can find authors who specialize in film, who understand the aim of cinema and who know what it takes to create filmic art, because in my opinion cinema should rely on adaptation only when absolutely necessary, and it [adaptation] should not account for more than 25% of film production. Cinema will not achieve artistic independence without writers who specialize in film. The key to this is the direction of talented young people towards cinema, just as they were directed towards the stage, because a screenplay writer does not find his voice the same way as a dramatist, for example, and it does not come from studying either. His foundation rather depends on his talent and faith in his particular artistic field. My hope for documentaries, cultural and scientific, is that they provide a temporary substitute for books, that, for the illiterate, they may provide a source of cultural nourishment and restoration (in *Thābit* 334).

^{xci} One cannot help but recall here the story of Moḥamed al-Bū‘azīzī, whose self-emulation in a Tunisian village on 17 December 2010 signaled a point of no return for people across the Arab world. It was a reckless, ethical transgression that, through its conviction, seemed to render the very infrastructure of society unsustainable. The subsequent emulations in Egypt and elsewhere, in contrast, seemed tragically miscalculated.

^{xcii} This description of secularism comes from José Casanova’s lucid study of the subject: *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994). Casanova argues that “secularization”

should not be addressed from a singular, theoretical standpoint, but, rather, it should be understood as “three very different, uneven and unintegrated propositions,” and that each of these propositions should be analyzed independently (211). In this chapter, my focus clearly falls on the latter of the three distinctions.

^{xciii} He seems to be saying that with *Ulysses* Joyce wanted to have a day imagine the reader instead of the reader imagining a day.

^{xciv} “¿Debe corresponder el tiempo del arte al tiempo de la realidad? Las contestaciones son múltiples. Shakespeare— según su propia metáfora— puso en la vuelta de un reloj de arena las obras de los annos; Joyce invierte el procedimiento y despliega el único día de Mr. Leopold Bloom y de Stephen Dedalus sobre los días y las noches de su lector. Más grato que el empeño de abreviar o alargar una sucesión es el de trastornarla, barajando tiempos distintos. En el terreno de la novela, Faulkner y Joseph Conrad son los autores que mejor han jugado a esas inversiones; en el del film (que, según observa muy justamente Allardyce Nicoll, es singularmente capaz de tales laberintos y anacronismos) no recuerdo sino *El Poder y la Gloria*, de Spencer Tracy. Ese film es la biografía de un hombre, con omisión deliberada, y conmovedora, del orden cronológico. La primera escena es la de su entierro.”

^{xcv} Cozarinsky points this out on the back matter of his book. The quote comes from Borges’ prologue to the first edition of *Historia universal de la infamia* (*A Universal History of Infamy*, 1935).

^{xcvi} Jorge Louis Borges, “The Aleph,” *Sur*. 1945.

^{xcvii} On the history of price gouging and monopolization of vegetable markets in the twentieth century, particularly the Rawd al-Farag market, Yahya M. Sadowski wrote:

All but 10 percent of them [the vegetable wholesalers] came originally from the same three villages in Suhag (Upper Egypt). Over forty years, kinship, clientage, and common business interests had forged the wholesalers into a few small cliques headed by five families that the press had dubbed ‘the Lords of Rawd al-Farag.’ Each of these families specialized in the trade of specific crops. They controlled networks of agents in the countryside who telephoned them about the changing fortunes of the crops and negotiated sales from local farmers. They controlled the fleets of trucks and depots necessary to bring the crops from the markets to Cairo. In some areas the wholesalers actually leased orchards from farmers and assumed direct control over production. Under normal circumstances they controlled 70 percent of Cairo’s fruit and vegetable trade (172).

Mahfouz’s “Abū Zayd” was likely based on one of the five families that had long controlled the wholesale trade. The others, according to Sadowski, included that of Ahmad al-USayli, Muhammad Ibrahim, and Rashad Ibrahim (172).

^{xcviii} Eugene Rogan has a colorful description of this tumultuous period in his monumental history of the region, *The Arabs* (2009). Of the major factions that controlled Cairo at this time, he identifies two major households: the Faqari and the Qasimi. These were followed by a third, the Qazdughlis, who profited from the mutual destruction of the latter two and would go on to “dominate” Egypt for the remainder of the century (38).

^{xcix} The term comes first from Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936). I borrow it from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) (ad passim).

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Nathaniel Greenberg was born in Boulder, Colorado, in 1979. He finished his B.A. at the City University of New York, Hunter College, in 2003, and went on to study at the University of Washington, where, in 2012, he completed his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature. Upon graduation, Nathaniel was awarded the College of Arts and Sciences Dean's Medal for the Humanities. He is an avid reader, writer, traveler and teacher.