

## THE POSITION OF THE CAIRO TRILOGY IN CONTEMPORARY ARAB LITERATURE

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### Abstract

The notion of trilogy refers to three works by an author, which are related and constitute a whole. Consequently, they are related to each other, addressing a single story or a common theme. The Cairo Trilogy in Arabic literature is one of the most important moments in the history of modern Arabic literature. The Cairo Trilogy has gone through the usual pattern of Mahfouz's works. It first appeared in serials, and later was published as a book. This literary work will open new paths and motivate other writers in the Arab world to reflect the social reality in their countries through the form of a trilogy. Among them, we emphasize: The trilogy of Suhayl Idriz, the trilogy of Muhammed Dib and the trilogy of Hanah Minah.

*Keyword:* World literature, Cairo Trilogy, Arab literature, influence

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### Introduction

Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy, through its three volumes, reflects Egyptian society during the period 1917–1944 and offers a precise portrayal of its social structure and transformations. The trilogy occupies a significant place not only in Arabic literature but also in world literature more broadly. In order to illustrate the importance of the trilogy within the broader literary tradition, examples have been drawn from Russian, French, German, and Italian literature. At the same time, in order to bring the subject closer to the Albanian reader, parallels have also been established with Albanian literature. Furthermore, to examine the influence of The Cairo Trilogy on contemporary Arabic literature, the trilogies of the authors Ahmed Harbi and Mohammed Dib have also been.

The trilogy in modern literature represents a narrative form that can be perceived as a cohesive story closely linked to events depicting the dramatic development of society and individuals. The notion of trilogy refers to three works by an author, which are related and constitute a whole.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, they are related to each other, addressing a single story or a common theme. The division of events into separate parts facilitates a clearer understanding of temporal progression and change. Therefore, the trilogy deals with society and its transformation, while the characters reflect the social reality that the author seeks to present with the model of the transitional period. These are known as the novels of the round table 16.

At the level of world literature, the trilogy is considered an example of narrative realization, encompassing human drama alongside historical and social events. What follows is a brief overview of trilogies in world literature.

In Russian literature, we can distinguish the trilogy of Tolstoy, who presents himself not only as a pioneer of early sentimental psychologism but also of the moralism of the 18th century. Tolstoy found the subject for the trilogy in his personal spiritual and mental maturity with his three novels: Childhood (Detstvo, 1852), Boyhood (Otrocestvo, 1854) and Youth (Junost,

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<sup>15</sup> Jani Thomai, *Fjalori i gjuhës shqipe, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë*, Tiranë, 2020, p. 666.

<sup>16</sup> Ibrahim Halil Ebu Muleveh, *Thulathijetu Ahmed Harb ve thulathijeti Nexhib Mahfudh –Dirasetu fi er-ru jeti vet-teshkili*, el Xhamiatu el urdunijetu, 2003, p.11.

1857). Similarly, we also count the autobiographical trilogy that is considered among the most important works for Maxim Gorky: *Childhood* (Detstvo, 1913 -1914), *Among People* (V ljudjah, 1916), and *My Universities* (Moi universitety, 1923) in which Alexei Maksimovich Peshkov himself becomes the axis of the prose cycle.<sup>17</sup>

In German literature, we distinguish the Trilogy of Heinrich Mann (1871-1950), a creative personality opposed to the worldview of literature by his style and political views. This writer will become popular through the well-known Trilogy for the social classes in the Second Reich. The first part, the novel *Man of Straw* (Der Untertan), published partially in 1914, and only in 1918 in its entirety) is built according to the model of the educational novel type. The second and third parts of the trilogy, the novels *The Poor* (Die Armen, 1917) and *The Head* (Der Kopf, 1925), which complete the picture of society from "below" and "above", present social problems, poverty, the working environment and the struggle of workers for their rights <sup>18</sup>.

Trilogy in French literature is not only a narrative form, but a way to explore big topics like freedom, responsibility, love, war, everyday life and the meaning of life. We have separated Albert Camus' famous philosophical trilogy – often informally called the "Trilogy of the Absurd" – consisting of three separate works, which are not connected to each other through narrative, but through the central topic of the absurd: *The Stranger* (L'Étranger, 1942) *The Plague* (La Peste, 1947) *The Fall* (La Chute, 1956). This is an ideological trilogy, exploring the themes of absurdity, revolt and moral judgment.

From Italian literature we have discerned the Italian writer, archaeologist and journalist Valerio Massimo Manfredi. The Alexander trilogy in a collection of three parts: 1. *Child of a Dream*, 2. *The Sands of Ammon* 3. *The Ends of the Earth*. In these three novels, Manfred tells the story of an extraordinary man who dedicated his life to realizing his dream of ruling the world. "Alexander" is not only an extraordinary story of empire, mysteries, revenge, and battles, but also a story of great love, suffering, and sad loneliness.

The trilogy also occupies an important place in Albanian literature. We have several authors who have created related works that are considered a thematic and historical cycle. 1. Ismail Kadare – *The War Trilogy* ("The General of the Dead Army", "Chronicle in Stone", "The Winter of Great Solitude"); 2. Sabri Godo – *Historical Trilogy* ("Ali Pasha Tepelena", "Skanderbeg", "[The Fire Trial](#)"); 3. Rexhep Qosja – *The Languidness Trilogy* ("Death Comes to Me from Such Eyes", "Nobody's Sons", "The Revealed Secrets").

The Cairo Trilogy in Arabic literature is one of the most important moments in the history of modern Arabic literature. This trilogy, which is one of Naguib Mahfouz's most famous works, has won great acclaim and played an important role in examining Egyptian society and politics during the period between the two world wars.

The Cairo Trilogy, with its three parts, reflects Egyptian society, covering the following time periods: 1) the novel [Palace Walk](#) (Bayn al-Qasrayn) (1956), covers the period 1917-1919. 2) the novel [Palace of Desire](#) (Qasr al-Shawq) (1957), reflects the events of 1924-1927. 3) the novel [Sugar Street](#) (Al-Sukkariyya) (1957), deals with the life of Egyptian society between 1935-1944. <sup>19</sup>

Among the most voluminous with over 1500 pages, each part is named after the streets near the great mosque of Hussein in the same neighborhood of Cairo, which is considered one of the most artistically feasible in contemporary Arabic literature, reflecting the Egyptian world.

Describing the fate of a large Muslim merchant family, probably similar to his own, during the first half of this century, it provides an extraordinary overview of the panorama of life in Egypt at that period.

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<sup>17</sup> Grup autorësh, *Historia e lëtrsisë botërore*, v. 7, Rilindja, Prishtinë, 1989, pp.353-354.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp. 216-217.

<sup>19</sup> Neval Hantut, *Xhedelijet ul fen-ni ved-dini fi rivajet ulad har-retina li Nexhib Mahfudh*, in: *Kul-ljeu el adabi vel-lugat*, 2016-2017, pp. 3-4.

The personalities he reveals are wealthy people and their mutual relationships are shown in detail and with great originality. Time and its flow are a frequent theme in Mahfud's works, and in the great Trilogy there is unlimited space for their comprehensive elaboration.

It presents traditional Muslim views, for example, on marital relations, where equality was achieved only after fifty years of complete subjugation of women. The social and political conflicts of those turbulent times are presented through their impact on every aspect of Egyptian life, and between family members there is often conflict due to their different beliefs and behaviors. Support and opposition to the monarchy, as well as different political factions, the Muslim Brotherhood or Marxists, submission or indifference in the ongoing struggle against the British, appear as hot and dominant themes in Mahfouz's work.

The Cairo Trilogy has gone through the usual pattern of Mahfouz's works. It first appeared in serials, and later was published as a book. With this work, Mahfouz gained great popularity in the fifties, and its success has caused a new interest in his earlier works that had gone unnoticed by the reader, while they have subsequently been reprinted several times.

Mahfouz's trilogy is one of the most important works in Arabic literature due to its rich depiction of Egyptian life and reality during the colonial period and the struggle for independence.

Through this trilogy, Mahfouz addresses social divisions in Egypt, showing the conflict between generations, social classes, and the cultural and economic changes taking place in society. This includes the efforts to balance tradition and modernity.

The trilogy also addresses the impact of British colonialism and its impact on the daily lives of Egyptian citizens. The characters in the novel face major economic challenges, cultural shifts, and attempts at change that reflect the larger changes of the time. The characters in the trilogy are not simply individuals, but are also symbolic of groups and social classes in society.

This literary work has greatly influenced the development of modern Arab literature, making it an example that can be used to reflect and document the social and political reality of a nation. It therefore remains a point of reference for scholars and admirers of Arabic literature, to understand the impact of British colonialism on the one hand and the popular sacrifice for Egypt's independence on the other. It played an important role in examining social and political relations and contributed to helping create a new literature that also reflected the realities of Egyptian society after independence.

### **The Influences of the Cairo Trilogy on Contemporary Arabic Literature**

The Cairo Trilogy is one of Naguib Mahfouz's most important works, helping to transform the modern Arabic novel. It earned Mahfouz the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988. The trilogy was a turning point in Arabic literature, providing a profound insight into Egyptian society and the political and social changes that followed World War I. It offers a detailed portrait of Egyptian society and makes a profound social critique that remains relevant today.

The Cairo Trilogy is an excellent example of profound realism, where Mahfouz used characters and events to describe a society undergoing profound changes. Although Mahfouz was not simply a historical narrator, he was also a visionary who saw the future<sup>20</sup> through the fight against social injustice, wearing the cloak of knowledge and science. Thus, he connected knowledge, technology and socialism.

Mahfouz's works have been translated into many European and world languages and have gained great appreciation in world literature, helping to recognize and affirm Arabic literature in the international arena. This trilogy has been a guide for young Arab authors and has shaped a writing model for many others.

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<sup>20</sup>Subeyh Mez'al Jabir, *Jedaliyatul wa'ji as-saidi wal mutahav-vili fi thulathiyeti Najib Mahfudh*, Jamiat Baghdad, Majalatu al-ulumi al-insaniyati, v. 34/no. 4, November 2017, p.1703

The Cairo Trilogy is considered one of the most important works of modern Arabic literature and one of the most important writings that has influenced the contemporary novel. It has had a profound impact on world literature, providing an insight into the social and political changes in Egypt and the Arab world of the 20th century. On a global level, the trilogy is considered an example of narrative realism, incorporating human drama and historical events. The Cairo Trilogy has helped shape the contemporary Arabic novel and has transcended the boundaries of Arabic literature and has been recognized internationally.

The phenomenon of the trilogy in Arabic literature represents social phenomena, reveals negative and deviant behaviors, unlike previous narratives in literature that conveyed experience. Whereas the contemporary novel illustrates living experience that inspires human and psychological understandings in general. This literary work will open new paths and motivate other writers in the Arab world to reflect the social reality in their countries through the form of a trilogy. Among them, we emphasize:

The trilogy of Suhayl Idriz ( al-khandakul al-amik, ay-hayu al-latini, asabiahah tahteriku), the trilogy of Muhammed Dib ( al-darul al-kabiretu, al-hariku, an-naulu). The trilogy of Hanah Minah (al- baqayya, al-mustankiyyatu, al-kitab al-janibu al-aharu ...)

Ahmed Harbi's trilogy (1967-1994). The first work "Ismail" presents a portrait of the Palestinian revolution after the 1967 war. It describes the persecutions, imprisonments and mistreatment of the Palestinian people. The second novel " Al-Janibu al-Ahar" describes the events of the "intifada" and the transformation that encompassed the entire society as well as the end of the nationwide revolution. The third work "Al-Beqaa" clarifies in detail the portrait of the relationships and events that encompassed the first two parts.<sup>21</sup>

The trilogy of Muhammed Dib, written by the Algerian writer and poet, represents one of the most famous works of modern Arab literature. It consists of three outstanding novels;

1 - "Al-Bayt al-Kabir" (1952) – "The Great House". This novel tells the story of a group of people who are connected to a big house, which symbolizes the destruction of traditional Algerian society due to colonial occupation. It shows the challenges that individuals face to preserve their identity and dignity in a divided society.

2- "Al-Hariq" (1954) – "The Fire". This novel deals with the consequences of an escalating conflict related to the Algerian war of independence. It describes a period of turmoil, where several groups of people face the violence and suffering that comes from war and internal wars.

3 -"El Noul" (1957) – " The Loom". This novel focuses on the aftermath of the post-independence period and the internal issues affecting Algerian society. It depicts individuals trying to adapt to the new reality, facing the same tensions and contradictions that accompanied the colonial period.

## Conclusion

Contemporary Arabic literature in the twentieth century underwent a profound thematic and stylistic transformation. Within this context, Naguib Mahfouz emerges as one of the most representative voices of a generation confronted with the tensions between tradition, colonial reality, and social modernization. Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy stands as the most representative work of contemporary Arabic literature. The Cairo Trilogy not only secured Mahfouz a distinguished place among the major authors of world literature, but also established itself as a source of inspiration and a literary model for many writers of contemporary Arabic literature, from Palestine in the East to Algeria in the West.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibrahim Halil Ebu Muleveh, *Thulathijetu Ahmed Harb ve thulathijeti Nexhib Mahfudh*, p.11.

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