

**Approaches to Teaching
World Literature**

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see the last pages of this book.

**Approaches to Teaching
the Works of
Naguib Mahfouz**

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the notion that the poet is willing to take on blame prolongs the tension between the two readings, a group drinking literal wine and a group partaking of the *dhikr*. "Zaabalawi" can be read as an homage to Ibn al-Fārid, and Homerin's observation that Shaykh Gad was in fact the name of the caretaker at Ibn al-Fārid's shrine, starting about the time Mahfouz was writing this story, would fit that argument (*From Arab Poet* 90). If we read in these terms, we might see the concluding scene at the Nigma (or Nijma) Bar, the scene where Shaykh Gad's tip has led the narrator to track down a merchant from the city of Damanhour named Hâg (Hâj) Wanas, as a footnote or addendum rather than as a climax. In that inconclusive, ambiguous confrontation, the traditional imagery of wine and *dhikr* is recapitulated, but we are likely to experience shock, since the wine is literal. For some readers it is a frustrating ending, as we never see Zaabalawi. Hâj Wanas's perverse condition that he won't talk until the narrator is drunk makes the confrontation with the saint indirect: it is not an actual meeting but an ecstatic dream, which comes to the narrator after he has passed out: a fountain in a garden, a hill of jasmine petals, and a conviction of serenity and rightness. He awakens to learn that Zaabalawi was sitting next to him but has just left, that Zaabalawi sprinkled water on him to wake him up, which explains the spray from the fountain in the dream. It would probably require an advanced class to discuss the changes that Ibn al-Fārid's paradoxes undergo in the barroom scene, but I like to imagine an unusually accomplished and articulate class working out the details of the transformation—how the once scandalous imagery of the circle of wine drinkers, reformatted as Sufi congregants reciting the *dhikr*, is changed to become a scene in the Nigma Bar where the holy man approaches the person who has literally passed out. The concluding scene, where the narrator runs out into the street and fails to track down the object of his quest, is oddly reminiscent of the final scene in Fyodr Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, where Liza's departure leaves Dostoevsky's unnamed narrator similarly empty.

I mention Dostoevsky because he and Mahfouz, at least the Mahfouz of "Zaabalawi," have at least one important feature in common. Religion for both writers is more than a theme; it is a shaping force, a prop on which the narrative relies. Such reliance can be an obstacle for contemporary readers but should be acknowledged. One could read "Zaabalawi" as a standard quest to locate a fictional individual, but we can't ignore the power of the assumption, necessary to the story, that there are people of power, intermediaries between the world of human beings and the divine realm. There is no doubt that writers in the twentieth century, as in every other period, are often believers, but it becomes increasingly rare to see in the work of canonical writers commitment to religious vision as the dynamic element that pulls the reader in—rare at least in world literature anthologies. Western equivalents might be in a European setting, Pär Lagerkvist (the 1951 Nobel laureate); in the United States, Walker Percy or Flannery O'Connor, though in Percy and O'Connor the religious vision takes some effort to locate because the device of irony can hide it. Mahfouz is a writer who fits uneasily into anthologies of his historical period for just this reason.

Miramar and Postcolonial Melancholia

Elliott Colla

In class, I always ask students which American author Naguib Mahfouz was thinking about when he wrote his 1967 novel *Miramar*. Usually I am met with a long silence. But when we break it down a bit—noting the novel's radical experimentation in solipsistic subjectivity, its crumbling community, and the centrality of a female character who is talked about but does not have her own interior voice—some students begin hazarding guesses. When we add to that list the theme of loss and the defeats of the past, at least one student soon comes up with the right answer: William Faulkner. I normally do not like fishing like this, but in this case there is a point: not to test the knowledge of students but to emphasize that literature is a conversation, often between languages, cultures, and historical moments, and that if we can reconstruct the contours of that meandering conversation, we often find that many foreign works are not so foreign after all. The payoff is two-fold: it gives us preliminary rubrics for reading works of literature from distant traditions; it estranges us from those works we thought we know and allows us to read them fresh.

Following Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's 1961 translation of *The Sound and the Fury*, there was a small boom of Arabic rewrites, explicitly adapting themes and structures of the American novel to Algeria, Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt.¹ For his part, Mahfouz distanced himself from the American writer, saying, "Faulkner makes things more complicated than they need be" (qtd. in Hafez, "Naguib Mahfouz"). Yet, despite his disavowal, Mahfouz thought highly enough of *The Sound and the Fury* to borrow from it while writing *Miramar*. Like Faulkner's work, *Miramar* tells the story of the dissolution of an intimate community brought together, but also torn apart, by their affection for a girl. Like the American text, Mahfouz's novel is narrated through the fragmented perspectives of disintegrating characters.

It is not surprising that Mahfouz turned to Faulkner, for like other Arab authors, he was at that moment moving away from realist styles and intensely exploring psychology and voice. As an experiment with radical shifts of perspective, monadic interiority, and idiosyncratic verbal expression, *Miramar* stands alone in Mahfouz's body of work. I do not want to overstate the overlap between *Miramar* and Faulkner, for the novel is very much Mahfouz's own, and it emerged directly from the Egyptian context. Nonetheless, *Miramar* draws and expands on many basic elements in Faulkner's work—and it seems useful to pair the two novels in any reading. This usefulness works in both directions, because when Faulkner's works are paired with rewrites from other contexts, we can begin to see how Faulkner was read outside the United States as a writer speaking eloquently about colonial loss and defeat—about colonialism as a set of ongoing aftermaths. Long before critics in American studies began to recognize

how he addressed the tragic consequences of white imperial expansion across North America, Third World writers like Mahfouz saw the postcolonial aspect of his writing and fully appropriated it to speak about their own experiences in the wake of colonialism. Notably, this Faulknerian strand of writing about colonialism was acutely attuned to the melancholic shades of that history. For students of Faulkner in my class, Mahfouz's novel thus becomes an object lesson in seeing the postcolonial arguments in his work, even if such strands are still, even now, not always evident to his most astute American critics.

It has often been said that *The Sound and the Fury* is about the search for lost objects of desire, but this observation does not say all that there is to be said. If loss structures Faulkner's narrative, recovery does not. Rather, his text and its Arabic rewrites, like *Miramar*, register loss first and foremost and then in their peculiar style of inward-focused narration compound and concentrate that sense of loss. The result is not that there is an originary moment of loss incurred by the characters at the beginning of the novel that leads them to search for compensation or redemption. We come to know about their loss only after the fact. We are never outside the realm of "the aftermath."

In this essay, I consider *Miramar* as a unique literary event that, more than any other Egyptian novel of its time, was concerned with Egyptian colonial and postcolonial history as a set of disappointments and losses. *Miramar* recapitulates not just the losses produced by colonization but also those of the nationalist movement and Egypt's revolutions. The resulting narrative is not about gains and redemptions but about compounded defeats and further setbacks. In this regard, the novel needs to be understood as somewhat out of step with the national canon at the time. In early 1967, when Mahfouz wrote *Miramar*, the political field of the Arab world was dominated by nationalist discourses of anti-imperialist struggle, and the Egyptian literary field was very much still under the sway of social realism and the Sartrean doctrine of "engaged literature" (Badawi, "Commitment"). Not long after the 1967 defeat, Arab nationalist discourse would lose its confidence—and social realist dogma would lose its hold over literary sensibilities. Although written before the cataclysmic event of the defeat, *Miramar* belongs spiritually to the period of self-critical writing that followed in the 1970s (Ajami, *Arab Predicament*).

For all these reasons, *Miramar* seems a useful text to revisit the place of melancholia in postcolonial discourse. Loss, mourning, and melancholia have figured surprisingly little in postcolonial theory (notable exceptions are Eng and Kazanjian; Khanna; and Scott). Indeed, although colonization has arguably most often been experienced in terms of loss and defeat—at least for those colonized—the tone of many of the theoretical traditions that reflect on this legacy has often been buoyant and even triumphalist. There have been, no doubt, concrete political and methodological reasons for this disjuncture. On the one hand, the exigency of political solidarity with Third World national liberation—and an interest in discovering resistance and subversion wherever possible—has led many theorists to focus on the possibilities of redemption rather than loss. Nationalist

investments in narratives of progress—the story that colonial decline would be replaced by postindependence renaissance—have usually also further precluded the laborious recounting of loss. On the other hand, in postcolonial theory the methodological strategies of poststructuralism, in particular its routine disbelief of linear narratives or figures of presence-absence, have also meant that many claims about loss were rejected out of hand as mere constructions (Appiah, "Postcolonial"). Those critics who dwell too long on loss invite dismissal as nostalgics. As Nauman Naqvi recently argued, nostalgia has a long, unsavory history as a medical term, a diagnostic weapon designed to pathologize those subjects who refuse to relinquish attachments to places, times, and objects stolen or destroyed by colonial modernity. Together, these habits worked to transform the problem of loss into something else: in the first instance, by renarrating colonial loss as the condition for postcolonial redemption; in the second, by lightening the weight of loss on philosophical grounds.

Mahfouz's novel offers a melancholic meditation on the recent colonial and nationalist history of its context. To illustrate this, I explore the problematic of national allegory in *Miramar*, the significance of its setting in Alexandria, its relation to Egyptian discourse on revolution, and its citations of Qur'anic discourse. I conclude with a few words on the novel's powerful but ambiguous critique of Nasserism to argue that, as *Miramar* shows, to ruminate on loss and defeat is not to become defeatist or passive. Rather, it is to seek another sort of victory, the kind of knowledge that only the defeated can hope to gain.

Miramar as National Allegory

Miramar tells the story of the dispersal of a small group of lodgers from an Alexandria pension sometime around 1962. In colonial times, the Miramar Pension was respectable, but now—a decade after Egypt's 1952 revolution, which brought national independence—it has fallen on hard times and attracted people struggling on their way up or on their way down. The cast of lodgers seems strange at first glance. I have always found this strangeness to be a great point of entry into thinking about the choices Mahfouz made to represent a diversity of generations, class origins, and ideologies in the novel. Five men, three young and two old, have arrived in the city as exiles, dreamers, or schemers. There are three sons of the post-1952 generation: Hosni Allam, an aristocratic playboy who maintains his privilege by parroting the slogans of the revolution; Mansour Bahi, who, after abandoning his former comrades to the secret police, has taken up a new career in state radio; and Sarhan al-Beheiri, whose rise from humble origins owes everything to his joining the ranks of the revolution. There is the ridiculous and reactionary old aristocrat, Tolba Marzouq, whose fortune and career were ruined by the 1952 revolution. There is Amer Wagdi, the patriot of the earlier 1919 revolution whose liberal nationalist ideals, no less than the politics of the old comprador aristocracy, were rejected by the new revolution. The two

women in the novel are Zahra, the peasant girl working as a servant at the pension and whose sultry image adorns the cover of the Maktabat Misr edition of the book, and Mariana, proprietor of the pension. Though Mariana is the novel's only native Alexandrian, she is ethnically Greek, not Egyptian.

The next salient aspect of the novel may be self-evident to Egyptian readers but not to those who are not steeped in modern Arabic letters. *Miramar*, like so many of Mahfouz's other novels, is a national romance. I usually devote some time to explaining what national romance means. As both Doris Sommer and Jean Franco developed this concept with regard to genres of Latin American novels, the national romance tells a certain kind of social allegory that is clear to its readers, in which the libidinal competition between men for the affection of a woman stands in for class, race, and regional competitions in the nation. In Egypt, the novelistic canon is built on a kind of narrative that resembles the Latin American—but with significant differences. Egyptian novels, as in visual and popular political culture at large, often represent the abstract idea of the nation through the recognizable character of a virtuous peasant girl. In *Miramar*, this reading is made all the more obvious by the peasant girl's name, Zahra ("flower"), for it is her virtue and flower that are at stake throughout the novel. Following the work of Beth Baron (*Egypt*) and Lisa Pollard, we might call this modernist tradition, dating from the late nineteenth century, "Egypt as woman."

The national romance of *Miramar*, like that of other novels by Mahfouz, is about the competition of men not so much for a woman as for the body and heart of the nation. Marriage, in this allegory, becomes the emblem for the union between the nation and those modern nationalists who would gently and lovingly govern her. In the earlier colonial context of winning Egypt from the clutches of overbearing European suitors, this allegory was powerful—and remains so even to this day.² But two dynamics render the reading of national romance problematic in this novel. For one thing, while there are assignations and while a man wins the girl's heart and body, there is no uniting of lovers. The romance ends not with marriage but with the tragic death of a would-be suitor. This resolution causes all sorts of problems for reading the allegory of the nation, since it suggests that although Egypt has given her body and soul to a lover, no one wins her.

At the novel's end, Zahra finds her good name has been compromised and prepares to return to the village whose backwardness she tried to flee. Only at this point do the characters realize that it was not the pension that brought them together: their triangulated, "homosocial" (Sedgwick) affection for Zahra made them a "knowable community" (R. Williams 164–81) of men. But that is not the only problem that Mahfouz's novel poses for reading it as a straightforward allegory. There is another national romance of sorts: the two older men, Tolba Marzouq and Amer Wagdi, vie for the heart and body of the old Greek proprietor, Mariana. Her name too suggests allegory (she is associated throughout with a statue of the Virgin Mary, and her name has echoes of the colloquial Arabic for "saint" (ماري; *mar*) just as it resonates with the name of the pension (*Miramar*) and Latinate words for "sea" (*mar*). Her name also points to Marianne, symbol of

French republicanism and, by extension, of the francophone imprint of Egyptian cosmopolitanism. *Miramar* thus suggests that one might have a patriotic love for two separate Egypts: on the one hand, Egypt as a young peasant from the countryside; on the other, Egypt as an old cosmopolitan Greek from maritime Alexandria.

Alexandria

Another aspect of the novel that is not self-evident is its place in a history of modern Alexandrian literature. Even a cursory presentation of this context helps students grapple better with the novel's significance. During the twentieth century, the city of Alexandria produced a disproportionate amount of melancholic writers, by which I mean simply writers more interested in exploring loss than gain or redemption. For Constantine Cavafy, the city's palimpsest history gave the city a permanent presence in absence that invited melancholic rumination, an insistence that an attachment to loss itself was superior (or more beautiful) than the attachment to any actual object of desire. For E. M. Forster, Lawrence Durrell, André Aciman, and others of the late colonial era, Alexandria was associated with the seeping away of empire and dissolution of cosmopolitan privilege. In their writing, Alexandria is productive of the kind of dreaming of the past that Paul Gilroy has called "postcolonial melancholia," that longing for lost empire that persists even in an era of multiculturalism. For Mahfouz as for other Egyptian writers, like Edwar al-Kharrat and Ibrahim 'Abdel Meguid, Alexandria became a site for producing another kind of melancholic writing that was also about the late colonial era. These Egyptian writers tend to be not only emphatic about the loss of cosmopolitan Alexandria but also deeply ambivalent about the supposed gains of national independence.

Mahfouz authored more than thirty-five novels and a dozen collections of short stories—the vast majority of which take place not only in Cairo but actually in the Catrene neighborhood of Gamaliyya. *Miramar* is his only work set in Alexandria. And while Alexandria has a long list of twentieth-century writers who have lived there or called it home—in addition to the names already mentioned—Durrell, Forster, and Cavafy—we could add Stratis Tsirkis, Robert Solé, Jacques Hassoun, and Giuseppe Ungaretti (Halim, "City," "Alexandria Archive," and "Forster"; Hirst and Silk; Ostle; Starr). But the city was neither home nor place of residence for Mahfouz. He was not an Alexandrian writer at all but a writer of Cairo for whom Alexandria was another city. So, I tell students, the choice of Alexandria for his novel raises questions.

Before writing *Miramar*, Mahfouz spent twenty years writing realist novels in the third person. Moreover, his fictional world had been founded on the "chronotope" of the حارة (*hara*; "urban alley") (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*). In Mahfouz's hands, the alleyway of Cairo sets the stage where different class backgrounds, lifestyles, temporalities, ideologies, and aspirations meet one another

and usually clash violently in the process. While in *Miramar* there is no alleyway, the novel does take place in a similar kind of time-space—the pension—which allows for the exploration of clashes between different backgrounds and world views. But in contrast to the knowable, semipublic community of the alleyway, the choice of a pension turns Mahfouz's fictional voice inward. A pension is a semiprivate space inhabited by characters who speak in fragmented interior monologues—and it is unclear whether they know or will ever know one another in a meaningful way. This shift to Alexandria was productive for Mahfouz in that it marks the first time the author experimented with radical shifts in perspective, interior monologue, and the fragmentation of the self. Likewise, in contrast to the permanent, nearly timeless feel of the alleyway in Mahfouz's other novels, the feel of the *Miramar* pension is temporary and fleeting. More, the pension is already passed, already gone.

The novel depicts Alexandria itself as already passed, already gone. The pension is but a shadow of its former self, and the places of the city—the cabarets, cafés, restaurants, and stores—are all in the process of changing hands throughout the novel, as their foreign and minority owners prepare to leave for Europe. Alexandria in Mahfouz's novel draws on the cosmopolitan elements that feature so large in the work of non-Egyptians on the city. The historical context and setting of the novel are significant in this regard, since at the moment depicted in the novel, the early 1960s, Alexandria loomed large in the nationalist imagination as a place badly in need of purification, decolonization, and nationalization.

Egyptian nationalists were not deluded in associating the city with colonial legacies. The French occupation of Egypt in the late eighteenth century began with this city. After the boom of the 1860s, as Egyptian cotton filled the gap left when American production collapsed, Alexandria served as the local base of operations for European financial and trade networks doing business in the expanding Egyptian economy (Reimer). Soon after opening, the Alexandria bourse became a central node in the global economy, and merchants and financiers set up shop and settled in the city. Bust soon followed boom, and European creditors, backed by their governments, descended on Egypt to recoup their debts. In perhaps the first organized restructuring of a modern state, the Egyptian government was forced to hand over its economic and development affairs to experts imposed on them by France and England. It was in Alexandria, not Cairo, where much of the drama played out.

Alexandria soon became a flash point again, this time as the restructuring efforts failed and descended into military conflict. Ethnic Egyptian officers soon revolted against the Turko-Circassian political elites who had granted so many concessions to European creditors. In the process, they created one of the first parliamentary governments in Africa but quickly came into confrontation with British troops dispatched to protect European financial interests. The invasion began with an industrial-scale bombardment. An Englishman who watched the event from sea wrote that the bombardment "commenced on Tuesday July 11, 1882 at seven in the morning. From where [we were] anchored we could see the

whole thing quite clearly through our glasses. To a civilian who had never seen warfare the spectacle was magnificent" (qtd. in Mitchell 128). As one historian of bombing technologies has described it, "The British navy shelled Alexandria from sunrise to sunset. During the night, the city was transformed into a sea of fire" (Lundqvist 18). A French witness to the destruction, Admiral Aube, was less enthusiastic about the event. Concerned about the precedent it was setting, he asked, "Is it now fair game . . . for the navy to bombard the enemies' undefended coastal cities?" (qtd. in Lundqvist 19). Under European leadership, the twentieth century would answer his question in the affirmative.

Soon after, British marines went ashore, armed with Gatling guns. After a week of mopping up resistance, Alexandria was secured. Thus began seventy-four years of direct British rule in Egypt. Through no fault of its own, Alexandria figured large in this colonial legacy. The bombardment of the city had flattened the old Ottoman port, a swath of land miles long and roughly half a mile deep. As we know from our own times, such events bring with them reconstruction opportunities and real estate speculation. Humanitarian and reconstruction contractors came from all over the Mediterranean, from the Dalmatian coast, from Marseilles, from Sicily and Malta. The modern center of Alexandria as we know it today was built on land cleared by this bombardment. What was once crowded harbor frontage eventually became an area of sweeping corniches, broad boulevards, open squares, and the kind of fin de siècle high-rises ubiquitous throughout cities of the eastern Mediterranean.

If Alexandria had had an association with Western finance and trade before the British occupation, this tie was now strengthened, though for reasons more complicated than mere colonial penetration. Historically, Alexandria had been home to large nonethnic Egyptian communities: Greeks most famously, but also Syrians, Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews, Maltese, Sicilians, French and North Africans (Ilbert, Yannakakis, and Hassoun). Under a complicated set of laws inherited from the Ottomans, non-Muslim, non-Egyptian communities enjoyed special legal privileges that were further bolstered by British divide-and-rule policies. As the Egyptian national liberation movement developed, these rights increasingly became a point of contention. Given the large numbers of nonnationals residing permanently in Alexandria, the city became a symbol of colonial extraterritoriality on Egyptian soil. The very multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, and hybridity celebrated by some Alexandrian authors became, in the eyes of nationalists, a set of problems to fix.

National Liberation(s)

Other historical references in the novel can be effectively and economically presented to great effect in the classroom. In official history, Egypt has had no less than three moments of national liberation from modern colonial rule: the 1882 Urabi Revolt, the 1919 revolution, and finally the 1952 revolution. Alexandria

figured importantly in each of these moments. In 1882, it was a center of military conflict and defeat. In 1919, it was the site of a popular uprising against British (and foreign) presence in the city, but it was also key symbolically. When the national figurehead, the Sorbonne-educated lawyer Saad Zaghloul, was expelled from the peace talks in 1918 by the British, he returned to Egypt to press his case there. Soon after, he was expelled from Egypt by the colonial authorities, and it was this expulsion that shifted the movement from legalistic strategies to a more immediate and public form of politics. Zaghloul remained in exile for weeks as the country, now radicalized, took to the streets. Forced to relent, the British allowed him to come back, and his return to Alexandria was celebrated as a national holiday. After Zaghloul's death, Parliament funded a number of massive memorials of his figure—including one in central Alexandria near the spot where Zaghloul returned to Egypt following his exile.

But by the 1950s, Zaghloul's Wafd Party had become so associated with the compromises and corruption of colonial rule that the leaders of the next revolution could eliminate it without much popular complaint (J. Gordon 14). In the wake of the 1952 coup d'état, the legacy of the 1919 revolution was shown to be ambiguous. It did not matter that the earlier revolution had been a mass undertaking whereas the later one involved only a handful of junior officers acting in secret. After 1952, 1919 and its liberal values were shown to be dinosaurs. This issue returns us to the character of Amer Wagdi, the core conscience of Mahfouz's novel, who is associated with this earlier revolution: he is described as a mummy in the novel, and for him the world is inhabited by ghosts of the failed revolution and especially by the specter of long-dead Zaghloul.

Alexandria was not a battleground during the 1952 revolution, but the presence of large numbers of nonnationals in the city became a focus of nationalist attention as the new military junta came into conflict with the lingering fact of British and French empire in nearby Cyprus and Algeria, and as Egypt moved into greater confrontation with Israel, rightfully perceived as a legacy and client of European imperialism. The process of nationalizing the Egyptian economy only intensified this conflict. As Joel Beinin has argued, this conflict was exacerbated by the Lavon Affair, in which Egyptian Jews, conscripted by Israel, set off bombs in Alexandria and Cairo in the hope of destabilizing the Nasser regime. In the wake of this campaign of terror, Egyptian police arrested hundreds of Egyptian Jews on suspicion of having dual loyalties. Jewish-owned properties and businesses were also seized by the state. These events, in turn, helped spark the 1956 Suez War. During this same period, the new state began to insist that Egyptian citizens own controlling shares in large-scale business and industry. By 1961, the year in which land reform and economic nationalization laws came into full effect, most of the cosmopolitan business communities had either fled or been expelled from the country. The city center of Alexandria was especially affected by these departures: businesses and buildings had been sold for a pittance, and large numbers of rural immigrants moved into the vacuum.

Miramar is thus set in an overdetermined time and location. The novel takes place directly in the former colonial center of town and is filled with references to the changing landscape of Alexandria, to Trianon, Panayoti, Genevoise, Metro, Café de la Paix, Windsor, and Miramar. Greek restaurants, French cabarets, Italian stores, and even small pensions are sold as their owners take flight. Streets and buildings empty and peasants rush in from the nearby Delta.

The city in Mahfouz's novel marks the aftermath of three moments of revolution, 1882, 1919, and 1952—now understood to mean three moments of defeat. In reverse order, the departure of Alexandria's cosmopolitan classes by 1961 marks the excesses and failures of a revolution that itself marked the defeat of the revolution of 1919. The level ground of central Alexandria, with its empty broad streets and open squares, suggests that the city was built on the rubble of 1882. In this account, national liberation does not compensate or redeem the losses of colonial rule; it rather compounds and extends them. It is better to mourn than celebrate.

God's Voice

Students reading in translation might feel they can skip over the references to Qur'anic discourse in the novel. I hope I have convinced my students not to, since this is where much of the action is, so to speak. Though the novel is narrated in fragments of interior monologue, the core perspective of the text belongs to Amer Wagdi, whose very name suggests the perseverance of conscience. Throughout his monologues, he recites passages from the Qur'an, remembering his youthful education at al-Azhar and taking comfort from the holy word. Verses from the Sura of the Beneficent recur most often throughout the novel, forming a clear and repeating refrain. They are the closing words of the novel as well, its coda.

1. The Beneficent
2. Hath made known the Qur'an.
3. He hath created man.
4. He hath taught him utterance.
5. The sun and the moon are made punctual.
6. The stars and the trees adore.
7. And the sky He hath uplifted; and He hath set the measure,
8. That ye exceed not the measure,
9. But observe the measure strictly, nor fall short thereof.
10. And the earth hath He appointed for (His) creatures,
11. Wherein are fruit and sheathed palm-trees,
12. Husked grain and scented herb.
13. Which is it, of the favours of your Lord, that ye deny?

(Pickthall, *sura 55*)

No other Arabic novel from this period includes so much Qur'anic language as *Miramar*; and no other novel ends simply with a direct quotation from the holy text. The passage is well known, and its message—acknowledging God's creative power, His gift of revelation, and the necessity of remembering His generosity—embodies core parts of what the classical commentator al-Zarkashi would call "the sciences of the Qur'an" (1: 17). I draw attention to the last line cited here, which is also the last line of Mahfouz's novel: "So which of your Lord's favors will you deny?" In the Sura of the Beneficent, this phrase is repeated no fewer than thirty-one times. Noting the emphatic quality of the interrogative (استفهام التقرير; *istifham al-taqrir*), some authoritative commentators insist on its status as a rhetorical affirmative and point to a saying (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad that supports this interpretation (al-Mahalli and al-Suyuti 532). According to this hadith,

the Prophet was once reciting the Sura of the Beneficent to a group of believers, and when he completed it, he chided, "What is wrong with you? Why are you so silent? Verily the jinn are more responsive than you! Each time I recite this verse to them, *So which of your Lord's favors will you deny?*, they answer, 'Not one of your graces, our Lord, do we deny, for all praise belongs to You.'" (532–33)

The recurring question of this sura carries the demand for an emphatic response from the listener, the expectation that anyone hearing it must voice a resounding "No, we will not deny Your graces."

This reading points to some essential differences between the Qur'anic text of the quotation and the novel in which it is embedded. The novel tradition is based in forms of reading that do not depend on vocalization. In contrast, the Qur'an means little without voice breathing life into its letters. By including this quotation at the end of his novel, Mahfouz is not only asking a well-known question posed by the Holy Word; he is also begging his readers to recite it out loud—in their reading of the novel to move from the silent to the spoken word. Indeed, to remain silent in the face of this question is tantamount to the act of denial denounced in the Qur'anic quotation.

What is the context in which this demand is made on the reader? The Qur'anic passages are filtered through the character of Amer Wagdi, an old liberal nationalist who throughout the novel has been silent witness to a number of violent and absurd events, most of which have to do with a compounding set of losses: the loss of a young woman's innocence; the murder (or suicide) of one of the lodgers; the dispersal of the small temporary community of the pension; the collapse of old and new nationalist dreams of dignity and autonomy; and, above all, the loss of the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria itself, undone by the mechanics of nationalization. There is thus a great degree of irony in the command to remember God's graces, for this is a novel of defeat, corruption, and loss, not one of creation and

beneficence. And yet: each time these defeats intrude on the psychic life of the character, the Qur'an appears as consolation and also command—a command to remember and remain attached to "the favors of creation" despite their disappearance and loss. With this recitation and command to remember aloud, the mostly silent character finds his voice, and the words happen to belong to God. This novel, which so radically experiments with partial perspective and the incomplete quality of interior voice, ends with the omniscient, omnipresent voice of God. If there is consolation in this, it is that of bearing witness and nothing more.

In his study of C. L. R. James, *Conscripts of Modernity*, David Scott makes the case that much critical theory on colonialism has worked to obscure our understanding of colonial history rather than to illuminate it. This blindness occurs not because of a moral failure on the part of critics but because we have not been paying sufficient attention to the generic dynamics of our stories. Calling anti-colonial literature "a classic instance of the modern longing for total revolution" (6), Scott asks:

Does anticolonialism depend upon a certain way of telling the story about the past, present, and future? Does the political point of anticolonialism depend on constructing colonialism as a particular kind of conceptual and ideological object? Does the moral point of anticolonialism depend on a certain narrative form, a certain rhythm, and a certain conception of temporality? (7)

He answers his question:

[A]nticolonial stories about past, present and future have typically been emplotted in a distinctive narrative form . . . with a distinctive story-potential: that of *Romance*. They have tended to be narratives of overcoming, often narratives of vindication, they have tended . . . to tell stories of salvation and redemption. (7–8)

Scott's intervention invites us to rethink the confrontation (or set of tensions) that emerged between commitment ideology of the postindependence era and novels like *Miramar*. Mahfouz's novel is not unique in this regard. Arab rewrites of Faulkner allowed a different kind of emplotment than those of the social realist epics sanctioned by commitment ideology during the 1960s. In *Miramar*, the Faulknerian strand allowed Mahfouz to take a normative genre, the national romance, and turn it into an elegy. At the same time, the tragic quality of this minor tradition did not shy away from political thinking, nor did it amount to a rejection of the anticolonial politics of contemporary national liberation movements.

Mahfouz found probably his clearest political voice in this novel. For the first time he was able to condemn the political tyranny of Nasserism directly. Amer

Wagdi recites verses from the Sura of the History, which retells the well-known confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh:

1. Ta. Sin. Mim.
2. These are revelations of the Scripture that maketh plain.
3. We narrate unto thee (somewhat) of the story of Moses and Pharaoh with truth, for folk who believe.
4. Lo! Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth and made its people castes. A tribe among them he oppressed, killing their sons and sparing their women. Lo! he was of those who work corruption.
5. And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples and to make them the inheritors . . .

(Pickthall, sura 28)

The moment is as remarkable as it is fraught, for the reference to Pharaoh points to the present political time of the novel as much as it does to the distant past. Medieval commentaries routinely point to Pharaoh as a recurring Qur'anic figure—perhaps the central figure—of tyranny and human arrogance over the ages (Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities*). Yet, by the late 1950s, *Pharaoh* had also become a term with special meaning in modern Egypt: it was the epithet that the Muslim Brothers used to refer to President Gamal Abdel Nasser, associating the hubris of his rule with that of arrogant pagan rulers. Again, the connection to Alexandria is suggestive, for it was in that city that a Muslim Brother nearly succeeded in assassinating Nasser in 1954, an event that set in motion a brutal campaign against the organization and its sympathizers.

Most novels of this period, Mahfouz's included, pursue an implicitly secular agenda. Indeed, literature in general, and the novel in particular, played a prominent role in the broad social-cultural project of النهضة (*al-Nahda*; "the awakening" or "renaissance") modernity that sought to replace received religious traditions with new ones. For these reasons, it is rare to find sustained discussion on issues of Muslim morality or theology in Egyptian novels. It is even rarer to find the Qur'an quoted verbatim as often as Mahfouz does in *Miramar*. But the text allows Mahfouz to say that the world is composed of loss and that Nasser is a tyrant, to say things that under the late Nasserist regime no one might say publicly.

Miramar emplots its politics along a set of points that departs sharply from the nationalist consensus. It calls us to think of colonialism's legacy melancholically and to consider modern Egypt as an aftermath. The invitation is troubling, since it suggests that the broad social investments in national liberation and decolonization were ill founded or bound to fail. We are asked to sit in defeat as it bears witness to the lessons that only defeat can offer. In this, it echoes Reinhart Koselleck's analysis of defeats from another time and place:

[The] defining experience [of the defeated] is that everything turned out other than they hoped. They labor under a greater burden of proof for

having to show why events turned out as they did—and not as planned. Therefore they begin to search for middle- or long-term factors to account for and perhaps explain the accident of the unexpected outcome. There is something to the hypothesis that being forced to draw new and difficult lessons from history yields insights of longer validity and thus greater explanatory power. History may in the short term be made by the victors, but historical wisdom is in the long run enriched more by the vanquished. . . . Being defeated appears to be an inexhaustible wellspring of intellectual progress. (qtd. in Schivalbusch⁴)

It may be that defeat leads to greater insight than victory. *Miramar* suggests that the best way, for now, to tell the story of colonialism and national liberation is to begin, and even end, with loss.

NOTES

¹ On Faulkner's reception in France, Latin America, and the Arab world, see Aboul-Ela, *Other South*; Azouqa; Casanova; Hafez, "Divergent Civilizational Experiences"; Jabra; and Yousef.

² Familial and romance allegories of nation are by no means limited to Latin America or Egypt. See also Dominguez; Hunt.