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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### The Ambivalent Reception in the East and the West: Mahfouz's Novel Children of our Ally

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to investigate the duality of East-West perspectives in interpreting literary texts, with Naguib Mahfouz's novel, *Children of Our Alley*, as a case study. The study aims to identify the reasons behind the divergent analyses and interpretations of the text, with a particular focus on the impact of cultural and historical contexts on literary reception. The research adopts a reception studies approach and examines the following two perspectives: The first one is Eastern Reception which analyses the reception of *Children of Our Alley* in the Arab world, exploring the significant reviews and research that shed light on how and why the novel has been perceived in a specific way. This study examines the issues related to identity and religion that arise in the context of the Arab world's reception of the novel. Moreover, it analyzes the impact of cultural and political factors on the interpretation of the text in the Arab world. Moreover, the second one is Western Reception which examines the reception of *Children of Our Alley* in the West, highlighting relevant reviews and research that discuss the differences in interpretation between the East and the West. This study investigates the impact of Western cultural and political contexts on the reception of the novel. Furthermore, it analyzes the differences in interpretation of the novel about issues related to identity and religion. Overall, this article provides a comprehensive analysis of the duality of East-West perspectives in interpreting literary texts. By using *Children of Our Alley* a case study, this research sheds light on how cultural and historical contexts shape literary reception and interpretation, and how this understanding can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of literature across cultures.

## KEYWORDS

Reception, Naguib Mahfouz, Eastern, Western, Religion, Atheism

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## Introduction

Atheism is portrayed as a cohesive philosophy that supports all the other practices that would be aligned with secularist orientations. There are various definitions and interpretations of Atheism. According to Christian theologian and physicist Alister McGrath, "Atheism is the religion of the independent and logical human being who believes that reason can uncover and express the deepest truths of the universe, from the mechanics of the rising sun to the nature and final destiny of humanity" (McGrath, 2004, p.220). According to Stephen, atheism is the absence of belief in the existence of a God or gods (Bullivant et al., 2013). Atheism has always been a very unpopular position, to say the least. Richard Bentley wrote in 1724 in *Eight Sermons* that an atheist could never be a loyal friend. Edwards also proclaimed that an effective relationship is impossible with an atheist and that an atheist can never be a loyal citizen (Edwards, n.d.). The protestant theologian Robert Flint wrote over a century ago that in every country where atheism will become dominant "national decay and disaster" would be the result. In France, it was impossible to publish books defending atheism until the French revolution, so famous atheist philosophers, like Baron d'Holbach and Denis Diderot (Cliteur, 2009, p.5).

Since Mahfouz published *Awlad Haritna* or *Children of our Alley*, there has been much discussion and speculation about the meaning of the novel and the purpose of Mahfouz in writing. It was controversial from the outset, appearing in serial form in Egypt in 1959, but having to wait eight years for it to be published as a book, and then in Lebanon, and not in Egypt. Sasson Somekh, in "The Sad Millennial: An Examination of *Awlad Haritna*," records that "its publication provoked sharp reactions in certain Muslim Orthodox circles" (Somekh, 1971, p.49). The main characters indeed bear obvious, even if superficial, similarities to historical religious figures, which could easily give the impression that it is mainly a religious parable. Atheism is one of the central elements of the novel.

When the Egyptian writer Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, the Swedish Academy highlighted his unique book, *Children of Our Alley* (*Awlad Haritna*), describing it as "an allegory of the historical fate of mankind under the great monotheistic founders of religion." the work delineates the spiritual and social history of man from Genesis to the present day. The characters are God and Satan, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Moses, Christ, and Muhammad. The Prophets are depicted in thin disguise as social reformers trying to save their nations from tyranny and injustice. Then Mahfouz confidently allegorizes in the modern world the "death of God" The hands of a new prophet, a magician embodying science (El-Gabalawy, 1988).

This research examines the ambivalent reception of Mahfouz's controversial novel, *Children of our Alley*. Despite being an Eastern-born and raised author, the book is received very differently in the East compared to the West. The study investigates the varying reactions of two distinct cultures: In the East, criticism of religion is not tolerated, and certain codes of conduct must be followed. Challenging religious beliefs can result in social disgrace and accusations of blasphemy since the Quran is a crucial guideline for Muslims in the East. Conversely, the West strongly advocates for freedom of speech, where theoretically, any form of expression is allowed, even if it includes religious critique or disparagement of prophets (MIMIO Ghorab, 2013, p.21).

An instance of this can be seen in the actions of Terry Jones, a pastor from the United States who claimed to be against Islam. Jones made threats to burn copies of the Quran, but when Eastern countries demanded that he be prosecuted, the US government refused and instead held a symbolic trial of the Quran, burning a copy of it on March 21, 2011. Conversely, when Mahfouz, an Eastern author, writes in a satirical manner about religions and prophets (as seen in *Children of our Alley*), the West does not take offense and views it as a form of literary expression and freedom of speech.

#### *Naguib Mahfouz*

Naguib Mahfouz, an Egyptian writer was born in 1911 at Gamaliya, in the Muslim lower middle class in Cairo. He received the Nobel Laureate in 1988 for his writing of *The Trilogy*. He had been a renowned figure within Egypt since the 1950s, and after his award, the English and French translations of his works were read all over the world. Mahfouz was the first Egyptian Muslim writer to be honoured for his work by the West. Mehnaz sees, "Muslim writers have been writing from being living in two worlds, which has allowed for narratives to change and for the role of Islam and literature to be questioned"(Afridi, 2008).

Mahfouz's literary works have naturally attracted numerous studies and critiques. These studies have covered a great many aspects of Mahfouz's creative writing, but, perhaps because of the secular, modern education Mahfouz received (both at school and in the Department of Philosophy at Cairo University), and his lifestyle, they have concentrated on the socialist, secularist, materialist and structural aspects of his work. Perhaps because of this, one important aspect of his writing has largely escaped attention: his artistic use of the language of the Qur'an.

#### *Statement of the problem*

The novel *Children of Our Alley* by Mahfouz has received mixed reactions from readers in the East and the West. While some readers have appreciated its literary merit and portrayal of religious and philosophical themes, others have criticized it for its controversial content and perceived blasphemy. This article aims to explore the ambivalent reception of *Children of Our Alley* in the East and the West and to analyze the factors that have contributed to these differing reactions. By examining the cultural, religious, and political contexts in which the novel was received, this article seeks to shed light on the complex relationship between literature, society, and ideology."

#### *Most Controversial Novel*

Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Children of Our Alley* caused controversy in the Middle East, despite quickly becoming one of his most famous works following a seven-year hiatus after the 1952 revolution. Originally serialized by the Egyptian daily newspaper *Al-Ahram* in 1959, the novel was later banned after *Al-Azhar* requested President Nasser to enforce a ban due to charges of heresy, given its allegorical representation of God and the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Although Lebanon was the only country in the region to print the novel, it quickly sold out when a few thousand copies were brought to Egypt in 1967. However, after the imams of *Al-Azhar* protested, the government swiftly banned the book, causing outrage among Eastern readers, including scholars and preachers, the book was banned in Egypt despite its initial popularity (Gordon, 1991, p. 88).

Mahfouz asserts the fact that his decision to not publish the novel in Egypt was not based upon any censor's orders, but out of the wish not to alienate Al-Azhar. Irrespective of censorship, I agreed and will honour it (Salamawy, M 2006).

### *Reception Theory*

Reception theory, often known as reader-response theory, is a literary theory that investigates how readers interpret and make sense of texts. Instead of focusing entirely on the author and the text itself, it emphasises the role of the reader in constructing meaning from a text. According to reception theory, a reader's understanding of a text is influenced by their own experiences, beliefs, and cultural background. Readers actively engage with a text and interpret and make sense of it based on their knowledge and understanding. This implies that, depending on their views, different readers may interpret the same text in various ways. In the interpretation of a text, reception theory also highlights the significance of context (Reception Theory - Media Studies - Revision World 2023). The historical, social, and cultural context in which a text was written might affect how modern readers read and interpret it. A reader's interpretation of a text can also be influenced by the context in which they encounter it. Reception theory has been used in a wide spectrum of literary materials, from classic literature to popular culture. It has been used to investigate how readers interpret and respond to various genres, styles, and forms of literature. It has also been used to examine how literature reflects and influences cultural and societal values.

The theory of reception, often known as reception theory, is a literary theory positing that a text is incomplete until it has been read and evaluated by its audience. In other words, the meaning of a text is not defined or predetermined by the author but rather is shaped by the reader's comprehension, experiences, and social environment. By applying this theory to *Children of Our Alley* by Naguib Mahfouz, one can understand how the novel's reception has been affected by both its Eastern and Western readers. In 1988, Egyptian author Mahfouz was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was renowned for his realistic depictions of Egyptian life and culture, and his work frequently dealt with issues of social and political upheaval in Egypt. In *Children of Our Alley*, Mahfouz delivers a fictitious recounting of the Exodus from the perspective of Islam. The novel was initially released in Arabic in 1959, and it was received with controversy and outrage from certain Muslim religious authorities who viewed it as heretical. In the West, the novel was originally well-received and hailed for its unique use of modernist techniques and exploration of the relationship between religion and society. Nonetheless, some Western readers and critics also took fault with the novel's depiction of Islam and its use of religious themes. Ultimately, *Children of Our Alley* equivocal reception might be interpreted as a reflection of the novel's complexity and multidimensional character. Mahfouz's use of religious themes and examination of the relationship between religion and society attract many interpretations, and the text's reception has been shaped by the social and cultural backgrounds of both its Eastern and Western readers.

### *The Eastern Reception of Children of the Alley*

During the late 1950s, external factors such as World War I and II, the 1919 and 1952 revolutions, and the attempted assassination of Gamal Abdel-Nasser in October 1954 may have influenced Egypt's Muslim ideology. The publication of *Children of Our Alley* coincided with this time, and was ultimately banned in many Middle Eastern countries. In response to the assassination attempt, Nasser jailed leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and tried to place Egypt on a secular path, as advocated by the philosophies of Arab Nationalism and Arab Socialism. This process of increasing secularization had already been set in motion during Muhammed Ali's reign in the nineteenth century and continued after the July 1952 free-officers revolt, with Egyptian nationalism remaining on a secular path in the years following the revolution (Esposito & Tamimi, 2000, p. 4).

Some critics might suggest that the reader should consider this book as a piece of literature and literary work. Nevertheless, as Mahfouz depicts the prophets and their adherents – directly or indirectly – as أولاد كلب “bastards, cowards” and “God damn them all,” I think it is very difficult for the Eastern receiver and the Muslim mindset to acknowledge any justification in defence of the book (MIMIO Ghorab, 2013).

While some of them have affected the Eastern personality and the dogmatic values of Islam, which are part of the "Aqiida". Muslim countries have been in the transitional process of working toward political, cultural, and social identity, which is part of any part of Islamic dogma, Including globalization, invasion of Western culture or even occupation It is very important, as Paddy argues, that "the most important elements in the region in the Middle East" are religion and religious conscience" (Hodgson, 1977, p.166).

Mahfouz aimed to bring about a reformation within Egyptian culture, blending its Islamic heritage with secularist socialism. He appeared to show a preference for secularist socialism over Islamist revivalism, as evident from his portrayal of religious figures. He depicted them as common men, indulging in vices such as drugs, shisha smoking, and sexual desires. In chapter 66, Mahfouz has Qasim say, "You are a boy crazy about women, you lurk in the dark for the desert women" (Mahfouz, 1996, p. 261).

Mahfouz had a liberal mindset and attempted to introduce a secular reform to Egyptian culture and society, aligning with the dominant attitude of the 1950s. However, it is not possible to completely secularize the identity of Egypt as a society. The country maintains a balance between secularism and religion. Mahfouz portrays the prophets and their followers in *Children of Our Alley* in a way that is challenging for Eastern Muslim readers to accept, which is particularly controversial. The Eastern Muslim reader may find it difficult to understand Mahfouz's intentions, as he presents religious figures as flawed and immoral, with the character of Arafa cursing them and their followers, he refers to them as "bastards and cowards" in chapter 94, page 457:

Hanash laughed, "It's enough that you're the only person in the alley that everyone does business with – from Gabal, Rifaa and Qassem."

"God damn them all ... Each of them [Al Gabal, Al Rifaa, Al Qassem] is so stupidly, so blindly proud of its man—all proud of men of whom nothing is left but their names. And they never make any attempt to go one step beyond that false pride! Bastards, Cowards" (p. 307).

Nevertheless, the Egyptian people's Islamic identity is deeply founded and rooted, and under no conditions can ever be changed. This is profoundly rooted in Egyptian history: Egyptians love religion and make it a part of their religion. This holds a position that cannot be altered in their hearts; it's just their way of life.

Mahfouz employs the Socratic Approach in *Children of Our Alley* to raise questions about faith, spirituality, and the divine will. This methodology uses a series of inquiries to uncover inconsistencies, inadequacies, and ambivalences in an individual's beliefs. In the novel, Mahfouz challenges the religious system of Egypt, revealing how the citizens of the alley hold misconceptions about Gabalawi's promises of shared resources and land. While the inhabitants hope for a better future, extortionists and gangsters gradually take control of the estate's wealth over time.

#### **Mahfouz Encourages Atheism**

During an interview with Al Jazeera Mubasher Misr channel on December 2, 2011, Abdel-Monem El-Shahat, the official representative of the Salafist party, claimed that Mahfouz's novels promoted promiscuity, adultery, and atheism. He expressed his disappointment that Egypt was being portrayed in such a negative light through Mahfouz's literature.

"Mahfouz's novels," he said, "are mainly set in Areas containing brothels and drugs.

"He went on to characterize Mahfouz's *Children of Our Alley* as a novel that contains" symbols supporting atheism.

A committee from Al-Azhar, led by the prominent Islamist intellectual Muhammad al-Ghazali, who was the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar in 1959 when *Children of Our Alley* was published, banned the book. Al-Ghazali was considered a mainstream voice among the New Islamists and had previously stated that various forms of art, including fiction, were acceptable within Islam. However, both he and the Al-Azhar Committee firmly condemned the book and refused to allow it to be printed in Egypt. Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, who is currently serving a life sentence in the United States for his suspected involvement in the first attack on the World Trade Center, also condemned the book for ridiculing the Quran and issued a Fatwa declaring Mahfouz an apostate. The critic suggests that had Mahfouz been imprisoned for his book, it might have prevented Salman Rushdie from publishing *Satanic Verses*.

#### **Mahfouz Personifies God**

Several scholars from the East believe that in *Children of the Alley*, Mahfouz personified God. Abdel-Fatah Barakah, a former Secretary-General of the Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar, claimed that Mahfouz portrayed Allah, prophets, and holy figures in an improper and inappropriate manner, and that he personified God through the character of Gabalawi, who holds himself hidden away in the mansion at the top of the alley.

Mustafa Al-Shaka, a graduate of the Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar and former dean of the Faculty of Arts of Ain-Shams, also expressed his disapproval of the novel, stating that it personifies science and technology as humanity's new gods and targets all religions, especially Islam, through the use of metaphors to represent God and the prophets. He wrote in the daily Elghad on 8 October 1983 that Al-Azhar would never approve the publication of *Children of El-Gabalawi*.

## Religion supplanted by the science

According to Rasheed El-Enany, who has a particular interest in Naguib Mahfouz's literature, the ideas presented in *Children of Our Alley* are against religion. El-Enany says regarding *Children of El-Gabalawi*:

It is a rare allegory of human experience from Creation to the present day. In it, the masters of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are stripped of their holiness and portrayed, in thin camouflage, as nothing more than social reformers who have worked to the best of their abilities to save their subjects from tyranny and oppression. Another character in the allegory stands for science, which is seen to have replaced faith and whose hands are ultimately influenced by the death of God (El-Enany, 1993).

### *The Western Reception of (Children of El-Gabalawi)*

It introduces Peter Theroux, the *Children of El-Gabalawi* translator provides insights into the text and also examines possible political interpretations of why Western audiences tend to accept the text as they do. From an article titled "Peter Theroux":

Peter Christopher Sebastian Theroux (born 1956) is an American writer and translator. He studied English literature at Harvard University and spent a year at the American University in Cairo. He worked, as a journalist in Saudi Arabia and was a stringer for the Wall Street Journal. Theroux was born in Boston, Massachusetts, the son of Catholic parents; his mother, Anne (née Dittami), was Italian American, and his father, Albert Eugene Theroux, was French-Canadian (2012, para. 1).

Peter Theroux is a skilled translator, writer, and thinker who worked on the translation of *Children of Our Alley* and made it comprehensible to Western readers. He not only translated the text, but also provided his own interpretation to make it meaningful for Western audiences. Theroux demonstrated his ability to do so by acquiring a deep understanding of the cultural and social contexts of both languages. His translation reads as if it were originally written in English. (MIMIO Ghorab, 2013).

### *Secular Identity of the West*

Mahfouz's secular beliefs that are contrary to the Eastern mindset and are more aligned with Western values. The secular culture of the West created many problems for the Muslim minorities living there such as the minaret and hijab issues in France, the burqa conflict in Switzerland, and the publication of caricatures of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings Be upon Him) in Denmark. The West views the publication of caricatures as a freedom of speech, while the East is often seen as lacking democracy and ignoring freedom of expression. However, when Mahfouz writes about religious figures and prophets in his novels, the Western secular culture recognizes and appreciates it.

Mahfouz's novel is well received by the Western Reader, though, Mahfouz presents Eastern cultural elements in such a way that they seem to originate from Western viewpoints. He wrote this novel with a Western eye, for example, depictions of alcohol consumption, sexual promiscuity, and drug use, despite the fact that these are strictly prohibited in Islam and are therefore incompatible with Eastern cultural norms. However, such literary techniques are commonplace in Western culture and are therefore attractive to Western readers. Mahfouz utilizes Western novelistic methods and patterns in *Children of the Alley*, which aligns with Western literary culture. This point is in line with Selden as he explains:

Mahfouz recognizes the misconception that the West has about Egypt and the Arab world as a whole. He understands that Arabs are often viewed as "other" and that this distorted perception is a result of British colonialism, which he himself experienced (Selden et al., 1993).

Altoma says, in the same context:

Mahfouz, without a doubt, should be credited with his primary role in introducing a novel in Arabic as a modern genre within a short period. Mahfouz has succeeded in emulating many Western literary methods, styles, and patterns and in producing, in the process, a distinctly Arabic narrative form. In the mid-1950s, he had been a literary phenomenon (Altoma, 2005, p.21).

In a press release on October 13, 1988, the Swedish Academy praised Naguib Mahfouz and placed a strong emphasis on his novel, *Children of El-Gabalawi*. This decision marked the first time the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to an Egyptian and Mahfouz became the first literary Nobel Prize winner. Mahfouz's contribution to the development of the novel as a genre and the literary language in cultural circles was also highlighted (1988, para. 1-3). The Academy commended *Children of Our Alley* and recognized its exploration of the everlasting quest for moral principles of humanity, making it a novel that promotes values.

Lee Smith, a visiting professor at the Washington, D.C., Hudson Institute, pays homage to Mahfouz's *Children of Our Alley* and supports its political interpretation. He highlights: Fate left all that material in Mahfouz's path, but it was the politics that men made with military dictatorships and yet more tyranny that cursed his beloved Egypt. *Children of Our Alley* is the best novel of Mahfouz, better than the Qur'an and the Bible (MIMIO Ghorab, 2013).

### **Literature Review**

To discuss these striking differences and Mahfouz's intentions in deliberately writing in this style is the purpose of this paper. Gretchen asserts In *Children of Our Alley* Mahfouz is writing meta-fiction - fiction which dramatizes the writing of fiction, or, in this case, fiction which dramatizes the non-writing of fiction. Indications that Arab authors are concerning themselves with the "word on the page" or the form of fiction as the content of fiction rather than with a more explicit message have appeared in recent articles. The implication in Ismail's article is that the "printed or written word" itself is "destiny-determining" since it "changes the destinies of contemporary peoples to the extent that it relates to the daring aspiration for change by those people, or reveals to them part of the need for drastic change" (Ronnow, 2016).

Sadiq al-Mahdi, a well-known Sudanese political and religious figure, accused Mahfouz of blasphemy when, on 10 September 2006, he wrote in Asharq Al-Awsat, a Saudi-owned independent pan-Arab newspaper, "I read Awlad Haretna and had no patience to read, but in his writer's name I found a bad plot full of absurdities of various kinds."

Especially writing about Mahfouz, Menahem Milson indicates that Mahfouz plays with literary form rather than dramatizing solutions to the problems of Egypt when he writes the Mahfouz. The view is not inherently a political one. It is convenient for Mahfouz to handle serious questions by parabolae and not in abstract form because he does not have to present complete solutions to problems in this way, and he can express his ambivalence through ambivalent characters. Unresolved conflicts and ambivalent attitudes are common in literature, as in reality (Ronnow, 2016).

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Apart from reading as a piece of literature, *Children of Our Alley* forces itself to be read as a religious and allegorical story that is heavily forced on the Arabic edition reader. El-Enany points out:

That *Children of Our Alley* is a panoramic view of the history of man and religion from the beginning of time to the present day. God, Satan, Adam, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are all there, but without the halo of religious myth: *Children of Our Alley* is an attempt at demythologizing humanity's religious quest (El-Enany, 1993, p.142).

Mahfouz wrote the novel as an anti-Quranic analogy, which reflects the lives and deeds of holy figures and stories recounted in the Quran. The characters in the novel, such as Adham, Gebel, Rifa'a, Qassim, and Arafa, represent different episodes in the story and are re-enactments of holy stories. The novel is divided into five chapters, four of which reflect the tales of Adham, Gebel, Rifa'a, and Qassim, and the last episode depicting Arafa's contribution to technology and contemporary life. Ultimately, the terms used by Mahfouz and the actual religious figures are in order following approximations:

- Adham refers to Adam.
- Qasim refers to the Prophet Muhammad, one of the prophets Muhammad's nickname is Abul-Qasim.
- Umaima is Adham's wife and mother of Qadri and Humam, she refers to Eve, the literal meaning of Umaima is 'small mother.'
- Qadri and Humam refer to Cain and Abel.
- Arafa, who represents science.

*Children of Our Alley* tells Gabalawi's story, who owns the alley, and all the land around it. He builds a palace, raises his family, has several sons, and prefers Adham over the others — this parallels Adam's Quranic narrative and his coming down to Earth with his wife (Eve). Translated by A. Yusuf Ali as

We said: "O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will but approach not this tree or you run into harm and transgression" Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 35.

Gabalawi selected Adham, instead of his eldest son Idris, to manage the family property. Although all of Gabalawi's sons agreed with his decision, Idris became angry and refused to accept it. Idris believed it was his right to oversee the estate and not Adham, leading Gabalawi to drive him out of the palace. Adham took on the responsibility of managing the property, including

collecting rent from tenants and submitting accounts to his father. He also fell in love with a slave woman named Umaima and eventually married her. Despite Adham's success, he still felt sorry for his brother Idris.

Idris pays a visit to Adham and asks him to look at the important book that is kept in the silver box in Gabalawi's room. This book contains Gabalawi's secrets, the fate of the alley dwellers, the path to salvation, the punishment of sinners, the happiness of believers, and knowledge of the future. Although Adham initially refuses Idris' request, he eventually succumbs to the temptation and, with the encouragement of his wife Umaima, breaks into Gabalawi's inner sanctuary to read the book. Gabalawi catches Adham in the act, punishes him severely, and banishes him from the mansion. Adham builds a cottage outside the palace and leads a life of sorrow and hardship, raising his twin sons Qaidra and Humam in the alley, whose story alludes an allegory story to the Cain and Abel novel. However, one day Gabalawi appears before Adham and shows him mercy, echoing a passage from the Quran:

*Translated by A. Yusuf Ali*

*Then learnt Adam from his Lord's words of inspiration and his Lord turned toward him; for He is Oft-Returning Most Merciful (Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 37).*

37) ثم تعلم آدم من ربه كلام الوحي والتفت إليه ربه. لأنه كثير الرحمن الرحيم (البقرة الآية)

*As a token of tolerance, Gabalawi tells Adham that he has forgiven him and that سيكون*

*بنی آدم (children of Adam - mankind) بني آدم forever, a reference to the famous phrase بني آدم، الوقف لذريتك*

*Translated by A. Yusuf Ali*

We said: "Get you down all from here; and if as is sure there comes to you guidance from me" whosoever follows my guidance on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve (Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 38).

Moreover, social oppression resurfaces in the Hara, which symbolizes Earth in the allegorical sense. El-Enany argues that Mahfouz portrays social injustice as the trigger for conflict, and this idea is reflected in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These religions are depicted as movements aimed at overthrowing oppressive systems and establishing a fair society on Earth. However, their successes were only short-lived as people eventually reverted to their old wicked ways. (El-Enany, 1993, p.142).

In an allegorical manner, Mahfouz points out that religions have neglected the importance of science and technology. This is demonstrated when the character Arafa is subjected to mistreatment, ridicule, and insult in the Hara, highlighting the lack of appreciation for his technological advancements. (Mahfouz, 1996, ch 93, p. 450) (Ch. 93, p. 450). A thousand misfortunes! A thousand misfortunes! Who are you in our alley to live with? (p. 365)

Arafa eventually finds a place to stay in a cellar with only one window, which represents the idea that science is detached from human emotions. Throughout the novel, the concept of responsibility is emphasized, as Arafa's objective is to eliminate the notion of Gabalawi or God, suggesting that science can supersede religion. In chapter 103, page 408, Arafa declares that his actions should speak louder than his words, and that it is the duty of a good son to take over and become the successor. According to El-Enany (1993), Mahfouz takes this idea even further by linking the death of Gabalawi to the decline of the idea of God in the modern world. El-Enany believes that Mahfouz's ultimate goal is to establish science as the legitimate successor to religion, as demonstrated by Arafa's vision of the message left by Gabalawi, which is never explicitly revealed in the text. (chapter 111, p. 437:

El-Enany highlights that Arafa, the magician, is viewed as a figure similar to the prophets in terms of receiving divine revelations. Mahfouz elevates science to a spiritual level, and Arafa is depicted as possessing the power of divinity through his scientific pursuits. In the novel, Gabalawi instructs someone to go to Arafa and tell him that his ancestor passed away content with him, signifying that Arafa has inherited a sacred duty to pursue knowledge and use it for the betterment of humanity (1993, p.143).

## Conclusion

The article highlights how cultural, religious, and political differences have shaped the reception of Mahfouz's novel. The East, with its strong adherence to religious beliefs, tends to view criticism of religion as blasphemy and may respond with social scorn and even violence. The West, on the other hand, values freedom of expression and embraces literary works that challenge established beliefs, including religious ones. However, the article also acknowledges that these are generalizations and that there are variations and nuances in how different societies and individuals respond to the novel. One of the key findings of the article

is that the novel's allegorical portrayal of religious figures and its depiction of atheism have been particularly controversial. While some readers have seen the novel as a thought-provoking critique of religious dogma and a celebration of secularism, others have viewed it as an attack on their religious beliefs and a threat to the social order. The article argues that these differing interpretations reflect not only individual perspectives but also larger societal and ideological debates about the role of religion in public life. The article also highlights the role of translation and interpretation in shaping the reception of the novel. The different translations of the title, for example, reflect different cultural and linguistic connotations, with some emphasizing the novel's allegorical nature and others its social and political themes. Similarly, the different interpretations of the novel by Western and Eastern scholars reflect different theoretical frameworks and intellectual traditions. In conclusion, the article demonstrates how literature can serve as a lens through which to understand the complex interactions between society, culture, and ideology. By analyzing the ambivalent reception of *Children of Our Alley* in the East and the West, the article shows how the novel has been both a reflection and a catalyst of wider debates about religion, secularism, and freedom of expression. While the novel's controversial content may continue to divide readers, its literary significance and historical importance cannot be denied. As such, the article contributes to a deeper appreciation of the complexities and diversity of literary reception in different cultural contexts.

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