

## Western-Made Source of Naguib Mahfouz's Pharaonic Novels

**Mohamed Kamel Abdel-Daem**

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### Abstract

This paper argues that the efforts and discoveries in Egyptology made by European archaeologists and historians are the main references that helped the modern Egyptian people and writers learn about the history of ancient Egypt. Naguib Mahfouz's three novels about ancient Egypt – written in the late 1930s when Egypt was under the British occupation and the Turkish rule – unconsciously conveyed postcolonial ideas to the colonized people, i.e, surrender to Fate (the colonizer's and dictator's reality) (*Khufu's Wisdom*), irrelevance of democratic rule, lack of centralized regime leads to conflict between two domineering authorities – religious and military (*Rhadopis of Nubia*), and political relief from contemporary oppression springing from nostalgic pride for forcing the invaders out (*Thebes at War*). The three novels foster enlightenment principles of Egyptian patriotism (rather than Middle-Ages Arab) nationalism, and this helped implement the European colonizer's strategy: 'diaírei kai basíleue'.

### Key words

ancient Egypt, enlightenment, dictator rule, colonialism, patriotism, individualism, Middle-Ages Arab nationalism.

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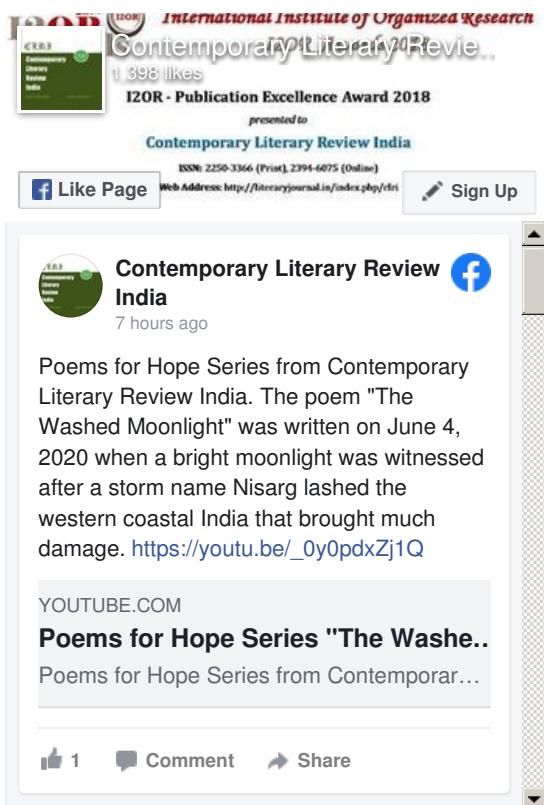



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Naguib Mahfouz. Egyptian novelist and first Arab Nobel laureate who sprang to world attention with his depictions of life in Cairo's old city. Denys Johnson-Davies. His first attempts were three novels with Pharaonic backgrounds, the first being *The Curse of Ra* (1939). Next came a period of social realism as seen in novels like *Midaq Alley* (1947), an entertainingly vivid depiction of the alleyways of his youth and the extraordinary

characters that inhabit them: the hashish-smoking cafe-owner Kirsha, and Zaita, the "fashioner of deformities", who performs maiming operations on those wishing to take up a life of begging. Mahfouz was widely read in western fiction and particularly admired Flaubert, Stendhal, and Proust, and Melville's *Moby Dick*. Naguib Mahfouz (mahkh-FEWS) is known primarily for his long fiction, although he wrote many short stories and some one-act plays, five of which he published with collections of his short stories in *Taḥta al-miḡalla* (1969). His first publication was a translation into Arabic from English, *Miṣr al-Qadmah* (1931), of James Baikie's *Ancient Egypt* (1912). Mahfouz also published numerous pieces of popular journalism and his memoirs, including *Asda' al-sirah al-dhatiyah* in 1995 (*Echoes of an Autobiography*, 1997). Achievements. In his Nobel speech, he described himself as the son of two civilizations: Pharaonic and Islamic. He expressed his passion to transcend traditional barriers for a universal vision informed by a heightened sense of responsibility toward humanity.