

surrender of the Arabs to the imperialist-Zionist assault. The Arabs are no more known as those who fight the battle of Port-Said, nationalize the Suez canal, resist Western military pacts, reject 'Israel' and uphold the banner of socialism. They have become those who were defeated, who have gotten used to enjoying defeat, to entreat for the blessings and alms of the West, to preach moderation, to fully accept dependency and the conditions of the IMF, to fetter any Arab militant and denounce any Palestinian armed action, to glorify the wisdom of the West, to consecrate capitalist commodities and to make long speeches about peace... In this context, the Nobel Prize has found its way to Naguib Mahfouz. The necessary conditions which enabled part of the West to bless part of the Arab literature have materialized. This part has been found in a defeated writer with a great stature and a great talent, i.e., Naguib Mahfouz.

The Nobel Prize awarded to Naguib Mahfouz has a special political meaning. While Egypt, the largest Arab country, has recognized 'Israel' and given up the dreams of independence and Arab unity, the greatest Arab writer has chosen to sail in the waters of the capitulating regime. In this sense, we are faced with a sad paradox: Egypt, which should be the supporter of the oppressed Arab dreaming of a different future, becomes an unofficial member of NATO; Mahfouz, who should be the staunchest defender of all the causes of Egypt, the Arabs and culture, sheds all his turbans and chooses what is comfortable for him as an individual; he chooses the petit ego and gives up the common cause.

Some may ask why we try to connect Mahfouz, the consistent writer, with the Arab cause? Hasn't he limited himself, through his consistency, within Egypt, the history of Egypt and the streets of Cairo, with no reference whatsoever to the Arab cause? Such an objection is valid; Naguib Mahfouz is not necessarily to be blamed. Yet the author of *A Beginning and an End* has not appeared as a mere Egyptian character, but taken a role unworthy of a great writer, choosing to keep silent while the regime was selling «immortal Egypt» to the World Bank, while the «land of the pharaohs» with all its magnificent glories was changing hands at the cheapest prices. The great literary figure remained satisfied with his pen, writing pad and desk, forgetting his big national and social role which happens to go beyond writing novels.

A sad paradox indeed - such a miserable fate for Egypt and its great writer: A distinguished writer seeking refuge in mean and petty positions; a writer wasting his words for personal safety although he has never been threatened; a novelist whose name has become a shield; a pen which finds protection and support in a great name and fame. Mahfouz has failed to combine his ego as an individual with his person as a great writer. He gave up the latter to maintain an ego occupied with small calculations.

After Abdul Nasser, Naguib Mahfouz wrote *Al Karnak*, a novel in which he denounced prisons and torture cells. During Sadat's rule, he wrote a novel about the judgment of history, *Amam Al Arsh* (*Before the Throne*), equating Nasser and Sadat, even showing the latter to be more rational and positive than the former. After Sadat was killed, Mahfouz wrote *The*

*Day the Leader was killed*, where the «leader» was Sadat who appeared even more rational and convincing than before. In these writings, we failed to see the author of *Zuqaq Al Midaq* (*Midaq Alley*), *Al Sukkeriyyeh*, *Bain Al Qasrain* (*Between Two Palaces*), *Qasr Al Shouq* (*The Palace of Longing*), *Al Qahire Al Jadid* (*New Cairo*), *Tharthara Fog Al Nil* (*Chatter over the Nile*), etc. We only saw an ordinary journalist seeking mediocre material in both form and content. The great artist disappeared to be replaced by an ordinary writer who opted for the easiest way and produced easy books that history would forget, or that, at best, would be marginal in comparison with the great early texts, or stand as a literary testimony to a writer's descent from the peaks of clarity to the foggy steppes of ambiguity.

Naguib Mahfouz is a prominent writer who belongs to the past, a novelist who was finished when his first bourgeois dream vanished. This bourgeois dream ended with the June war, with a novel which preceded and predicted it, *Tharthara Fog Al Nil* (*Chatter over the Nile*). The dream collapsed gradually and pulled the man with it. When he reached the Sadat phase, the man had changed; nothing remained except the ordinary character who was looking only for protection, safety and petit aims. He lived through the Sadat phase with a petty pen. Petty pens never frighten. Yet the tragedy remains; his, ours or the Arabs reader's tragedy is the fact that he had been holding a great pen which founded the Arab novel and wrote the best examples of the genre. When the Nobel Prize goes to him after he had become a petit writer, we do not feel happy but get confused, because we feel that the prize has not come to the great novelist whom we revere and love, but to his shadow in which we can see neither the face of «immortal Egypt» nor that of the founder of the Arab novel.

Before Nasser's revolution, Naguib Mahfouz could observe the rhythm of history; he could see history as an ascending process of evolution through struggle; he could write his great trilogy. With the revolution, the man is at first happy, then confused; he withdraws from the big flow of history to the alienation of the individual and writes *Al Lis wa Kilab* (*The Thief and the Dogs*), *Al Tariq* (*The Path*), *Al Shahhath* (*The Beggar*), *Al Samman wa Kharif* (*The Grocer and Autumn*). After the defeat, he gets lost in the formulae of abstract time and writes *Al Harafish* (*The Outcasts*), *Rihlat Ibn Fattouma* (*The Journeys of Ibn Fattouma*), *Shey'y an Alf Leyla wa Leyla* (*Something about the One Thousand and One Nights*). When Sadat settles into power and everything is gone, he writes only simple and ordinary things as if the chain of defeats spared the ego after defeating the artist who lost his project and failed in the realm of literature.

Has the prize come to the writer of dreaming after he has dissipated his very dream, or to a defeated novelist? Has it come to honor a pen before its voluntary defeat? Emotion tears within everyone of us. We do not know what to say to an author we are proud of. We are extremely confused. Is the Nobel Prize honoring Naguib Mahfouz or eulogizing him though he is still alive; is it glorifying him or blessing his defeat?