

ary products are increasingly widely read outside the boundaries of the countries or languages in which they are written.

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See Also: Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal; Educational Reform; Languages; Mahfouz, Naguib; Modernity; Nationalism; School; Women.

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Mahfouz, Naguib

Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006) was an Egyptian writer who did much to establish the novel as the dominant literary genre in Arabic and to bring realism into the mainstream of Arabic prose fiction. After receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, he became the world's best-known and most translated Arab novelist. His many literary works reflect a deep commitment to liberalism, democracy, socialism, and modern science, as well as the belief that a writer's role is to articulate the experiences and needs of his nation.

The son of a middle-class civil servant, Mahfouz grew up in Cairo in an environment marked by strong nationalist opposition to British imperial rule in Egypt. He studied philosophy and sociology at what is now Cairo University, then devoted himself to writing literature, while also working in the civil service until his retirement in 1971. During his 15 years at the Ministry

of Religious Endowments, he encountered a wide variety of Egyptians and their everyday concerns. Starting in 1955, he worked in state cultural institutions, particularly those related to film, and held several high-ranking posts. He wrote numerous film scripts and many of his literary works were adapted for the cinema.

His first novels expressed nationalist sentiments through historical narratives set in ancient Egypt. These works won critical acclaim, but in 1945 he took the risky step of switching to realistic novels about modern Egyptian society. Social realism was then considered avant-garde in Arabic literature, and these novels initially gained little recognition. His *Cairo Trilogy*, completed in 1952, follows several generations of a middle-class Cairene family from 1917 to 1944, focusing on their relationship with the nationalist movement and on conflicts between the values of older and younger generations. In addition to its literary merits, the Trilogy is a unique historical document of everyday life in Cairo in the early 20th century. After the 1952 nationalist military coup, state cultural policies gradually moved social realism from the avant-garde into the mainstream. The Trilogy was finally published in 1956–57 and received a state literary prize.

In 1959 Mahfouz turned away from realism and published *Children of the Alley*, an allegorical treatment of the Bible, the Koran, and Islamic traditions. In a sequence of loosely connected episodes, the novel portrays Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad as social reformers and ordinary human beings, suggests that they failed to achieve their aims and that God is dead, and presents science as the rightful successor to religion. The novel was serialized in a state-run newspaper thanks to the support that Mahfouz enjoyed at the highest levels of the regime, but its publication in book form was banned after religious authorities at Al-Azhar University declared that it contradicted religious doctrine.

Mahfouz's novels of the 1960s indirectly critiqued the Nasser regime's authoritarianism and the social ills that ensued; he relied on symbolism—and on his powerful allies—to avoid censorship. *Adrift on the Nile* (1966) has been seen as a prophetic portrait of a society headed for catastrophe, which took the form of Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war with Israel. Mahfouz's writings after 1967 initially expressed the sense that the defeat had shattered cherished beliefs, leaving Egyptians demoralized amid an absurd exist-

tence. In the 1970s, in works such as *The Harafish* (1977), he increasingly returned to the episodic form that he had used in *Children of the Alley*. No longer seen as an innovator, he adopted, to some extent, the stylistic innovations of younger writers. In the short story collection *Love Under the Pyramids* (1979) and the novella *The Day the Leader Was Killed* (1985), he decried the social problems caused by President Anwar Sadat's Open Door economic policies. His work, however, attracted fewer and fewer readers and seemed consigned to literary history.

The Nobel Prize suddenly returned him to the forefront of the literary scene. The Nobel committee praised *Children of the Alley*; this renewed public debate about the novel, in the context of the international controversy over Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, published the same year. An Egyptian Islamist religious figure declared that Mahfouz should be executed for apostasy. In 1994 two young Islamist militants attempted to carry out the sentence, stabbing Mahfouz in the neck; the author was badly wounded but survived. He did not allow the novel to be published in Egypt until 2006, when it received al-Azhar's approval.

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See Also: Islamic Radicalism; Literature; Nasser, Gamal Abdel; Sadat, Anwar.

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Minority Religions

The Middle East is not a homogenous region composed of Arabs and Muslims, as some people think. It is much more culturally diverse in regard to ethnic-

ity, religion, sects, and languages. Cultural diversity or pluralism has long been part of life in the Middle East. This mosaic character includes important variations that influenced life in the Middle East. Among these dimensions are ethnic, religious, and sectarian divisions.

Muslim and Non-Muslim Minorities

The Middle East is the birthplace of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. More than 92 percent of the Middle East is Muslim, influencing cultural and social life. Most Muslims—about 80 percent—are of the Sunni sect, and Shiites comprise about 15 percent. Shiites are in the majority in countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Bahrain. Lebanon also has a large Shiite “minority.” Elsewhere, Shiites are in the minority, and many suffer from discrimination. The Shiite minority can be found in some provinces of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.

Other Muslim religious minorities are Alawi, mostly in Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon; Druze, who live in Lebanon, Israel, and Syria; Ismailis in Egypt; and Zaidiyyah in Yemen, all of whom are Shiite offshoots. There is also the Baha'i Faith, which was founded in Iran in the 19th century but is persecuted today. Other non-Muslim religions are the Mandaean (Sabeen) religion found mainly in Iraq, the Yazidi religion in Iraq and Syria, Zoroastrianism in Iran, and other small groups in the region. Although Judaism is the majority religion in Israel, Jews constitute a tiny minority in Morocco, Yemen, and elsewhere. Judaism's followers number about 6 million. At the turn of the 20th century, there were large Jewish communities in most Middle Eastern countries. Most of them had to flee because of discrimination endured over the creation of Israel in 1948 and after the 1967 Arab–Israeli War. In 1920s, for example, one-fourth of Baghdad's population was Jewish.

Christians

Christians are one of the largest minority religious groups in the Middle East. They are concentrated in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, and Iran. Christian Maronites (Catholic) in Lebanon constitute 38 percent of the population, and 6 percent of the population of Syria; the civil war in Lebanon accelerated their emigration. Assyrians, who are an