

The SPL Journal of Literary Hermeneutics

A Biannual International Journal of Independent Critical Thinking
Double-blind, Peer-reviewed, and Open Access Journal in English



Vol. 6 Issue 1 Winter Edition 2026 e-ISSN 2583-1674 Page no. 347-361

www.literaryherm.org
www.cavemarkpublications.com



Allegory and Its Hermeneutic Horizons: Reflections on Naguib Mahfouz's *Children of the Alley*

A. K. Muneer

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4065-4095>

Corresponding Author: A. K. Muneer, Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Faculty of Arts, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, 202002, Uttar Pradesh,
akmuneer@gmail.com

Research Article

Keywords: Allegory;
hermeneutic horizons;
roman-fleuve;
multigenerational saga;
Naguib Mahfouz;
Children of the Alley

Article History

Received:

December 18, 2025

Revised:

December 27, 2025

Accepted:

January 1, 2026



ISSN 2583-1674 (SPL-IJLH)



Abstract

Aims: *This article examines the burden of allegory and its hermeneutic horizons in Naguib Mahfouz's Children of the Alley. Set against state power, revolutionary aspirations, and social inequality, the novel traces a loose chronology from the beginning of history to the modern age. Its five episodes parallel the stories of Adam, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and the rise of modern science. Through the experiences of the alley's children, history appears as a recurring cycle of creation and destruction, hope and despair. The article therefore outlines the novel's multilayered allegorical significance.*

Methodology and Approaches: *Using close reading and textual analysis, the study explores the hermeneutical dimensions of allegory in Children of the Alley. The novel resembles an Arabic roman fleuve ("river novel"), presenting a broad chronicle that maps generations of people and the course of human history over an extended period.*

Outcome: *A close reading shows that the generations represented in the novel function as a macrocosm of humanity from Adam to modern man. The narrative spans the long transition from reliance on the supernatural to faith in science and reason.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *Children of the Alley emerges as a grand allegory of human history in which successive generations experience recurring cycles of creation and destruction, hope and despair. Future research may undertake comparative studies of multigenerational sagas across literary traditions to illuminate both shared patterns and distinctive cultural dimensions.*

*Correspondence: A. K. Muneer, akmuneer@gmail.com © (2026) All rights are reserved with the author (s) published by CaveMark Publications. This is an Open Access Article distributed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any form or medium, provided that the original work is appropriately cited or acknowledged. This paper is available online at www.literaryherm.org, and CaveMark Publications, India, published it.

Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006) won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988, becoming the only Arab writer to have received the highly acclaimed award and thereby creating a world literary “event” that helped propel the pantheon of Arabic literature through the technologies of global recognition. In his Nobel Lecture, read at the Swedish Academy on 8 December 1988 and addressed to an audience who by and large did not recognise him, Mahfouz began by introducing himself rather evocatively, foregrounding the traditions he is deeply imbricated in. He says, “I am the son of two civilizations that at a certain age in history have formed a happy marriage. The first of these, seven thousand years old, is the Pharaonic civilization; the second, one thousand four hundred years old, is the Islamic one.” (“Nobel Lecture”)

It is no surprise, then, that the prolific fictional oeuvre of Mahfouz is inspired and enhanced, albeit to varying degrees, by these two time-honoured civilizational oceans, the confluence of which gives Egypt both its specificities and generalities as a society, nation and culture. The setting of his fiction has invariably remained Egypt, and, within it, mostly the urban, densely populated lanes and neighbourhoods of Cairo, teeming with people with low incomes. For example, his best-known, yet most ambitious, *Cairo Trilogy* (*Thulathiyya al-Qahirah*), comprising *Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*, traces the life of a lower-middle-class family—the Abd al-Jawad family—as it navigates the changes engendered by war, revolution, national turmoil, social upheavals, independence, and development. By following the fortunes and misfortunes of this family over three generations, the *Trilogy* spans some twenty-eight years (from 1917 to 1944) in the history of modern Egypt, starting in the middle of the First World War.

Notably, “the lane” or “alley” (*zuqaq* or *hara*) figures prominently in Mahfouz’s fiction as a vital and recurring motif; it functions as a microcosm of the world, even as it illuminates how tradition and modernity serve as the battleground for Egyptian society struggling under changing regimes and social upheavals in the tumultuous twentieth century. Mahfouz marshals the localised, enclosed Cairene alley to examine larger human experiences and situations, thereby using the manifold dynamics of a single street to ponder the broader

questions and concerns of society at large. Whether in *Midaq Alley*, which is set in a Cairene back street during World War II, or the *Trilogy*, which uses the names of historic Cairene streets to put together the history of a family over generations, or *the Children of the Alley*, in which the lane is employed to record humanity's history and its spiritual struggles across the Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—in all of these, a *lane* equals a *world*, transcending boundaries and illuminating complexities of various kinds. Thus, the significance of “the lane” in Mahfouz's work can be said to exemplify what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (40) calls a “globalectical imagination”— “the interconnectedness of time and space in the area of human thought and action,” an idea that wa Thiong'o, following William Blake, takes to be the ability to see “the world in a grain of sand, eternity in an hour.” Much like the Blakean grain of sand, “the lane” in Mahfouz's novels mobilises and transforms the particularity of Cairene life and experiences into a world which brings into relief the universality of the human condition.

Mahfouz was a past master at crafting “multi-generation novels” in which he sought to shed light on Egypt's history by tracing the evolution of a single family over generations. He treats human history not as a mere chronology of events but as a grand cycle of rise, decay, fall, and transformation, through which the contours of shifting power and authority, evolving social and cultural mores, and the larger existential, intellectual, and spiritual struggles of the ordinary individual are unpacked. He maps the broader history of Egypt and its social and political realities in the twentieth century—a macrocosm—onto the microhistories of Cairene alleys and the intergenerational family sagas unfolding within those microcosms. In this regard, apart from his oft-discussed masterpiece *Trilogy* (1956-57), what deserves special attention is a novel that soon followed it in 1959, namely, *Children of the Alley*. This is a stupendous multigenerational saga, ambitious enough to chart humanity's spiritual history—from Adam and Moses to Jesus and Muhammad—against the backdrop of the harsh realities that have engulfed a Cairene alley. The novel is often read as an allegory, and it is to the burden of its allegorical import that I turn in the rest of the article.

Mahfouz's remarkable novel *Children of the Alley* marks a clear departure from his previously published novels, including the *Trilogy*, in both content and form. It is an episodic novel that thematises "utter despair and escapism" against the backdrop of state organisation, revolutionary zeal and praxis, and the ostentatious prosperity of a new privileged class amidst what appears to be widespread mass poverty (Vatikiotis 171). The novel follows a "loose chronology" from the beginning of history to the present, in which five sections parallel the sagas of Adam, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, and the advancement of Modern Science, respectively, and in which the characters—the *children of the alley*—experience history as "an endless cycle of hope and despair" (Moosa 275). It is possible to suggest that the novel reads like an Arabic *roman fleuve*. A *roman-fleuve*, which means "river novel" in French, by and large designates, following the French author Romain Rolland, a novel—single- or multi-volume—which forms a vast chronicle, like the steady flow of a river, typically mapping generations of a family, a particular group of people, or human history over an extended period of time (Ashok 439). The generations that *Children of the Alley* follows represent the macrocosm of all of humankind from Adam to modern man, and the time covered in the process spans the many millennia it took the human family to transition from reliance on the supernatural to the embrace of science and reason.

The novel, originally titled in Arabic as *Awlad Haratina* (literally, "Children of Our Quarter/Neighbourhood"), first appeared in serialised form in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* between September and December 1959. It was banned by the government of Jamal Abd al-Nasser (r. 1956-1970) on charges of blasphemy, and as a result, it was first published as a novel in book form, not in Egypt but in Lebanon, in 1967. At long last, it was republished in 2006 in Egypt, just months after Mahfouz passed away and Egypt conducted its first "open" parliamentary elections. The novel has been translated into many languages and features two English translations. The first translation by Philip Stewart, published in 1981 by Heinemann is entitled *Children of Gebelawi*. Spurred by Mahfouz's international acclaim following his Nobel Prize in 1988, a second translation by Peter Theroux, under the title *Children of the Alley*, was

published in the United States by Doubleday in 1996, by arrangement with the American University in Cairo Press. It is to this second translation that I refer throughout this article for illustrative purposes.

Children of the Alley is an episodic novel divided into five sections, each named after its hero: Adham, Gabal, Rifaa, Qassem and Arafa. It retells the narratives foundational to the prominent Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the first section, we meet the patriarch Gabalawi at the family mansion, who summons his children and informs them that he has decided to entrust his son Adham with the management of his property. However, when Adham, tempted by his wife, tries to read Gabalawi's will about the future of the family property, and thus betrays his father's trust, he is expelled from the mansion and condemned to live a miserable life in the alley. In the chaos that ensues, criminals gang up and rule over the alley, spreading mischief and unleashing violence. As a result, the people of the alley are reduced to squalor and degradation. But the descendants of Gabalawi emerge over successive generations and seek to save the people of the alley. Thus, in section two, we are introduced to Gabal, who is brave and committed to justice: he leads his people from the front in their rebellion against their oppressors, who are eventually eliminated. But soon, chaos returns to the alley, and the criminals reestablish their control. Rifaa, who appears in the next section, is an ascetic whose renunciatory lifestyle first scandalises the people of the alley, but he eventually attracts his own circle of disciples who are drawn to his exemplary persona and his larger messages of mercy and love. But the corrupt rulers find in his growing popularity a threat to their authority, and as a result, he is brutally murdered. In the fourth section, Qassem succeeds Rifaa. His stature and influence help him mobilise an army to rid the alley of its corrupt overseers and criminals, thereby restoring normalcy and justice to his people. But, again, with his passing, mischief and social disorder reassert themselves in the alley. At this juncture, in section five, Arafa, a mysterious magician, appears on the scene. He invents fabulous weapons to eliminate criminals' control over the alley, but eventually succumbs to corruption and becomes a source of support for them. After stealthily entering the house of Gabalawi in search of the patriarch and his secrets, but to no avail, Arafa ends up

killing Gabalawi's old servant. Subsequently, the news spreads through the alley that Gabalawi, whose God-like yet shadowy presence has animated the entire alley throughout, is no more.

Children of the Alley immediately strikes one as a powerful allegory of human history from creation to the present, refracted through key figures of the Abrahamic tradition and the development of modern science, offering transgressive readings of world-historical events in ways that are deeply ambivalent and overdetermined. By his own admission, Mahfouz's novel was influenced by another, much larger allegorical masterpiece—*Back to Methuselah* (1921), a towering five-cycle play by Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw, beginning in the Garden of Eden and spanning to A.D. 31,920 (Shoair 159). In Mahfouz's novel, God, Satan, Adam, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are all present, marking particular, critical junctures of human history before modern science is symbolised as both hope and fear in the concluding episode. Notably, in crafting a story spanning over five generations, *Children of the Alley* follows a Quran-like structure, dividing itself into 114 chapters, exactly the number of Surahs in the Quran.

The opening episode of the novel is reminiscent of the Quranic story of human creation, including Adam's fall from Heaven after he violates the divine command that he (and Eve) should not approach the forbidden tree—Heaven in the novel being the mansion of Gabalawi (God) and Adam, Gabalawi's son Adham. Gabalawi's eldest son, Idris (who reminds one of the defiant Satan (Iblis) who refuses to prostrate himself before Adam), rebels against his father's will and insults him, as a result of which he is expelled from the mansion. Idris is so vengeful that he entices his brother, Adham, to betray his father's trust, which leads to his expulsion from his father's mansion, together with his wife, Umaima. Like Adam, who was sent down to live on Earth, Adham is banished to the alley where he goes through the trials and tribulations of life after his happy times in the Gabalawi's palace. Not long after, one of Adham's two sons, Qadri, kills the other, Humam, in what is clearly an allegory of the Cain and Abel story. Taking pity on Adham, who is now very distraught and inconsolable, Gabalawi bequeaths his estate to his children and their posterity. After this act of magnanimity, the

patriarch withdraws into his impregnable house bordering the alley, and his shadowy presence persists until he dies in the novel's concluding episode featuring Arafa. However, the management of Gabalawi's estate falls into the wrong hands as the estate overseer soon takes to embezzling the income of the estate and terrorises the people of the alley with the help of paid *futuwwas* ("strong-arm men"). Criminals take control and enjoy free rein, and the dwellers of the alley are sunk into poverty and squalor. As mischief and injustice spread in the alley, a saviour comes in the form of Gabal.

In the second episode, Gabal reenacts the familiar story of Moses. The rule of the overseer, with the support of thugs, resembles that of the pharaoh, who oppressed the Israelites. In ways that further relive the story of Moses, Gabal flees into the desert after killing a gangster in self-defence, and there he hears the voice of the elusive Gabalawi, who inspires him to return and lead his people. Considering himself an heir to Gabalawi, Gabal takes it upon himself to save the alley from the gangsters, temporarily restoring material well-being and justice to its people through wealth redistribution and lawmaking. He possesses unique skills, such as snake-charming, which also puts him in a better position in social situations. He, however, concerns himself only with his clan, the children of Hamdan, whom he wants to keep distinguished from the rest of the alley. Infighting breaks out among the alley's dwellers, and the gangsters regain control, leaving the alley in chaos and lawlessness, as Gabalawi is nowhere to be seen, offering succour in times of need.

When we meet the Jesus-like Rifaa in the third episode, the alley has again become the hotbed of violence and destitution. Its inhabitants, feeling abandoned by their mysterious patriarch in times of need, wonder why Gabalawi has locked himself away in his impregnable dwelling, cut off from the people of the alley. Rifaa is completely uninterested in the trappings of life, and, unlike Gabal, who believed in the equitable redistribution of Gabalawi's estate, he dismisses material wealth as "nothing," thereby valuing happiness and spiritual wellbeing as a prophet always does. As he puts it, "The estate is nothing, ... and the happiness of a full life is everything. Nothing stands between us and happiness but the demons hiding with us..." (204). He therefore busies himself with purifying the soul,

healing the sick and exorcising evil spirits. His teachings of mercy and love, like those of Jesus, earn him a circle of disciples and devotees, which eventually prompts the gangsters of the alley to kill him in the desert, giving him greater posthumous fame and renown. Fabulous stories and legends begin to float around him after his death, including the rumour in the alley that “his body had lain in the desert until Gabalawi himself came and got it; now it was concealed in the soil of his own fabulous garden” (248).

In the next, most developed, episode, featuring Qassem, the storyline accurately recreates Muhammad’s life, narrating such details as his time in his uncle’s house, his vocation as a merchant and his marriage to a rich older woman, his encounter with the angel Gabriel, his difficulty in garnering support from his people, the hostility of the merchant-class rulers to him, his migration to a neighbouring city and his ultimate reconquest of his native city as a formidable political leader. Qassem, Gabalawi’s messenger, is presented as a paragon of honour and virtue, valour and determination, knowledge and wisdom, and mercy and compassion. His personal happiness notwithstanding, he puts the happiness of all the people of his alley above everything else. Like Gabal and Rifaa before him, the misery and abysmal condition of his people torment him. During his stint of meditation in the desert, Gabalawi’s servant appears before Qassem, informing him of the patriarch’s concern about the plight of the children of his alley:

He wants to inform you that all the people of the alley are equally his grandchildren, that the estate is their inheritance on an equal basis, and that gangsterism is an evil that must be eliminated. And that the alley must be an extension of the mansion. (287)

The burden of this solemn revelation entails that Qasem is “the chosen one” (al-Mustafa) tasked with bringing about equality and justice. He combines within himself the qualities of both Gabal and Rifaa as he chooses to use force when necessary and to love invariably. Notably, Qassem is presented as a strong man willing to wield power to correct and improve a world dominated by naked power. In this regard, through his militant interventions against corruption and greed, he is portrayed as a greater revolutionary than his predecessors. In what is reminiscent of Muhammad’s historic “conquest of Mecca,” Qassem returns to the

alley triumphantly to become its “uncontested master” (359). He summons all the people of the alley to come to him, and, pointing to the mansion, tells them: “Gabalawi lives here. He is ancestor of us all. He knows no distinction between any of his children, between neighborhoods or individuals, between men and women... His estate is all around you. It belongs to all of you equally...” (359) Under Qassem’s revolutionary leadership, the alley enjoys a brief period of peace and brotherhood, which, however, yields place to violence and injustice immediately after his death, similar to what happened to the alley after Gabal and Rifaa’s deaths earlier. The cycle of social injustice and resistance to it continues unabated, and, as Mahfouz’s novel allegorises, the great Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam represent a succession of socio-political movements against a repressive regime, aiming to establish a just order on earth at critical junctures in human history.

The episodes devoted to Adham, Gabal, Rifaa, and Qassem prepare us for the last episode, which introduces a new secular prophet, the magician Arafa, whose name means “knowledge.” Misery has, yet again, returned to the alley, notwithstanding Qassem and his followers’ good intentions and efforts, as forgetfulness and tyranny reign supreme. It seemed that nothing had changed since the old days... Filth, flies and lice were everywhere, and there was no end of beggars, swindlers, and cripples. Gabal, Rifaa and Qassem were nothing but names, or songs chanted by drugged poets in the coffeehouses. Every group was proud of its man; of whom nothing was left... (364)

It is against this familiar backdrop that Arafa, who symbolises modern science, returns to the alley after a long absence. He toils day and night to invent weapons with which to change the face of the alley by ridding it of its tyrants and gangsters. He firmly believes that “Magic is so wonderful... There is no limit to its power. No one knows where it ends” (375). His confidence in all-powerful magic, which can be harnessed to bring an end to the misery and squalor of the alley, is stupendous. “I have something no one else has, not even Gabalawi himself. I have magic, and magic can do for our alley what Gabal, Rifaa and Qassem put together weren’t able to do” (403).

The magical powers of science are a double-edged sword, and Mahfouz is well aware of this. Thus, he seeks to channel the dangerous, destructive aspects of science into a more humane, productive force by infusing it with human feeling, sentiment, and understanding—that is, by giving science a human face. It is tempting to read the presence of a woman, Awatif, in Arafa's life as that of human compassion (Awatif) meant to soften the power of science (Arafa). However, the same instruments ("the magic bottles") Arafa invented to advance the alley's progress and development are soon exploited by the overseer and his thugs for their tyrannical rule in the alley. And Arafa is ultimately killed in cold blood by the overseer, who now sees him as a great threat to his own dictatorship over the alley. Arafa's disciple, Hanash, carries on his master's legacy of magic, but the overseer continues to visit fear and terror upon the people of the alley, who still hold fast to hope in the midst of unspeakable tyranny, waiting for "the dawn of light and miracles" (448).

Children of the Alley thus allegorically foregrounds the fragility and porosity of social justice in human history, even as the revolutionary leaders it has produced have, over time, contributed to the common public good in their own distinct, exemplary ways. Even as it presents science through Arafa as the last great hope of humankind, it casts doubt on science's ability to eradicate the injustice and violence so innate to humanity. The doubleness of allegorical levels in the novel is unmistakable, yoking together a massive retelling of the foundational narratives of the Abrahamic religions and a profound critique of power, oppression, and revolution in contemporary Egypt and the broader human condition. Mahfouz himself has not been very emphatic and enthusiastic about the novel's allegorical significance. When asked by his translator, Peter Theroux, about the novel's interpretation as a "religious allegory," Mahfouz emphasised two points. Firstly, "the book was a novel, a work of fiction, a story—it ought to be enjoyed as such, and readers were free to think of it as they chose" (669). Secondly, regarding the hostile interpretations of the novel as "a retelling of divine scripture," Mahfouz said, "They [the readers] spread those thoughts—I don't! They are condemning their own interpretations, their own ideas! They say these things—I don't!" (as quoted in Theroux 669). Given the novel's fatally

controversial stature and its turbulent career in Egypt, Mahfouz could not be more alert and sensitive to “the perils of allegory,” especially when religious sentiments are at stake: being an “allegory,” the reader of *Children of the Alley* will not “find it hard to give it whatever meaning he fancies” (as quoted in Shoair 105-116).

Beyond its salience as a religious allegory, *Children of the Alley* can also be read as a parable of authority and power in Egypt and beyond—as a parable of human history characterised by a constant struggle for power, full of sinister schemes and unscrupulous machinations. From this perspective, the heroes of the novels, contrary to what the novel’s interpretation as a religious allegory suggests, are not Adam, Gabal, Rifaa, and Qassem but the strong-arm men/monsters better known by the Arabic word “*futuwwat*”—the bullies and gangsters populating the alley who fight and outsmart each other for control and domination in each episode of the novel (Abu-Haidar 119). The word *futuwwa* connotes the ideals of manliness, chivalry, valour, and generosity, but in the context of warfare, it also refers to secret societies and warrior groups that use violence and armed force to advance and safeguard a cause. More specifically, in a social context, *futuwwat* designates “tough young men” tasked with defending a territory or neighbourhood against attacks from others. Also, the title of the novel in Arabic, *Awlad Haratina*, resembles the colloquial expression, *wlad haritna*, which is humorous and mocking in tone, and refers to the people of the alley, and among them, the *futuwwat* in particular, as they figure prominently in each episode, contributing to the action of the novel in a significant way (Abu-Haidar 120). The *futuwwat* represent power in its naked, crude, primaeval, and barbaric form, which permeates the alley over multiple generations only to be disrupted by the “revolutionary” leaders for a brief period of time.

The corruption of *futuwwat*, evidenced by the use of force for illegitimate ends, plunges the alley and its people into misery and destitution. This theme is introduced in the novel right from the word go. Gabalawi, the founder of the alley, is himself a *futuwwa*, and later the *futuwwat* reduces the alley to a haven for criminals and thugs. In the novel’s *Preface*, Gabalawi is described as a *futuwwa*: “He was tough; the wild beasts dreaded his very name” (3). Gabalawi expels his eldest son, Idris, from the mansion after he rebels against his decision to entrust

the management of his estate to Adham, Idris's younger brother. Idris then describes his father, again, as a *futuwwa*, "What kind of a rotten father are you! You were always a boss and a bully and that's all you'll ever be! We're your own sons and you treat us the same way you treat all your other victims!" (12).

Thus, Idris draws attention to his father's stature as a born *futuwwa* who only knows how to dominate, and he decries that his father treats his children like a *futuwwa* treats his victims. Subsequently, the overseer, who encroaches on the estate bequeathed by Gabalawi for the benefit of the alley's people, also mobilises his *futuwwat* to continue his tyrannical rule over the alley. Gabalawi's descendants, Gabal, Rifaa, Qassem and Arafa, try through various means, including force, mercy and love, virtue and valour, and magic and science, to mount resistance to the oppression of the tyrant and his forces. However, nothing can ultimately overpower "power", which leads to self-destruction—the cycle of violence and resistance to it continues without cessation, and even the medicine turns out to be the poison. It appears that Mahfouz, by pitting the heroes of the alley against the corrupt overseer and his *futuwwat*, suggests that man is perhaps condemned to live in the endless cycle of creation and destruction, in which no single prophet or creed can bring about or sustain everlasting peace and happiness.

In conclusion, *Children of the Alley's* allegorical import cannot be overstated, and its author himself was well aware of the possibilities and dangers thereof. The novel presents a macrocosm of humanity's monotheistic history through a multigenerational saga unfolding within the microcosm of a Cairene alley. In Mahfouz's craft, this religious allegory dovetails with a political allegory critiquing authoritarian tendencies and state repression in post-independence Egypt. The characters, Gabalawi, Adham, Gabal, Rifaa, and Qassem—all symbolise divine and prophetic figures central to the Abrahamic religious imaginations. The limits and inadequacies of political revolutions are also brought to the fore through parallel allegorical levels. Whenever a hero or prophet successfully deposes a dictator, the new regime in turn inevitably becomes corrupted by power and lapses back into high-handedness and tyranny, blunting its own revolutionary promise and potential. However, the protagonists of the

novel are not just the heroic descendants of Gabalawi, such as the prophets and modern science, but also the corrupt rulers and their associates (the *futuwwat*) who dominate the action in all five episodes of the novel, thereby making the novel into a parable of power and authoritarianism in Mahfouz's Egypt and the broader Arab world. Also, each episode of the novel brings the complacency of the masses in the face of corruption and disorder into sharp relief. At the same time, the concluding section foregrounds the perennial tension between faith and progress, and the paradoxes attending them. However, as the novel's concluding lines show, the people of the alley (and the people of the world) hold fast to hope, rather than optimism, which is, unlike hope, a judgment based on evidence. In the absence of evidence for a better, just world, hope remains the last hope, as it were.

Works Cited and Consulted

- Collins, Ashok. "The Roman-Fleuve." *The Cambridge History of the Novel in French*, edited by Adam Watt, Cambridge UP, 2021, pp. 439–455.
- El-Enany, Rasheed. *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*. Routledge, 1993.
- Abu-Haidar, Jareer. "Awlād Ḥāritnā by Najīb Maḥfūz: An Event in the Arab World." *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 16, 1985, pp. 119–131. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4183121>. Accessed 16 May 2026.
- Mahfouz, Naguib. *Children of Gebelawi*. Translated by Philip Stewart, Heinemann, 1981.
- . *Children of the Alley*. Translated by Peter Theroux, Anchor Books, 1996.
- . "Nobel Lecture." *NobelPrize.org*. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1988/mahfouz/lecture/>. Accessed 15 May 2026.
- Moosa, Matti. *The Early Novels of Naguib Mahfouz: Images of Modern Egypt*. University Press of Florida, 1994.
- Shoair, Mohamed. *The Story of the Banned Book: Naguib Mahfouz's Children of the Alley*. Translated by Humphrey Davies, The American University in Cairo Press, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2kjcx20>. Accessed 21 May 2026.
- Theroux, Peter. "Children of the Alley: A Translator's Tale." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2001/2002, pp. 666–671. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25091810>. Accessed 22 May 2026.
- wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. "A Globalectical Imagination." *World Literature Today*, vol. 87, no. 3, 2013, pp. 40–42. <https://doi.org/10.7588/worllitetoda.87.3.0040>. Accessed 16 May 2026.
- Vatikiotis, P. J. "The Corruption of Futuwwa: A Consideration of Despair in Nagib Maḥfūz's Awlād Ḥāritnā." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1971, pp. 169-184. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4282369>. Accessed 17 May 2026.

Muneer, A. K.

www.literaryherm.org

A.K. Muneer

A.K. Muneer (Muneer Aram Kuzhiyan) teaches English at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. He is primarily interested in comparative literary and cultural studies with a focus on literary formations in the Indian Ocean World (IOW). His articles have appeared in various journals, including *the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, *South Asian Review* and *Contemporary South Asia*. He leads an MA course in “Anglophone Arab Literature,” among others, at the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.