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SOCIAL REALISM IN NAGUIB MAHFOUZ'S *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar* (LOVE UNDER THE RAIN)

Amina Khatun[1], Dr. Farid Uddin Ahmed[2], Dr. Noor Uddin Ahmed[3]
[1]*Research Scholar, Department of Arabic, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India*
[2]*Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India*
[3]*Associate Professor, Department of Arabic, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam, India*

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ABSTRACT

Naguib Mahfouz's Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain) exemplifies his mastery of social realism, depicting the socio-political and psychological struggles of mid-20th-century Egypt. This study explores how Mahfouz interweaves personal narratives with broader societal issues, reflecting the anxieties of a generation facing political instability, shifting moral values, and economic challenges. The novel's characters grapple with existential dilemmas, illustrating the conflict between tradition and modernity.

Mahfouz employs symbolic imagery, introspective monologues, and a realistic portrayal of love and relationships to critique societal constraints. Through his characters, he highlights themes of disillusionment, alienation, and the fragility of human aspirations amid an evolving social landscape. The novel serves as a microcosm of Egyptian society, portraying the struggles of individuals seeking meaning and stability in an uncertain world.

This research examines how Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar embodies Mahfouz's signature social realism, portraying the intersection of personal and collective experiences. By analyzing the novel's themes, narrative techniques, and character development, the study underscores Mahfouz's ability to offer a profound critique of social realities while maintaining a deeply humanistic perspective. His exploration of love, identity, and societal expectations remains relevant beyond its historical context, reinforcing his legacy as a literary chronicler of Egypt's evolving social fabric.

KEYWORDS: *Social Realism, Naguib Mahfouz, Egyptian Society, Political Instability, Alienation, Tradition and Modernity, etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Naguib Mahfouz, a towering figure in Arabic literature and a Nobel laureate, is renowned for his deep engagement with social realism. His novel *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar* (*Love under the Rain*) is a testament to his literary prowess in depicting the socio-political and cultural realities of mid-20th century Egypt. Through vivid characterization, intricate narrative techniques, and a profound understanding of human nature, Mahfouz explores the struggles of individuals caught in the tides of societal transformation. The novel reflects the undercurrents of political unrest, economic hardship, and the conflict between tradition and modernity, making it an essential subject for an analysis of social realism in Arabic literature.

Social realism in literature is a genre that aims to portray everyday realities, often focusing on the struggles of the working class and marginalized groups within society. It highlights issues such as poverty, oppression, and political turmoil while offering a critique of the socio-political structures that perpetuate inequality. In *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar*, Mahfouz employs this literary approach to provide an unembellished view of Egyptian society during a period of transition, offering readers a lens through which to examine the complexities of human relationships amid social constraints.

The backdrop of the novel is an Egypt grappling with the remnants of colonialism and the emergence of nationalist movements. The characters in the novel, from various socio-economic backgrounds, navigate personal aspirations, romantic entanglements, and moral dilemmas, all of which are influenced by the broader socio-political context. Mahfouz meticulously crafts his narrative to reflect the anxieties and aspirations of a generation facing uncertainty, where love and personal fulfillment often clash with societal expectations and economic struggles.

A crucial aspect of Mahfouz's social realism is his ability to depict the psychological turmoil of his characters. His protagonists often grapple with existential questions, a characteristic feature of his modernist approach. In *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar*, he presents a nuanced exploration of alienation, disillusionment, and the search for meaning. The novel's protagonists find themselves caught between the desire for freedom and the constraints imposed by tradition and economic hardship. This theme resonates deeply with the struggles of post-

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colonial societies attempting to redefine themselves in a rapidly changing world.

Mahfouz also employs realism through his detailed depiction of urban life in Cairo, which serves as more than just a setting—it becomes a character. The streets, coffeehouses, and neighbourhoods encapsulate the vibrancy and despair of a society in flux. Through his masterful descriptions, Mahfouz captures the essence of Egyptian life, portraying both its beauty and its hardships with equal measure. This attention to detail allows readers to immerse themselves in the everyday struggles of his characters, making their experiences and emotions profoundly relatable.

Furthermore, the novel delves into themes of political instability and its repercussions on personal lives. Mahfouz subtly weaves political commentary into his narrative, illustrating how government policies, economic downturns, and ideological shifts impact the common people. Unlike overtly political novels, *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar* presents a more subdued yet powerful critique of the socio-political climate through the lived experiences of its characters. This method aligns with the broader framework of social realism, where the focus remains on individual stories that collectively reflect societal conditions.

Another significant theme in the novel is the evolving role of women in Egyptian society. Mahfouz portrays female characters who struggle to assert their independence in a male-dominated world. Their journeys highlight the intersection of gender, class, and social expectations, providing insight into the challenges faced by women during that period. By addressing issues such as arranged marriages, limited career opportunities, and societal double standards, Mahfouz sheds light on the broader feminist discourse within Egyptian literature.

In analyzing *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar* through the lens of social realism, it is crucial to consider Mahfouz's literary techniques. His use of stream-of-consciousness narration, shifting perspectives, and intricate character development enhances the novel's authenticity. The dialogues reflect everyday speech patterns, adding to the realism and making the characters' experiences more tangible. Mahfouz's ability to blend personal narratives with broader social issues allows him to craft a novel that is both intimate and universal in its themes.

The significance of *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar* extends beyond its immediate historical context. It serves as a reflection of the continuous struggles faced by individuals in societies undergoing rapid transformation. The themes of alienation, political uncertainty, and the clash between modernity and tradition remain relevant to contemporary readers, making the novel a valuable literary work for understanding not just Egyptian society but also broader human experiences.

This paper aims to explore the various dimensions of social realism in *Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar*, examining how Mahfouz employs this literary style to critique society and portray the lived realities of his characters. Through a close reading of the novel, the research will analyze the themes of economic disparity, political instability, gender roles, and urban life, highlighting Mahfouz's contribution to Arabic literature and his enduring legacy as a writer deeply attuned to the human condition.

Naguib Mahfouz: A Great Novelist of the Arab World

Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006) is widely regarded as one of the greatest novelists of the Arab world. His literary contributions, spanning over seven decades, have significantly shaped modern Arabic literature, particularly in the realm of social realism. His works vividly depict Egyptian society, its historical transformations, and the struggles of individuals within socio-political structures. Mahfouz's Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988 solidified his reputation as an international literary figure.

Born in the Gamaliya district of Cairo, Mahfouz grew up in a middle-class family, an experience that profoundly influenced his literary themes. He was deeply inspired by Egyptian history, classical Arabic literature, and Western literary traditions, particularly the works of Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Marcel Proust. His early writings, including historical novels such as *Radubis* and *Kifah Tiba*, reflect his fascination with Pharaonic history.[1]

Mahfouz's magnum opus, *The Cairo Trilogy—Palace Walk*, *Palace of Desire*, and *Sugar Street*—offers a panoramic view of Egyptian society from the early 20th century to the 1950s. The trilogy follows the life of Al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad and his family, portraying the tensions between tradition and modernity.[2] Through intricate character development and detailed descriptions, Mahfouz presents a microcosm of Egypt's social and political evolution.

Mahfouz's later novels, including *Children of the Alley* and *The Thief and the Dogs*, delve into existential and political themes. *Children of the Alley* was controversial for its allegorical representation of religious history, leading to its censorship in many Arab countries.[3] His engagement with existentialism is evident in *The Thief and the Dogs*, where he explores themes of betrayal, fate, and revenge, reflecting the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

In 1988, Mahfouz became the first Arab writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. The Swedish Academy acknowledged his ability to "create an Arabian narrative art that applies to all mankind".[4] His Nobel win brought global attention to Arabic literature, paving the way for future writers from the region to gain international recognition.

Mahfouz's literary legacy remains unparalleled in Arabic literature. His ability to intertwine the personal with the political, the historical with the contemporary, and the local with the universal cements his status as a literary giant. His works

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continue to be studied, adapted into films, and translated into multiple languages, ensuring his impact endures across generations.[5]

Introduction to "Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar" :

Naguib Mahfouz's Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain) is one of his later novels, first released as a complete book in 1973 after being partially serialized. The serialization began in December 1972 and was featured in the three published editions of al-Shabbab (Youth), a magazine associated with the Arab Socialist Union. The novel exemplifies Mahfouz's hallmark style, offering a penetrating depiction of contemporary Egyptian life while critically examining the socio-political landscape of the early 1970s. Through his characters and their interactions, Mahfouz presents a compelling reflection of the nation's prevailing political, social, and psychological challenges.

In terms of themes, Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar continues to align with the expectations of Mahfouz's extensive readership by providing an insightful commentary on modern Egyptian society. Renowned for his perceptive exploration of human nature and the socio-political dynamics of his time, Mahfouz uses this novel to articulate the struggles, concerns, and aspirations of Egyptians during a transformative period. The narrative engages with critical issues such as political corruption, social disparity, and the psychological impact of Egypt's 1967 defeat, illustrating the complexities of a society grappling with change.

Beyond its themes, the novel is also significant for its narrative form and structure. Spanning 45 interconnected episodes over 200 pages, Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar is more concise compared to some of Mahfouz's lengthier works. However, its brevity does not compromise its depth. Mahfouz relies heavily on dialogue-driven storytelling, allowing readers to engage directly with the characters' inner thoughts and the broader societal conflicts they navigate. A notable feature of the novel is its spacious format, where conversations between characters form a substantial part of the text. This approach fosters a fluid and dynamic narrative, making the characters' experiences and emotions more immediate and immersive.

Structurally, the novel follows a cyclical pattern, transitioning between various scenes and settings in a way that sustains reader interest. Each episode introduces new locations and figures, weaving multiple storylines into a cohesive whole. Despite the shifting backdrops and evolving character interactions, Mahfouz maintains a steady and interconnected narrative rhythm. This structural design mirrors the unpredictability of life in contemporary Egypt, reinforcing the novel's portrayal of a society in flux.

Character Analysis of the Novel

Naguib Mahfouz's Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain) presents a diverse ensemble of characters, with over twenty voices contributing to the narrative. These characters embody a wide spectrum of Egyptian society, from the affluent elites to the hard-pressed working class. Through their interconnected stories and interactions, Mahfouz crafts a vivid portrait of Egypt, showcasing the disparities between social classes and the ensuing tensions. Each character, whether central or peripheral, plays a vital role in weaving the intricate tapestry of a society undergoing political and social transformation.

Mahfouz's signature ability to create multidimensional, believable characters shines throughout this novel. The individuals in Love Under the Rain are depicted with depth and compassion, each reflecting a facet of the human experience. Their personal dilemmas, ambitions, and conflicts mirror the broader societal challenges that Mahfouz explores with remarkable insight.

The title of the novel itself, Love Under the Rain, encapsulates its key themes. The 'rain' symbolizes Egypt's turbulent political and social climate, while 'love' represents the enduring personal connections and emotions that thrive despite adversity. The narrative continually balances the personal with the political, illustrating how characters navigate their private lives amidst a backdrop of rapid and often unsettling change. Mahfouz uses love, in its many forms, as a metaphor for human resilience and the capacity to endure trials.

Ultimately, Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar is both a reflection of its historical context and a timeless meditation on the human condition. Mahfouz captures a nation's struggle with its identity and future, while providing an intimate glimpse into the lives of individuals swept up by the tides of history. Themes of love, perseverance, and human struggle resonate deeply, making this novel a significant contribution to Mahfouz's distinguished literary legacy. 6

Naguib Mahfouz's Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain) breaks away from the conventional approach of a singular, central storyline. Instead, it unfolds through a series of interwoven vignettes, painting a vivid portrait of contemporary life in Egypt. The novel's structure is defined by an array of events and encounters involving multiple groups of characters. These groups, which shift and overlap throughout the narrative, create a sense of dynamic motion. Each group is tied to its unique story arc, and their respective journeys unfold in the order they are introduced within the book.

Early on, the story introduces Marzûq and 'Aliyyât, a pair of university students nearing the completion of their education. Their narrative largely revolves around contemplations of their country's challenges and uncertainties about the future. As they navigate Cairo's bustling streets, the couple engages in candid discussions about Egypt's sociopolitical struggles, which set the stage for their aspirations, including their plans to marry.

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Across nearly forty pages and ten distinct scenes, Mahfouz portrays the couple's evolving relationship, exploring the tension between their dreams and the realities of a country in upheaval. However, their plans face a major obstacle as Marzûq is assigned a teaching position in Upper Egypt, while ‘Aliyyât secures a role at the Ministry of Social Affairs in Cairo. This geographical divide forces the couple to confront the challenges of maintaining a long-distance relationship, delaying their hopes for immediate marriage.

A particularly memorable episode occurs at a train station as the couple bids farewell. Their conversation is abruptly interrupted by Muhammad Rashwân, a film producer working on a new project. Rashwân strikes up a conversation with Marzûq, expressing interest in casting him as the lead in a movie celebrating the bravery of Egyptian soldiers. Given Marzûq’s military background and firsthand experiences as a soldier, Rashwân views him as the ideal candidate, believing his authenticity would resonate deeply with audiences.

After some consideration, Marzûq agrees to participate, viewing it as a chance to contribute to his nation's narrative through artistic expression. His swift decision reflects his sense of duty and desire to support Egypt’s cause in a new way. This interaction underscores one of the novel's central themes: the interplay between personal identity and national responsibility.

This episode exemplifies the broader fabric of Love Under the Rain, which is woven from a collection of incidents involving a diverse and constantly shifting cast of characters. While the individual storylines might seem disjointed, they collectively offer a multifaceted depiction of Egyptian society. Through these fragmented yet interconnected narratives, Mahfouz captures the complexities of life during a time of significant social and political upheaval, illustrating how personal lives are inevitably shaped by larger historical forces. 7

In the later chapters of Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain), the narrative shifts its focus to Marzûq’s evolving journey, both in his personal life and his professional aspirations. He ventures into the film industry, securing a role as an actor, where he works alongside Fitna Nâḍir, a captivating and influential actress. Fitna, deeply immersed in the world of cinema, maintains intricate and overlapping relationships—she is romantically involved with an Arabian Sheikh named Yazîd, who never directly appears in the novel, as well as a film producer, Aḥmad Riḍwân. Despite these existing entanglements, she develops feelings for Marzûq throughout their collaboration on set.

As Fitna's affection for Marzûq intensifies, he begins to distance himself from his former fiancée, ‘Aliyyât. What was once a seemingly stable and promising relationship gradually unravelling as Marzûq becomes increasingly drawn to Fitna and the glamour she represents. His fascination with her world leads him to drift away from his earlier commitment to ‘Aliyyât, further complicating his emotional and professional path.

However, Marzûq’s budding career in cinema and his growing attachment to Fitna take a drastic turn when he is suddenly attacked, leaving his face severely injured. This incident marks the end of his aspirations to become a film star. The motive behind the assault remains ambiguous, adding an element of mystery to the plot. Though his acting career is prematurely cut short, he proceeds with his marriage to Fitna.

Their relationship, however, soon begins to crumble as conflicts emerge over their career ambitions. Marzûq, now disillusioned by the compromises he has made in pursuit of fame, reassesses his life choices. Eventually, he decides to abandon the entertainment industry and return to his original profession—teaching. Alongside this career shift, he also chose to sever ties with Fitna and rekindle his relationship with ‘Aliyyât, seeking stability after his turbulent experiences.

Meanwhile, ‘Aliyyât faces her challenges. Throughout the novel, she endures a series of unfulfilling romantic entanglements, including a deeply distressing experience with an unwanted pregnancy. Additionally, she becomes the target of advances from Samrâ’ Wajdî, a woman with manipulative intentions who seeks to involve her in a coercive relationship. Samrâ’s role in ‘Aliyyât’s life takes a dark turn when ‘Aliyyât’s father intervenes and strangles her, bringing an abrupt and violent end to the situation. This act of aggression serves as a turning point in ‘Aliyyât’s story, freeing her from Samrâ’s pressure but introducing moral complexities regarding her father’s actions.

While Marzûq’s life is marked by a series of setbacks and misfortunes, ‘Aliyyât’s future appears more stable as the novel reaches its conclusion. Despite the emotional hardships she has endured, she ultimately finds herself in a more secure position. By the end of the story, it is implied that she is likely to marry Ḥâmid, the brother of Sâlim ‘Alî, a figure who has been a source of support in her life. This potential union suggests a future of stability and happiness for ‘Aliyyât, in contrast to Marzûq’s turbulent past.

Through its intertwined narratives, Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar explores themes of love, ambition, sacrifice, and the far-reaching consequences of personal choices. Against the backdrop of Egypt’s evolving social and political climate, Mahfouz presents a rich and layered depiction of individuals navigating the complexities of their relationships and aspirations. The novel highlights the tension between personal desires and societal expectations, illustrating how individuals must make difficult choices that ultimately shape their destinies. 8

The opening scenes of Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain) set the stage with a naturalistic depiction of the

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environment, mirroring the intricate emotions and relationships between the characters. The novel begins by introducing two key figures—al-Ustadh Husnî Hijâzî, a refined gentleman, and ‘Aliyyât, the daughter of ‘Abduh Badran, who works as a waiter at a coffeehouse. As they walk together toward Harun Cafeteria, they continue to a nearby garden, selecting a quiet spot where their conversation unfolds. Over glasses of lemonade served by a café waiter, they discuss both personal matters and the political landscape of Egypt.

‘Aliyyât tries to steer their discussion toward love and the prospect of marriage, expressing her hope for their relationship to take a more serious turn. However, Husnî Hijâzî skilfully redirects the conversation back to political affairs, evading any direct talk of commitment. This leaves ‘Aliyyât feeling uneasy, sensing that their relationship might not progress as she desires. Sensing her distress, Husnî employs a manipulative tactic, reassuring her of his deep affection. His ability to calm her and witness her relaxed smile gives him a sense of satisfaction and control over the situation.

Husnî Hijâzî, a man in his fifties, is a regular patron of the coffeehouse where ‘Aliyyât’s father, ‘Abduh Badran, works. During his late-night visits, ‘Abduh Badran and his assistant, ‘Ashmawî, attend to him, offering him cigarettes and polishing his shoes. On one such occasion, ‘Abduh Badran casually mentions that his daughter has received a marriage proposal. This revelation unsettles Husnî, who is troubled by the thought of losing ‘Aliyyât to another suitor. The very idea fills him with anxiety.

Every time Husnî returns to the coffeehouse, ‘Abduh Badran playfully teases him about ‘Aliyyât’s potential wedding, suggesting that the marriage should be finalized soon. Meanwhile, ‘Aliyyât’s brother, Ibrâhîm, a soldier in the Egyptian army, confides in her about his romantic aspirations. He reveals his deep affection for Saniyya, who happens to be Husnî Hijâzî’s sister. Determined to pursue a relationship with her, Ibrâhîm arranges a meeting with Saniyya in a secluded hilly area where they can speak freely.

During their conversation, Ibrâhîm expresses his serious intentions, hoping to establish a meaningful connection. However, Saniyya avoids engaging in discussions of romance, shifting the focus instead to political affairs and the ongoing war. She references her brother’s views on the conflict, possibly to maintain emotional distance.

The novel also offers insight into Husnî Hijâzî’s personal life. He resides in a well-furnished apartment adorned with imported furniture from Japan and goods from Khan al-Khalili, a renowned marketplace. As a cinematographer, he is closely associated with the film industry and spends much of his time engaged in studio projects. His work brings him enjoyment, which he shares with his sister, Saniyya. Her exposure to this glamorous world piques her interest, making her increasingly drawn to the allure of cinema and its associated lifestyle.

Throughout the novel, Husnî Hijâzî remains a dominant figure, shaping the narrative from beginning to end. At times, he reflects on the lives of those around him, particularly ‘Abduh Badran’s and ‘Ashmawî’s families. He marvels at their ability to survive on modest earnings, providing insight into the broader socio-economic struggles that many characters face amid political and economic challenges.

One recurring motif in the novel is the uncertainty surrounding marriage. Many of the characters, both men and women, are in a state of waiting—postponing their weddings until the war’s conclusion. This reflects how historical events, such as World War II and the conflicts of 1956 and 1967 in Yemen, influence the personal lives and aspirations of the characters. Mahfouz skillfully interweaves these historical backdrops with intimate personal struggles, illustrating how societal circumstances shape individual destinies.

Additionally, the novel touches on themes of morality and social justice. ‘Ashmawî, a cobbler, grapples with existential dilemmas as he contemplates the fate of his descendants. Some of his relatives become involved in criminal activities and face severe repercussions for their actions. Their eventual punishments underscore the harsh realities that accompany moral transgressions.

Friendship is another significant theme explored in the novel. At one point, ‘Aliyyât and Saniyya accept an invitation from their friend Munâ Zahrân to visit her home by the Nile. Munâ, who comes from a family of similar social standing to Husnî Hijâzî’s, openly discusses matters of love with them. She shares her romantic experiences, revealing that she is involved with Sâlim ‘Alî, a judge. Despite her relationship, Munâ maintains a sceptical view of marriage, stating that she would rather remain single than enter a union based on superficial love. While her stance on love and marriage appears pessimistic, the novel does not portray love in an entirely negative light. Instead, it presents love as a complex and multifaceted force shaped by personal desires, societal pressures, and historical events.

Ultimately, Al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar offers a compelling exploration of its characters' lives, skillfully weaving together themes of love, war, ambition, and social class. Through the experiences of figures such as Husnî Hijâzî, ‘Aliyyât, and Ibrâhîm, the novel presents a rich and nuanced portrayal of Egyptian society during a time of profound change. It highlights the intersection of personal aspirations and historical realities, illustrating the challenges individuals face as they navigate a world shaped by external forces. 9

Another subplot in the novel revolves around Sâlim ‘Alî, a well-regarded lawyer whose life becomes intertwined with that of Munâ Zahrân, a close friend of ‘Aliyyât. Their past relationship

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was once filled with affection, but tensions arose when Munâ expressed her desire for independence, particularly her ambition to become an actress. Sâlim, unable to reconcile his traditional beliefs with her unconventional aspirations, ultimately chose to end their relationship. This breakup proved to be a pivotal moment for both. Struggling with emotional turmoil and frustration, Sâlim made an impulsive decision—he hastily married a prostitute, an action that seemed more like an act of defiance than a pursuit of personal happiness. However, this choice failed to bring him the peace or fulfillment he had hoped for.

On the other hand, Munâ Zahrân pursued her career aspirations in the film industry but soon found herself entangled with Muḥammad Rashwân, a film director. Initially, she believed that Rashwān could help her advance professionally, but she quickly realized that his intentions were far from genuine. Instead of providing guidance and opportunities, he sought only to exploit her for his desires. This realization was a crushing blow to Munâ, leaving her feeling betrayed and disillusioned.

The situation took a tragic turn when her brother, ‘Alî Zahrân, a doctor, learned about the director’s actions. Enraged and driven by a fierce sense of protectiveness, ‘Alî confronted Rashwân in a violent altercation that ended in the director’s death. With one fatal strike, ‘Alî committed a crime that thrust him into the centre of a highly publicized legal case, as the murder of such a prominent figure became a widely discussed scandal.

At this critical point in the novel, Ḥasan Ḥamûda, a seasoned and highly respected trial lawyer, was appointed to defend Dr. ‘Alî Zahrân in court. As the case progressed, Munâ developed an attachment to Ḥasan, and the two became romantically involved. However, their relationship was fleeting. Munâ soon recognized that her feelings for him were not as profound as she had initially believed, and their connection gradually faded.

Following this short-lived romance, an unexpected turn of events led to a reconciliation between Munâ Zahrân and her former lover, Sâlim ‘Alî. Over time, Sâlim had come to understand and accept Munâ’s need for independence and her ambition to build a life on her terms. Realizing that his earlier resistance to her aspirations had been a mistake, he ended his ill-fated marriage and sought to rebuild his relationship with Munâ. With a newfound respect for each other’s individuality, they overcame the barriers that had once divided them. Eventually, they reunited and married, their journey marked by personal growth and a deeper understanding of one another. 10

A significant subplot in the novel revolves around Ibrâhîm, a front-line soldier and the brother of ‘Aliyyât, whose role in the narrative is crucial. Ibrâhîm shares a romantic relationship with Sanniyya, the sister of Marzûq Anwar. Their love flourishes when Ibrâhîm returns to Cairo on leave, and they decide to marry, reinforcing their commitment to one another despite the ongoing war. Sanniyya remains steadfast in her devotion to Ibrâhîm and her patriotism, even as external challenges loom over their future. However, tragedy struck when Ibrâhîm was severely wounded in battle. Despite his injuries, the couple proceeds with their marriage, demonstrating Sanniyya’s unwavering dedication. After their wedding, their presence in the story diminishes as they fade into the background, no longer at the centre of the unfolding events.

At the heart of the novel is Husnî Hijâzî, whose presence connects the various characters and plotlines. He serves as a pivotal figure, yet he gradually becomes burdened with regret over the impact he has had on the lives of those around him. One of the most intense moments in the novel occurs when he is seated in his usual spot at the coffee house and witnesses the dramatic entrance of Samrâ’ Wajdî. This incident triggers a chain of tragic events for which Husnî ultimately holds himself responsible. At one point, reflecting on his influence, he likens himself to “a millstone grinding down people he has only ever considered friends.” This moment of self-awareness highlights his inner turmoil as he grapples with the unintended consequences of his actions.

A recurring motif in the novel is the influence of the film industry, which entangles many of the characters. Among them are Marzûq Anwar and his fiancée, ‘Aliyyât, who stand apart from the rest as government employees—‘Aliyyât works for the Ministry of Social Affairs in Cairo, while Marzûq is with the Education Department in Banî Suwayf. Their paths cross with the world of cinema when, during a visit to a train station in Egypt, ‘Aliyyât and her father, ‘Abduh Badrân, meet Marzûq. The three of them sit together at a bar, where ‘Aliyyât introduces Marzûq to film producer Muḥammad Rishwân. The producer, impressed by Marzûq’s demeanour, suggests that he take on a lead role in an upcoming film. Eager to seize this opportunity, Marzûq accepts the offer. When the time comes to prove himself in front of the camera, he delivers a remarkable performance, earning admiration from his peers and cementing his place as a rising star in the industry.

Meanwhile, Munâ Zahrân is also invited to participate in the film’s production, yet she repeatedly declines. Her reluctance to embrace a career in cinema mirrors her unwillingness to accept a second marriage proposal from Sâlim ‘Alî. This refusal infuriates Sâlim, creating tension between them. Attempting to mediate, Munâ’s brother, Dr. ‘Alî Zahrân, advises her to be more accommodating toward Sâlim, hoping to diffuse the situation.

The conflict escalates when Dr. ‘Alî Zahrân encounters Muḥammad Rishwân outside the studio. Enraged over the producer’s treatment of Munâ, he violently attacks him. Amid the altercation, Marzûq Anwar steps in, attempting to intervene, but he too falls victim to Dr. Zahrân’s anger and is injured in the scuffle.

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Following this violent incident, Munâ and her father seek legal counsel from Ḥasan Ḥamûda, a seasoned advocate in his forties, hoping to address the ramifications of the crime Dr. Zahrân has committed. With Muḥammad Rishwân now dead, another influential producer, Aḥmad Riḍwân, steps in to take over the film's production. Marzûq Anwar, having already made a strong impression as an actor, continues to build his career in the film industry, solidifying his reputation as a promising new talent.

Through its intricate web of relationships, personal struggles, and professional ambitions, the novel paints a vivid picture of human resilience, the consequences of actions, and the interplay between societal expectations and individual desires. Set against the backdrop of war and the world of cinema, it delves into themes of loyalty, ambition, regret, and the impact of one's choices on the lives of others. Each character is deeply connected to the larger narrative, their fates intertwined in a compelling exploration of love, power, and destiny. 11

One day, Ustâdh Ḥusnî Ḥijâzî decided to confess his deep affection for Munâ Zahrân, approaching her with sincerity and hope. With heartfelt emotions, he proposed marriage, anticipating a positive response. However, Munâ gently declined, revealing that she was already engaged to Ḥasan Ḥamûda, an advocate, and their wedding was already planned. Although disappointed, Ustâdh Ḥijâzî accepted her decision and turned his thoughts toward the turmoil of war that had engulfed the nation. The ongoing political crisis weighed heavily on his mind, becoming a focal point of his reflections. Even as his friends, 'Abduh Badrân and 'Ashmâwî, teased him about remaining unmarried, he brushed aside their remarks, choosing instead to steer the conversation toward the war and its broader implications. This portrayed him as a man deeply engrossed in philosophical and political concerns rather than personal matters.

Meanwhile, Munâ Zahrân and Ḥasan Ḥamûda continued their relationship, often meeting in serene settings to discuss their future together. One such meeting took place in a garden, where they sat under a glowing lamp, exchanging thoughts on their love and upcoming marriage. However, despite the idyllic surroundings, Ḥasan's mind remained preoccupied with the war. The conflict had unsettled him, filling him with anxiety and uncertainty, which began to affect his mood and behaviour. Munâ noticed his distraction, realizing that while women in the story—such as herself—were more focused on love and relationships, the men, including Ḥasan, were increasingly absorbed by the war's consequences. The female characters, despite the violence surrounding them, continued to express their affection subtly through glances and gestures, seemingly less troubled by the external turmoil.

As the narrative unfolds, an unexpected twist emerges when Ḥasan Ḥamûda confesses to Safwat his interest in marrying a younger woman, around twenty years old. This revelation marks a turning point in his relationship with Munâ, introducing a layer of complexity to the novel's dynamics. Soon after, a series of significant events occur in quick succession: Sanniyya weds Zarîr, 'Aliyyât's brother, while Munâ Zahrân ultimately marries Sâlim 'Alî. These marriages take place within the same week, representing a pivotal moment in the story.

One evening, 'Aliyyât seeks out Ustâdh Ḥusnî Ḥijâzî to talk about her concerns, particularly regarding marriage. However, the discussion leaves her feeling unsettled, as he remains ambiguous about his marital intentions. His lack of clarity frustrates her, leaving her with unanswered questions about his plans.

As the novel moves toward its climax, the character of Samrâ' Wajdî, the daughter of 'Ashmâwî, takes centre stage. She shares a complicated past with Ustâdh Ḥijâzî, and one day, she confronts him in a heated exchange. Accompanied by her new suitor, she challenges him, leading to an argument that escalates rapidly. The unresolved emotions between them erupt into a moment of uncontrollable rage, culminating in a shocking crime—Ustâdh Ḥijâzî murders Samrâ' Wajdî. This brutal act sends shockwaves through the narrative, affecting the lives of multiple characters as news of the tragedy spreads.

Following the murder, 'Aliyyât and Ḥâmid meet at an Indian Tea House to discuss the crime and gather clues that might lead to justice. They recognize the gravity of the situation and decide to seek legal guidance from Ḥasan Ḥamûda, hoping his expertise will help them navigate the case. However, unbeknownst to them, Ustâdh Ḥijâzî has already learned of their intentions, growing increasingly wary of those who might expose him.

In a tense confrontation, Ustâdh Ḥijâzî seizes an opportunity to isolate 'Aliyyât. Locking the door behind them, he sits beside her in a room filled with silence and tension. Their eyes meet, cold and distant. He reaches for her hand and asks a question that pierces the core of their long-standing friendship: "Have I not always been your most trusted companion?" Overwhelmed by emotion, 'Aliyyât nods in confirmation, her eyes welling up with tears. As she buries her face in her hands, sobbing uncontrollably, Ustâdh Ḥijâzî attempts to persuade her to keep the murder a secret. He assures her of his kindness and insists that he would never harm her, hoping to manipulate her loyalty to cover up his crime.

As the story reaches its conclusion, the investigation into Samrâ' Wajdî's murder continues, and the case eventually appears in the newspapers. Ḥâmid comes to understand the dark reality behind the crime, yet the society depicted in the novel is one where justice is often elusive, especially when powerful individuals are involved. Even Ḥasan Ḥamûda, despite his legal knowledge, hesitates to challenge Ustâdh Ḥijâzî directly, fearing the repercussions. With key witnesses silenced, the truth behind the murder remains concealed.

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The novel closes on a reflective and ambiguous note, contemplating the nature of history and death. The final line, "genuine deems fancies, history is death, and the death is not sent forth back," leaves readers contemplating the elusive nature of truth. The fate of the characters remains unresolved, with lingering questions that refuse to be answered, ensuring that the story's mysteries endure beyond its final pages. 12

The events of this novel unfold within an unspecified timeframe, beginning in the aftermath of Egypt's crushing defeat in the June War of 1967. This historical setting plays a crucial role in shaping the novel's tone, reflecting the widespread disillusionment, frustration, and uncertainty that engulfed Cairo during the years between major conflicts. While the narrative does not establish a precise chronology, references toward the novel's conclusion to Egypt's acceptance of American ceasefire proposals suggest an allusion to the diplomatic negotiations that occurred in the mid-1970s. These historical markers help situate the novel within a particular political context, though it covers only a segment of the interwar period—a time characterized by deep anxieties about Egypt's future on both military and political fronts.

The novel vividly captures the profound sense of despair that permeated Egyptian society following the Six-Day War. It provides a compelling depiction of the hardships, uncertainties, and emotional struggles experienced by the people of Cairo during this tumultuous era. However, one notable omission is any mention of President Gamal Abdel Nasser's death in September 1970. Given the significant influence Nasser wielded and the uncertainty surrounding the transition of power to Anwar Sadat, one might have expected this event to be a focal point in the novel. Yet, the narrative does not delve into these political shifts, instead maintaining its focus on the social and personal challenges confronting its characters.

Interestingly, historical accounts suggest that the manuscript of this novel was submitted to al-Ahrâm for serialization in the autumn of 1972 but was not accepted for publication at that time. This rejection raises intriguing questions, as many of the novel's themes and issues would have remained relevant, given the ongoing regional tensions and Egypt's volatile political climate. The absence of any direct reference to Nasser's passing may partly explain why the novel appears somewhat detached from certain key historical moments, despite their expected impact on the characters' perspectives and interactions.

One of the novel's strengths lies in its ability to immerse readers in the lived experiences of Cairo's residents during this period of uncertainty. It effectively conveys the reality of life in a city grappling with external threats and internal upheavals. Renowned author Naguib Maḥfouz skillfully weaves together interrelated narratives, crafting characters who navigate a landscape of chaos and unpredictability. Despite the novel's brevity, Maḥfouz adeptly captures the social, political, and ideological shifts shaping Egypt in the wake of Nasser's era and the looming spectre of further conflicts.

The novel's characters embody the broader societal struggles of the time. Their fluctuating relationships and shifting moral stances mirror the instability that defined the era, as people were forced to reassess their values in response to the country's evolving crises. This persistent state of uncertainty reflects a nation caught in transition, where individuals continuously question their roles and identities in an ever-changing world.

Ultimately, the novel serves as a poignant exploration of the atmosphere of doubt and turmoil that pervaded Cairo during the interwar years. Through the intimate struggles and moral dilemmas of its characters, it sheds light on the larger social and political challenges facing Egypt in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat and the years of tension that followed. Despite its concise length, the novel successfully encapsulates the spirit of a city and a nation in flux while offering an insightful commentary on the intricacies of human relationships amid political and historical upheaval. 13

DISCUSSION

Naguib Mahfouz's al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain) presents a multifaceted portrayal of modern, Western-influenced culture, exploring themes of love, socio-political turmoil, corruption, crime, and the symbolism of nature. The novel offers a critical reflection on the instability and moral ambiguity of contemporary society.

Love, a central theme, is not romanticized but depicted as fleeting and often self-serving. The title metaphorically represents the unpredictability of relationships—some love is sincere, while much of it is superficial, manipulative, or driven by personal gain. This contrast between genuine affection and artificial emotions underscores the novel's exploration of human interactions in a society preoccupied with appearances.

Socio-political conditions significantly shape the characters' lives, with corruption and lawlessness serving as a backdrop for personal struggles. Many characters engage in deceit and betrayal, reflecting broader societal decay. The novel portrays a world where individuals must navigate difficult moral choices in an environment of injustice and inequality, often leading to treachery and violence.

Nature plays a symbolic role, mirroring emotional turmoil and societal chaos. Stormy weather reflects the unpredictability of relationships and social instability. Likewise, moments of playful banter and jesting add depth to character interactions, often masking deeper tensions and conflicts.

Ultimately, al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar critiques a society where love is distorted by self-interest, corruption, and insincerity. Yet, the novel offers hope—just as a rainstorm clears, renewal and redemption are possible if individuals embrace sincerity and

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authenticity in their relationships. Through its rich narrative, Mahfouz captures a world in flux, where love, like rain, can either nourish or destroy.

CONCLUSION

Naguib Mahfouz's al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar (Love Under the Rain) stands as a profound exploration of social realism, capturing the complexities of love, corruption, and socio-political instability in modern Egyptian society. Through a vivid and layered narrative, Mahfouz presents characters who struggle within a morally ambiguous world shaped by shifting values, economic disparity, and personal ambitions. The novel's depiction of fleeting, insincere relationships reflect the erosion of traditional moral structures, emphasizing how individuals adapt—or succumb—to the pressures of an uncertain society.

A key aspect of Mahfouz's social realism lies in his unflinching portrayal of corruption and crime, illustrating how power dynamics and self-interest drive human interactions. The novel does not merely critique societal decay but also examines how personal emotions—love, betrayal, and desire—intertwine with larger social forces. By embedding personal struggles within a broader socio-political context, Mahfouz highlights the tension between individual aspirations and societal expectations.
Nature serves as both a literal and symbolic element in the novel, reflecting the unpredictable nature of human relationships. The metaphor of rain underscores the transient, often unstable nature of love, paralleling the turbulence of the characters' inner lives. Yet, just as rain brings both destruction and renewal, Mahfouz subtly suggests that hope and redemption remain possible.

Ultimately, al-Ḥubb Taḥt al-Maṭar exemplifies Mahfouz's ability to merge personal narratives with broader social critique, reinforcing his legacy as a master of literary realism. The novel invites readers to reflect on the intersection of love and society, offering a compelling portrayal of a world in flux—where human emotions and societal structures continuously reshape one another.

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