



The Exploration Of Themes In Naguib Mahfouz's The Coffeehouse

Author: Farooq Jaafar Aziz

Abstract

Very few authors in the history of literature have been able to pen novels that encompass the most significant stages of an individual's life. Naguib Mahfouz is one of them. His exemplary mastery in describing life and providing insights into its intricacies that a person has to go through in different phases of their lifetime can be termed as a commentary on existence. In *The Coffeehouse* (*Qushtumur* in the Arabic version) he brings to the fore the themes that govern every individual's life – from childhood to old age. The numerous relations and relationships that a human forges with others forms the cog of the novel and in it are embedded the themes of the novel. The saga of five friends and their life episodes are narrated in a manner that is not only vivid but also epitomizes the themes that are explored – friendship, love, marriage, morality and change. Mahfouz creates situations in the novel and then helps the characters to effortlessly wade through them, either with success or failure, and turns those happenings into the essence of the novel. By comprising themes without which life cannot be termed complete, Mahfouz has provided ample scope to explore and investigate the bonds that spur people into action with great passion and zest which take the form of themes that demand an examination.

Keywords: Friendship, Love, Marriage, Morality, Change.

Introduction

In his career as a novelist that spanned more than five decades, Naguib Mahfouz wrote on a variety of subjects with diverse themes which made each of his work offer a refreshing take on life, social classes and at times, nations. Moreover, his works primarily reveal the Egyptian way of life in all its hues and shades, thereby unveiling the Egyptian culture and . His works also gain significance due to the political and controversial stands that he took through them. A few of his writings that stand out among his prolific writings are the Cairo Trilogy *Palace Walk* (1956), *Palace of Desire* (1957), *Sugar Street* (1957) and the controversial *The Children of Gebelawi* (1959), which would later be the cause of a life-threatening attack on him. His other notable works include *Adrift on the Nile* (1966), *The Thief and the Dogs* (1961), and *The Journey of Ibh Fattouma* (1983). His collection of short stories and his craft as a screenplay writer and a newspaper columnist, bear

testimony to his talent that made him a colossus of Arabic literature. Additionally, his ability to masterfully depict the lives of the people from every strata of society with their different struggles, wants and needs made him a novelist who fathomed life from varied perspectives.

Also, the grit displayed by Mahfouz in his works by dealing with subjects that are taboo and controversial, made him an author who propagated free thought. Even a cursory glance at his novels shows his intent to put his literary works to good effect when it comes to creating a sociopolitical awareness. The vast array of his writings are usually categorized as meditations on existentialism and having themes of political influence. Though that observation holds water, Mahfouz not only transcends those boundaries but also ventures into territories that were left unexplored in Arabic literature. Ultimately, his works are a reflection of his deep understanding of human life through realism. The depiction of the mental and emotional trials and tribulations of his characters and the events that shape them connect with readers around the globe. For his stellar contributions to the literary world, Naguib Mahfouz was befittingly awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988.

The Theme of Friendship

Though *The Coffeehouse* was the last novel Naguib Mahfouz penned, it was not his ultimate work. The author has weaved the saga with the thread of friendship, and in doing so, has revealed the significance and value of companionship in each episode and stage of life. The tale of five friends and their friendship of seventy years is chronicled with insights and meditations that reflect the essence of lives that are well-lived and celebrated with true friends. The five friends – Sadiq Safwan al-Nadi, Ismail Qadri Suleiman, Hamada Yusri al-Halawani, Tahir Ubayad al-Armalawi and the narrator, navigate through events and incidents in a friendship that is so open and deep that they can bear witness to each of them. The barrier of have and have-nots is neither a criteria nor an obstacle in their togetherness, and Mahfouz has left no stone unturned to encompass the plots with situations that bring to the fore the contributions made by each character to honor the sacredness of their bond. The dexterity of the author in forging the longevity of friendship between the five friends and restoring its novelty and freshness over seven decades is evident in the manner in which the characters approach their relationship with trust, innocence and zest.

From the discoveries of childhood to the intricacies of adulthood and to the wisdom of elderly age, the experiences of the journeys of the lives of the characters are embedded in a collective and shared environment of interconnectedness. Therefore, it is no surprise that “*Qushtumur* focuses on communion and compassion, profound affection and ideal friendship.” (El-Gabalawy, 1990). Also, it is interesting to note that strong political beliefs fail to sour the ties among the friends and their acts of commission and omission are neither

judged nor viewed with condemnation. The camaraderie between the friends who share the happenings in their lives with utmost honesty – be it love, family or work – showcases the depths of their faith in each other. The wantonness and infidelity of Sadiq is debated as much as the opinionated political beliefs of Ismail, the debauchery of Hamada and the atheism of Tahir. Furthermore, Mahfouz has created plots in the novel wherein the opinions of the friends clash on varied subjects but none of it causes any bitterness or causes the absence of goodwill towards each other. The freedom and candor with which they are able to speak their minds denotes that “friends are essentially chosen relationships.” (Spencer & Pahl, 2006).

The significance of the theme of friendship is further underlined in the novel with the author making the narrator narrate the novel through the bond of friendship. Everything that the reader knows about the characters and the ongoings of their lives is through the conversations that take place between the five friends where their disarming frankness is on display. Naguib Mahfouz has made the theme of friendship the essence of his novel and the readers become witnesses to the lives of the characters through the narrators fondness for his four friends. That is so because hardly any important aspects of their lives are missed. Not only that, by discussing the most intimate parts of their lives, be it love, marriage or business and by announcing their future plans to the group, each friend displays a blind trust. And in doing so, they allow themselves to become receivers of sound counsel after deliberations that seek their well-being. The contrary opinions that erupt at times without anyone taking anything to heart, in case their views are dismissed or laughed upon highlight the necessity of an ego-less relationship where each individual gives importance and respect to the opinions of others.

Therefore, the theme of friendship in *The Coffeehouse* is not just a foundation on which the storyline of the novel is built. Upon closer examination, it is amply clear that there are messages for the readers. It can be said with certainty that Naguib Mahfouz, as a writer of great renown, would not write a novel just for the sake of the entertainment. And there are reasons to believe so. Firstly, the friendship between the five friends begins at childhood and at the end of the novel completes seven decades. By that, the reader witnesses their close companionship that gets stronger as time passes by. Secondly, the author, in a subtle way points to the reasons that makes that friendship stand the tests of time. Thirdly, Mahfouz puts the most important point across that with true friends, life is safe, happy and lived well. Just like the lives of the protagonists that sail smoothly despite the storms that batters them a few times. But their friendship which also has a soothing effect, takes them to the shores of safety as the priority of each friend is the happiness of the others. The conversations between the friends are not just light talk but are perspectives shared that each could easily implement in their own lives.

Significantly, the passage of time witnesses the friends making a living in a manner that they deem fit and settling down. The manner in which they express their views on each others choice of profession or on the females that they take as brides shows the extent to which they had allowed each other to analyze their lives. They may have not agreed on everything or anything as a group but the fact that they valued each others' thoughts speaks of the understanding they had among themselves and the maturity that they possessed in reading each other's character traits. On the surface, the regular meetings between the friends at the coffeehouse may seem as a happening of mundane talk about their lives and plans but Mahfouz adds the years of bonding between them and ties that have seen decades of changes and growth in each other that have also been used as advice for one another. The author succeeds in gripping the attention of the readers throughout the novel as the lives of the friends unfold in stages and compels the reader to examine the causes of the unbreakable bond of friendship between the friends for life. To analyze that a couple of factors need to be taken into account.

Primarily, it must be understood that any true friendship is selfless, giving and never judgmental. The bond between the group was based on mutual respect, and throughout their life, there was never an iota of jealousy that took hold of any of them or none harbored any ill-will for the others. And in addition, there was never any division involved between the five. Mahfouz has scripted the novel on people whose loyalty towards their friends emanates caring and support. The manner in which Mahmud aka Hamada comes to the defense of his friends when his brother Tawfiq expresses disapproval of his friends and Tahir's fathers aversion of him being friends with boys from West Abbasiya, does not deter him from being friends with Sadiq, Ismail and the narrator. Sadiq successfully helping Ismail to get a job speaks about his sincere concern for his friend. Since their childhood, Hamada and Tahir never let their class differences come between them and the other three, and that explains their strong opposition to label people because of their class. The companionship of five children, two of which represent the affluent East Abbasiya and the other three who belong to the indigent West Abbasiya is a tale of friendship that has its roots in equality.

Ultimately, The Coffeehouse is a novel that tells the saga of five friends who have a sense of respect for each other. The author has presented the true essence of friendship and the secrets to a bond that lasts a lifetime. Sadiq Safwan al-Nadi, Ismail Qadri Suleiman, Hamada Yusri al-Halawani, Tahir Ubayad al- Armalawi and the narrator, through their companionship, take the readers to a journey that is full of messages on the manner to have a relationship of friendship for keeps. And by that, Naguib Mahfouz attempts to extol the characteristics and virtues of true friendships.

Love and its Fascination

Time and again in the course of the novel, Naguib Mahfouz has reiterated the fascination of love through the relationships of the protagonists with females. Some end well and some don't. Some create paradise on earth while the others make hell descend in this world. Any novel that chronicles the lives of characters from beginning to end, has to have mentions of the episodes of love. And Mahfouz does not disappoint in that segment of life in his novel. He embellishes in the saga, the varied forms of love that any individual can relate to. Mahfouz's strength as a writer lies in his gifted ability to make the happenings and situations relatable to the readers. The love lives of the four central characters, excluding that of the narrator, are depicted in an utmost natural manner and as easily as they happen. The span of seven decades is interspersed with the admiration, curiosity, flings and experiences regarding love. The author has portrayed real-life situations where the matters of the heart, at times, are uncontrollable. And so it happens with the four friends at different stages of their lives.

Growing up together, the four friends discover feelings for the opposite sex early in their childhood. Sadiq Safwan is dazzled by the beauty of his relatives wife Zubayda Hanem and is infatuated with her much elder daughter Amira. This is the first episode in the novel where the heartstrings of one of the friends get pulled in the presence of females. As they hurtle towards puberty, their attraction and curiosity for physical relationships takes root in their hearts. In their teens, things took a more decisive turn with Hamada Yusuf getting enamored with Samira al-Ma'ruqi but a physical and verbal assault from her cousin put paid to any further episodes to the budding love story. The author has given an accurate description of teenage love that is more often than not either nipped in the bud or finds ways to extinguish itself. And the phenomena that Mahfouz has portrayed is "an emotional upheaval at any age, but for adolescents the feelings are likely to be even more difficult to manage. Teenage bodies and brains are maturing at a rate not experienced since infancy. There is a growth spurt, development of secondary sex characteristics and young people change in appearance from child to adult." (Moore, 2016).

Therefore, by the above observation, Ismail Qadri's multiple sexual encounters can be understood with great clarity. The visit of the four friends to the prostitutes district on Clot Bey Street is a culmination of their curiosity about sex and love. That is so because their subconscious had been yearning for female love and warmth which they were deprived of either due to circumstances or by the lack of opportunities to have a steady romantic relationships. The psyche of teenage boys has been brilliantly showcased by Mahfouz where he brings to light the causes of suppression of natural carnal feelings. He addresses that issue by taking the friends to a brothel where Hamada, the undeclared group leader and Ismail satiate their burning desires while Sadiq and Tahir excuse themselves at the very last moment. Through the inclusion of that episode in the novel, Mahfouz has clearly distinguished the end of innocence and the beginning of adulthood in the teenagers. He has used the situation as a transformative tool to

usher the friends into manhood as “sexual development is impacted by a dynamic mixture of physical and cognitive change.” (Sexual Development, n.d.).

Additionally, of all the friends who seek love in their own individual ways, Tahir expresses his need for love through his first published poem ‘The Belles in the Garden’ in ‘Intellect Magazine’ and finds love in Raifa Hamza a nurse. Tahir is the only individual of the group whose courtship turns into love and ultimately into a marriage. The author has, with his great dexterity in weaving tales has brought about different results for the romantic escapades of each central character. It may seem as a normal thing to do but their outcomes can be witnessed in the future conjugal and romantic relationships of the characters. The subject of love has been broached by Mahfouz to give a glimpse of the Egyptian culture where it is not appropriate to seek love on the streets and parental approval is absolutely necessary in choosing one’s partner. Tahir’s rebellion against his family and his decision to cut himself off from his family forever is a telling example of how love has to be fought for, is worth fighting for, and the essential ingredient for that is courage and belief in one’s partner. Hamada Yusuf did not possess it. Nor did Ismail Qadri and Sadiq Safwan.

As if the norm, people try to find love in the holy union of marriage. The myth of marriage being holy and the bliss that is associated with it is busted by Mahfouz in the manner he treats his characters and the experiences he subjects them to. The fascination for true love makes Sadiq, Ismail and Hamada tie the knots at different stages of their lives. With Sadiq taking in multiple wives and Ismail too attempting it much later, their search for true love escapes them just like a mirage on a hot summer’s day. Hamada too takes his chances by getting married. His wedding to a prostitute ends disastrously as his wife suffers a miscarriage and squeezes him out of a large sum of money. The author has used the platform of his novel to make a social commentary on the rapidly deteriorating institution of marriage. Whether love can be found in marriage or whether it really exists is left to the reader to decide. However, it is pertinent to mention that Sadiq’s philandering ways and Hamada’s interest in loose women didn’t help their cause. Ismail’s renewed attempts at finding love late in his life fail as well and Tahir’s divorce to Anwaar Badran too ends in heartbreak for him.

Therefore, the question that gains significance is why do the friends have to look for love time and again and what caused those divorces? It finally boils to “the lack or loss of trust is one of the most harmful impediments to a couple’s long-term success. Without trust, a relationship misses two of the key anchors for forging and maintaining a strong bond: safety and security. Trust issues can manifest in a number of ways, such as jealousy, possessiveness, unreasonable rigidity, emotional infidelity, physical/sexual infidelity, relational game playing, lack of reliability or dependability, and lack of emotional support.” (Rodriguez, n.d.). The four central characters weren’t able to solve the conundrum of a successful relationship even after plunging from one to another. Naguib Mahfouz has written a novel that is as much about relationships as it is about friendship. The futile endeavours of the four friends to seek what they wanted can also be placed, in varied degrees, to their own weakness or decisions that went awry. Also,

the fascination with love didn't turn into a passion that can make relationships tide over the challenges that they face. And the author has driven home that point very well.

The Saga of Marriages

A very important plot in the novel that offers twists and turns to the entire storyline of the novel is the theme of marriage. As the four friends turn up for their rendezvous at the coffeehouse decade after decade on a regular basis, the theme of their conversations revolves around their family life. Even before any of them got married, though their dialogues hovered on many subjects, love and marriage was a topic that had prominence. Mahfouz makes the narrator to provide details of the marriages of his friends through every perspective so that the reader can be given the freedom to analyse the situations and decide for themselves about the nitty-gritties of marriage, and what makes them go right and wrong. The driving force behind the desire of the characters to marry more than once - except Hamada who married once but spent all his life in bedding different women - is depicted as lust, or an infatuation, which cannot guarantee a lifelong stable relationship. The truth of the matter is, the author has emphasized on the futility of seeking love without knowing what love is. The reasons that cause disharmony and fights between couples are just a fallout of the wrong understanding of a married life.

The first of the friends to get married is Tahir who marries Raifa against his fathers wishes and later, at an elderly age, marries Anwaar, a very young girl. However both his failed marriages highlight his failures in keeping his marriages alive. The analysis of any failed marriage brings forth multiple reasons and the accusations between couples fly thick and fast. However, the point is, what leads to that situation? The root of unhappy marriages lies in choosing the wrong partner without knowing them inside out. Also, circumstances play an important role. The last reason explains Sadiq's third wife's decision to get married to him because she was living in poverty. However, Sadiq is equally to blame to get married to Sina Ibrahim at the age of sixty while the bride was eighteen. It comes as no surprise that while Sina was married to Sadiq, she was caught having an affair with a young man. All of Sadiq's three marriages were unsuccessful for different reasons with his second wife Layla Hasan being infertile and by Sadiq's own version, his marriage with his first wife, Ihsan Hanem was extinguished due to the lack of love. To divorce for reasons that are flimsy and to remarry without knowing what one needs and for whom results in further troubles for the characters.

Ismail Qadri's sexual exploits before his marriage with Tafida made him to be anointed by his friends as their teacher of amorous activities. However, his marriage to Tafida, collapses after he gets fed up of her lavish spending habits and wishes death upon her. The agony and anguish caused by a relationship, which just until a few years ago, was all lovey-dovey raises serious questions about the sanctity and authenticity of the institution of marriage. Also, why does Mahfouz gets his characters into more than one marriage, multiple sexual partners, and the desire to get married

at an old age? At first, it would appear that such behaviours would be a part of Egyptian culture. At second thought, it would appear that the author wanted to make his plot engrossing for the reader. Though those two possibilities cannot be denied, the larger picture has to be taken into account. And by that, it is meant that Mahfouz wanted to drive home a point. Upon much reflection, the only conclusion that can be reached is the author himself has no real belief in the institution of marriage, and more importantly, the writer's distrust of fidelity and an unshakable belief in the greed of humans.

Also, the decision of the four friends to get remarried after having a bad experience is brilliantly explained in the following words – “In a conjugal relation, it is critical to redefine trade-off; different points are found in the second marriage compared to the first one because, in the second relationship, it is expected that both sides avoid repetition of mistakes of the previous shared life and launch the relation more cautiously and maturely. In conformity with previous studies, by increasing age at the time of marriage, particularly for women, they attempt alertly to discuss their status in the marriage with respect to decision-making on childbearing, financial affairs, and personal matters like job, education and relations with their own families.” (Yazdani et al., 2021). The above observation holds true and the stress is laid on not repeating the same mistakes of the previous marriage. However, for that to happen, it would be preferable that the age group of the couple be similar as that, more often than not, would equal to similar maturity levels. In the novel, Sina and Anwaar are ridiculously younger than Sadiq and Tahir and that makes the compatibility factor go haywire.

Therefore, it is evident that the central characters of the novel considered each matrimony to have a limited time validity with a partner and once that expired, it was time to move on for another marriage. It can be argued that the religion of Islam permits a man to have four wives at the same time. Though the scholars of that religion may put forward reasons that are mentioned in the scriptures, the wedlock that the characters get into with different females, are mostly a result of their whims and fancies and their obsession with lust and young females. Mahfouz makes valid arguments through the characters regarding the institution of marriage in a modern perspective. Wedlock, for Mahfouz, is a fallacy and unlike what the majority of the people think about it, he has his reservations. It's very likely that he was penning his own beliefs as in his real life, he married late, when he was almost in his mid-forties. The farce of marriage that is played out by the characters is central to theme of the novel as further developments in the storyline are based on each marriage that meets its end. However, a very significant aspect that needs to be looked into are the situations of the women who get divorced just because their husband's fancy women who they hardly know.

Ihsan Hanem, Layla Hasan, Sina Ibrahim, Raifa Hamza, Anwaar Badran, Tafida and Hamada's wife, an erstwhile prostitute, are females who were married to the four fiends, at one time or another. Mahfouz makes adequate references to them in relation to their relationship with their lovers but does not go into a detailed description of their agony and anguish their husband's brought upon them by their remarriage. However, he leaves it upon the

readers to gauge the extent of misery they are heaped upon by their husband's. With the exception of Layla and Anwaar who created problems for their husband's, the reader feels pity for the other characters. Tafida's situation needed a lot of understanding and her husband should have made more efforts to salvage their marriage but that did not seem to happen. Finally, Naguib Mahfouz presents the theme of marriage through varied circumstances and their outcomes and impact on the lives of the characters. Through that, the author makes a sincere effort to explain the complexities of marriage and the importance of choosing the right partner with utmost understanding, instead of giving in to passing and fickle attractions.

The Issues of Morality

Another aspect of life that the novel sheds light on, is the issue of morality in individuals and the people at large. And the morality that Mahfouz talks about encompasses all the characteristics of life where an individual has to act while being discerning at the same time. Right from the sexual escapades of Ismail, to the business ethics of Sadiq, and the showcasing of morality in their respective marriages, the friends and the other characters offer the readers a view of their morality compass. Any novel that tells the tales of lifetimes of individuals always focuses on their moral aspects as well. However, Naguib Mahfouz goes further and details the changes that take place in the characters through their actions. Being the master storyteller he was, Mahfouz uses dramatic changes in the subplots without giving any indication or forewarning about the twists in the tale and reveals them all of a sudden adding shock value to his narrative style. That shock value has a lot to do with the characters' sudden change in manner or an act that is completely out of character. The Coffeehouse covers lifetimes and generations and uncovers the changes that take place in a characters beliefs, conduct and at times, brings to light the true colours of a person. All those changes have to do with their moral disposition.

Furthermore, the striking changes that are observed in the morality of the characters as time passes by reflects a change in their beliefs. Sadiq's practice of profiteering despite him being wealthy and taking great pride in it shows that avarice had become a part of his character. Since he was a child, he had a burning desire to be wealthy and he became one, without conscience. That is further emphasized in his belief that his money could buy him love and that explains his three marriages. Hamada's flings with multiple women and Tahir's marriage with Anwaar despite their too big a gap in age differences, displays his passion for lust. The question of morality is raised by Mahfouz through the narrator and he leaves it to the discrimination of the readers to judge the characters through their acts. The question of morality goes beyond sin and merit and right and wrong because relationships and business, both have trust attached to them. Upon the breaking of that trust, an individual has to later, when their conscience takes hold of them, live in remorse and misery. That is so because, immorality brings with itself suffering which is hidden in the womb of the future.

That can be witnessed in the failed marriages of the characters. Also, Mahfouz makes it a point that the readers note the widening distance between the characters and their family members. That in itself tells a tale of not appreciating what you had, and in sterner terms, it would mean being ungrateful. Morality is “the set of standards that enable people to live cooperatively in groups. It’s what societies determine to be “right” and “acceptable.” (Morin, 2024). The yardsticks of those right and wrong acts are applied to every aspect of an individual’s life. And through those results, an individual’s morality is defined. On a closer observation, it comes to light that the other themes of the novel mainly friendship, love and marriage is based on the moral values of the characters. Therefore, Mahfouz has written a novel that revolves around morality and the characteristics of morality in the characters change as they age and venture deeper into life by gaining varied experiences on the way. Also, Mahfouz has applied the positive attributes of morality in friendship and the acts of the characters that denote gratefulness, indebtedness and a sense of responsibility.

However, most of it is related to and focused on love and marriage and on some sense the obligations the characters fulfil for their children. That is so because the conversations between the friends are mostly focused on their personal lives. And that makes the theme just more important because the question of morality with ones near and dear ones is the ultimate test. That is so because if an individual fails that test, then they have indeed failed in life. That is not to say that morality does not matter with outsiders. That statement is made in context to the focus of the plot of the novel. Therefore, the relationships of the characters with their wives becomes important. As hinted before, the infidelity of the husband’s to their wives and in the instance of Sina’s extramarital affair with a much younger boy have their own reasons. Infidelity is primarily caused by the dislike of one’s partner or having the option of finding a better one. Just as the reasons for splitting with a partner are many, so are the reasons in not going through a divorce. Relationships need to be worked upon and sacrifices need to be made. In some instances of the novel, the female characters accept getting married to wealthy men to improve their financial situation and more often than not, those relationships are met with a disastrous failure. The fundamental reason being, the subject of morality was not taken into consideration.

Or else, what can explain the marriages ending without any partner attempting their utmost to salvage it? The reason is "unless the person stops putting their focus on themselves and their own pain and suffering and puts their focus on learning how their partner’s emotional system works, the marriage will always fail. Some people are so focused on themselves that they turn their relationship into a transactional business. The process of if I do this for you, what will you do for me kills intimacy, connection, attraction and sexual connection." (Hedger, n.d.). That explains perfectly what went wrong with Sadiq, Ismail, Hamada and Tahir. All the friends at one time or the other considered their own feelings to be a priority without getting acquainted with the desires, wants and wishes of their partners. To add to that, a couple of them believed their wealth could buy the youth of a girl as well as their fidelity. Soon enough, they discover that that is not the way relationships work. Sadly enough, blinded by passion and lust, they keep repeating the blunder. Mahfouz has highlighted the lack and absence of faithfulness and points to its expected tragic end.

The Theme of Change

Like all things in life, the only constant throughout the novel is change. From the change in the characteristics of the characters, their situations, their life and the city of Abbasiya itself. Naguib Mahfouz has encompassed the entirety of life and the city which makes the narrator nostalgic towards the end, who, as a witness, experienced the sea-change. The only constant that remains is the friendship between the friends. The hallmark of *The Coffeehouse* are the penetrating insights that are on full display through the eyes of change. It is as if “that the lives of individuals and whole societies are connected with omnipresent dynamics, and the existence of contemporary man may be perceived as a process of permanent change.” (Niedbalski & Śleżak, 2015). Most importantly, at the end of the novel Mahfouz has made the characters think about their seventy years of life together as friends, and at the same time, served lessons for them and the readers that are timeless. The manner in which Mahfouz presents those changes is also noteworthy because the storyline seamlessly blends with the different time spans.

Just as the landscape of Abbasiya changes, so do the changes in the fortune of the characters. Hamada is no longer in the possession of the wealth he once was and begins to lose his memory. Ismail turns to practicing spirituality while reflecting on life and enjoying the happiness that life could provide him. Tahir becomes wealthy and seeks death. Sadiq turns to religion and takes pride in his daughters achievements. Their way of life is supported by studies that observe that “Both theoretical and empirical work suggest that in the later stages of life, more individualistic sources often tend to make way for more communal and transcendental sources such as spirituality and religion, nature, and community engagement and societal commitment.” (Bar-Tur et al., 2001). Ultimately, the changes in the characters take place inwardly and outwardly, and through those changes Naguib Mahfouz sends out a telling message that what remains with an individual are his memories and experiences while everything they hold dear withers away.

References

1. El-Gabalawy, S. (1990). Naguib Mahfouz, Qushtumur. *International Fiction Review*, 17(1). p.57.
<https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/IFR/article/view/14032>
2. Spencer, L., Pahl, R. (2006). *Rethinking Friendship: Hidden Solidarities Today*. Princeton University Press. London. p.82.
3. Moore, S. (2016). Teenagers in Love. *The Psychologist*. The British Psychological Society.
<https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/teenagers-love>
4. Sexual Development. (n.d). Adolescent Psychology.
<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/adolescent/chapter/sexual-development/>
5. Dr. Rodriguez, R. (n.d.). Reasons Relationships Fail.
<https://www.delraybeachpsychiatrist.com/couples-therapy-top-reasons-relationships-fail/>
6. Yazdani, A., Mousavi, M., Alipour F., & Raifey, H. (2021). Reconfiguration of relationships during the process of remarriage after divorce. A qualitative study in Iran. *Journal of Medicine and Life*.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8169131/#R12>
7. Morin, A. (2024). What is Morality?
<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-morality-5076160#:~:text=Morality%20refers%20to%20the%20set,term%20interests%20to%20benefit%20society.>
8. Hedger, S. (n.d.). “Why fighting to save a marriage will fail...!”
<https://www.stephenhedger.com/why-fighting-to-save-a-marriage-will-fail/>
9. Niedbalski, J., & Ślęzak, I. (2015). Editorial: Changes in a Human Life. *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*. 11(3):6–12. DOI:10.18778/1733-8069.11.3.01
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359088962_Editorial_Changes_in_a_Human_Life
10. Bar-Tur, L., Savaya, R., and Prager, E. (2001). Sources of meaning in life for young and old Israeli Jews and Arabs. *J. Aging Stud.* 15, 253–269. doi: 10.1016/S0890-4065(01)00022-6