

The Symbolic Dimension of Mahfouz's Novel, *al-Ṭarīq*, *The Search* (1964): From the Symbol of God/Spirituality to Social Problems

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Abstract

This article intends to examine whether *al-Ṭarīq's* novel, *The Search* is a philosophical symbolic novel, especially whether it contains symbols of God/spirituality and social symbols of contemporary Egyptian problems. The article builds on a qualitative research method based on a literature review and Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The novel is also studied based on other scientific literature studies, not only literary, but also religious and social. The article finds that al-Ṭarīq's novel, *The Search*, is Mahfouz's philosophical symbolic novel. Saber's father figure is a symbol of God/spirituality, with much evidence in the novel that shows this. For instance, God is called *sayyed* in Arabic, the name of Saber's father; moreover, his grandfather's name is also Sayyed, which means the lord of the lords, and his last name is *al-Raḥīmī*, the name of God, meaning: Most Merciful. In addition, the novel reflects/on and symbolizes Egypt's social problems, both politically, economically, and culturally. Saber, among other things, reflects a corrupt Egyptian character raised by his pimp mother and Karimah, the woman he loves who exploits Saber's innocence to do evil (kill), a symbol of Western colonialism and other local influences, the power of local capitalism and complicated bureaucracy. Other elements explored in the novel include contemporary Egyptian psychological problems, represented in dream material, and figures who have divided personalities.

Keywords: novel, Mahfouz, symbol, god/spirituality, social problems

1. Introduction

The Arabic novel has achieved an accelerated pace of development, drawing upon the whole tradition of well-developed and two-centuries-old European fiction. We can see the standard stages of the development of the novel represented in the work of one novelist: Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006). Mahfouz belongs to what one may call the second generation of Egyptian novelists: not one of the pioneers of the thirties but certainly the leading novelist in Arabic today (Maḥmūd, 1973: 47-48). The Arabic novel has reached a genuine maturity through Mahfouz's contributions in the 1940s and early 1950s. Subsequently, he and other writers throughout the Arab world have made use of the genre to comment on many social and political issues in the region (Allen, 1988: 491).

Mahfouz's first novel was published in 1939, and he has been a prolific Egyptian fiction writer ever since. However, his fame and esteem grew slowly, and it was not until the publication of the trilogy in the late 1950s, that he was hailed as the unrivalled master of fiction in the Arabic language. He was awarded the state prize for literature in 1970. His works were translated into the major languages of the world in the 1960s. In the beginning, interest in his work in the West was largely confined to orientalist and students of Arabic. Nevertheless, the strength of his reputation was such that he was the first Arabic writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, in 1988 (El-Enany, 1993: 31).

As many critics have mentioned, Mahfouz's novels generally consist of three major parts: historical romantic, socially realistic, and philosophical/sufi symbolic (Fauzi, 1989: 17-18, al-Naqqāsh, 1995: 254, 136-146, and Darwīsh, no year: 15-17). One of the interesting and regular themes in his novels is the search for a path, of which we are shown many forms, as Mahfouz's way of participating in finding a way out of Egyptian social problems, as both an ummah and a nation. Among these are national uprisings against invaders; revolutions against despots; social or spiritual struggles against heredity or environmental problems; and tyrannical fathers or oppressive regimes. He refers to the micro-living conditions, as if they were a case that he thought was important to raise. For example, life in an alley, which is different from the rest of the world, or a family whose history is told through many generations or even the entire human race. It discusses personal crises and intellectual, social or psychological dilemmas/problems (Al-'Ālim, 1989: 177). Mahfouz's novels are different from the general view of the literary lay public, who see literature as the product of mere imagination, as art that uses language as a medium that

only serves the goddess of art.

As in other types of novels, the discussion on the issue of social and psychological problems/dilemmas is also done by Mahfouz in his Sufistic symbolic novels, which replace the previous types/models of realist novels, beginning specifically with the novel *Awlād Hāratina* (*Children of Our Village*), published in 1959, although previously there were actually other novels of this type (Id, 1997: 244, 246). The change in his novel writing model to a symbolic novel was in accordance with the changing political system of Egypt at this time, from liberal democracy to repressive socialism. That way, Mahfouz could avoid Nasser's claws as ruler.

What is meant by the symbolic-philosophical/sufistic novel is a novel in which there are many symbols, presented through the characters, place settings, main themes, and some parts of the novel text contain a vague big philosophical meaning or idea, because it is hidden behind the text. Therefore, this type of novel tends to be deep in thought and soul, especially religiosity, through imaginative symbolic language, so that there is a match between taste, thought, and imagination. Even the language can be difficult to understand without rereading it through a hermeneutics/semiotics (Khafāji 1995: 166-167 and Fannanie, 2000: 55-62).

Based on the explanation above, this article will discuss *al-Ṭarīq's* novel, *The Search* (1964), written five years after Mahfouz's *Awlād Hāratina*, his first symbolic philosophical novel. The focus of the discussion is the God/spiritual and socio-problem symbols they contain. For this reason, the article is built on qualitative research methods based on a literature review (text novels) using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. The theory looks at the relationship between the *significant* (language/signifier) and the *signifier* (meaning/signifier) in two systems: the primary system (denotative reading) and the secondary system (connotative reading). This theory proclaims the death of the author. Barthes shifts from the author as the center of attention, the source of meaning and the most authoritative person for interpretation, to the reader (researcher) who is given a large role in producing meaning. It also celebrates the plurality of meanings. However, in order to avoid confusion of meaning, Barthes' theory recommends that text reviewers rely on the text itself, namely *lexia* (a certain reading unit). *Lexia* can be one word, several words, a sentence, a paragraph, or several paragraphs (Barthes, 1986, Barthes et.al, 2003, p. 87-93, Trifonas, 2001, Noth, 1990, Hoed, 2011). It is appropriate to employ this semiotic methodology, because literary works use language that has been defamiliarized as a medium, because it uses heightened language. Moreover the novel studied in this article is a philosophical symbolic novel.

2. Saber, the Protagonist

We will attempt to analyze the character of Saber, who falls prey to bad circumstances and is manipulated by other characters into committing crime. We are told that he grew up in a corrupt social milieu and was further spoiled by his mother, who kept him away from the realities of life by giving him money whenever he wanted it. This point about Saber's upbringing is emphasized by Mahfouz. Investigating the circumstances surrounding the crime that Saber committed show his naivety. A woman easily manipulated him. The fact that Karima was an accomplice in the murder shows her to be a dangerous and conniving woman. However, Saber is not careful enough as a criminal, and in carrying out the murder makes many mistakes, such as forgetting the glove in his hand that was supposed to be thrown into the Nile. This mistake brings negative consequences, which ultimately lead to his conviction in the future. Another mistake is committed when he pretends to have been talking to someone on the phone when actually talking to Karima, as this again shows his naivety:

“You must contact me anyhow. By telephone perhaps. She turned her eyes; she must have gotten the message. I want to know several things. I am sure that you are aware of my situation; we must talk, and do not forget that my money is running out. She gave him a waring glance. I am fully aware of your problems, but I am sure you will find a way” (Mahfouz, 1987: 93).

He behaves recklessly after learning of Karima's past, disclosed by Mohamed el-Sawi, which we know is false and meant to entrap him. Saber was provided with her address without being asked. Saber's recklessness and sentimental nature, the factors that lead to Karima's murder and Saber's arrest, confirm his naivety. This character deserves sympathy from the readers (Al-Rabī', 1989: 689-90).

Saber has deep affections for Elham, who represents a future life of stability, freedom, dignity and peace. However, Karima represents a terrible past, a life fraught with poverty, sex, and crime. Between Elham and Karima, Saber forgets his original goal, i.e. finding his father. Saber is not a suitable husband for Elham, who is well-educated and works for the newspaper agency, whereas he is uneducated and unemployed. He chooses Karima instead, going to the extreme of murdering her husband so that he can have her. His crime, however, is discovered and he waits to be hanged (Maḥmūd, 1964: 46; Dawwāra, 1972: 155).

Saber's search for his father has psychological, social and economic motives. His relationship with Elham and Karima indicate a split in his character between good and evil, pure ideals and sexual desires. His split soul is what explain why the goal of finding his father was unachievable. He failed, due to his lack of focus and the turn of fate against him (Kilpatrick, 1974:102, and see also Maḥfūz, 2008).

3. Symbolic Readings of *The Search*: Father's Character as a Symbol of God/Spirituality

Many symbolic interpretations have been made of this novel. For instance, al-'Ālim observes that the mysterious journey from Alexandria to Cairo Saber undertakes to find his father is a journey which begins after the death of his mother and the ensuing loss of any feeling of love and security. The journey symbolizes man's search for self-protection, self-knowledge and the knowledge of others around him (al-'Ālim, 1989: 177), while the source of protection and knowledge, whether related to oneself or others, is God. Therefore, Ṭarābīshī interprets the character of Saber's father, Sayed Sayed El-Reheimy, as representing God due to his name, because God in Arabic is also referred to as *al-Sayyid* or "Lord", *al-Rahmān al-Rahīm* or the compassionate, the merciful and the Lord of mankind. For him, this is the story of a child's search for the Father, or God (Ṭarābīshī, 1988:42; Kilpatrick, 1997:255). Tharābīshī in his analysis refers to the tradition in Christianity that

Allah (God) is also referred to as God the Father, and that a small number of Christians believe that Jesus, in His relationship with God, his father, has a connotative meaning rather than a biological sense, which is more in line with Islam, as the religion of the majority of the Egyptian people narrated by Mahfouz in *The Search*. That is, all humans should become "children" of God, where they live, act and work only for the sake of God, not for motives other than God, in accordance with the message of *tawhīd*, monotheism. In Islam, the word "son of God" in this spiritual connotative meaning is comparable to the word '*Abdullāh* (servant of Allah), another name given to the Prophet Muhammad who must be imitated by the Muslim community. In the language of modern science, they are "children" of God (God is spoken of in the language of God the Father) or servants of God (in the language of Islam) who have spiritual intelligence and often seek the ideal path to devotion to God, not because of material rewards/*dunyā*, as the main goal, which is symbolized by wealth, throne, and love. This means that the father character in the novel as a symbol of God has a scientific reference in religious studies, even in Islam, especially if the meaning of God the Son is in a spiritual connotative sense, a special and good person (see Mujiburrahman in Steenbrink, 2017: xviii, Hendrawan, 2009: 60-61, Zohar and Marshall, 2007, Pasiak, 2008).

Tharābīshī's analysis that interprets Saber's father as a symbol of God can also be justified, if what is referred to is the name of Saber's father, Sayed El-Reheimy. The name means the lord of the loving lord, which means the supreme leader of those who have the nature of compassion, because God is a very loving substance. Moreover, in the text of the novel, there are many fragments of sentences that show this assumption: *first*, when Saber receives a call from an unknown person who claims that he is his father, and says: "I am a very famous person and it is very easy to get directions about my home and work place. However, you ignored it". In other texts it is even mentioned that his father was a very famous person abroad (Maḥfūz, 2008: 62, 167), insinuating that many humans who want to be close to God, as a very famous substance, are actually very close to being so themselves, but they ignore their conscience that calls for truth and honesty, as they also ignore the instructions of God's holy book.

Second, the character of the father is described in the novel as a spiritual character, which Saber does not find until he is sentenced to death, because he is not focused, falling into blind love and greed, which, alongside his stupidity/recklessness, brings him to prison and hanging, because the evidence is convincing that he is the perpetrator of the murder of the hotel owner (Maḥfūz, 2008: 159-173). In the narration and plot it seems that Mahfouz wants to reveal that human problems cannot reach God, spirituality, unless humans are also spiritual beings, without which they cannot be happy, as they are thus a slave to the world. Saber's desire for wealth and women is self-centred, while Islam is symbolized by abstinence from eating, drinking and sex while fasting in the month of Ramadan.

Third, the statement of religious experts quoted by Mahfouz in the novel state that the main problem that leads to Saber's imprisonment and hanging is a lack of faith. For them: "If Saber makes an effort to seek God as he tries to find his father, then God will give him what he wants, both his worldly desires and his hereafter" (Maḥfūz, 2008: 160). In another text it is said: "If Saber had spent far less effort, searching for his father, he would have been spared of all the troubles" (Mahfouz, 1987: 117). So, the father character in the novel does appear to be a symbol of God, which all humans should seek in seeking Him, at least as Saber searches for his father in the novel, and if possible it should be even more than that.

The symbolic dimension of the protagonist's father as a symbol of God is visible in the first few pages of the novel. For example, when Saber asks his mother, "Should I spend my life searching for something I do not know exists?", her answer is, "However, you will not be sure of his existence except by searching". The novel continues thus:

Does he deserve all this effort?" She replies, "Without the least doubt, my son. He is a man of means in every sense of the word. He's got a lot of money. You will find the life you want with him, a life of freedom, dignity, and peace of mind. You will neither suffer the indignities of earning your daily bread, nor will you be forced to lead a life of crime. Your alternative is to become a hustler, a crook, a pimp or a murderer.

The father character in the early pages of the novel is narrated as an ideal character: an ordinary human being who had certain qualities that imitated the attributes of God, although only relatively. In Arab society, a son like Saber was expected to have all the qualities of such a father. Saber bears a strong resemblance to his father and shares his traits. One is love, in addition to handsomeness and ideal masculinity. In short, the father character in the narrated novel has the image of divinity, in accordance with what Tarābīshī said, which seems to refer to the Sufist belief that humans are the image of God, which he signifies by adding that, it is the same as how the moon on paper is a picture of the moon in heaven (Ṭarābīshī, 1988: 43-4).

In Islamic studies, especially Sufism, humans as the image of God refer to the existence of the prophet, Adam, as the father of humans in the world, where humans in general are often called *Banī Adam* (Adam's children and grandchildren), as stated in the Qur'an (al-'A rāf 7: 31). What the Sufism experts refer to is the hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī (al-Zubaydī, 1417: 661) and that narrated by Muslim (al-Mundhirī, 2014: 557), the second reference after the Qur'an, both of which explain that Allah created Adam in His "likeness"/ image, meaning that in Adam as the father of humans there is a divine side, as an image of God, even though Adam/human in Islam is not God, because in Islam, God has no partners, God is One. This hadith is used as a justification for the possibility of the union of God with humans, as Adam's children and grandchildren in the tradition of philosophical Sufism are not recognized in Sunni Sufism (see Nasution, 1973: 89). Based on this explanation, Saber's father in the novel is interpreted as a symbol of God, making it possible.

The symbolic image of God is complete at the end of the novel, when Saber learns from the lawyer that his father's only pleasure was love. Saber's own comment on this information is: "While he is having fun throughout the world, I am placed in a jail waiting for the hangman's rope...and does it never occur to him to ask about his children?" Is the father really considered responsible for taking care of his children?

Does the concept of fatherhood change, especially when it includes an unusual number of children? Does he not love them? He provided them with understanding and power such as what could be understood from the lawyer in the last pages of the novel.

Tarābīshī (1988: 52) says the father created them, so that they can live on their own, an unusual father narrative that approaches the model/symbol of God who created man to be independent. Mahfouz did not write this novel to tell us that it is our duty to do without a father, but that we must not depend on our fathers to such an extent that we do not hold ourselves responsible for our own actions. At the end, Saber remarks, "It seems there is no use relying on anyone else." The lawyer retorts, "There is only benefit in what is reasonable". This assertion, with which the novel ends, as Tarābīshī observes, contains a great progressive idea for the Arab/oriental society, where dependence on others may be practiced to a large extent. Therefore, *The Search* is a great work of social criticism. The metaphysical question is crucial to the novel. Mahfouz could link materialistic values with spiritual ones, bringing the metaphysical question to its real dimension as a principal social problem (Mahfūz, 2008: 167-173).

Similarly, El-Enany (1993: 106-7, 28) indicates that the search for freedom, dignity and security is moved from its usual socio-political setting to a metaphysical one. On a symbolic level, Saber's search for his father in the real world reflects humanity's yearning for metaphysical truth (or the father in Heaven), with reference to the Christian tradition. There is no metaphysical answer to man's issues on this planet. Heaven cannot grant us freedom, dignity, and security. They can only be gained by working for them on Earth. In the end, Saber's search (physical or spiritual) does not take him to his father, and he becomes involved in criminal activity. El-Enany(1993: 28) also points out the implied message of the novel that the way to freedom, dignity and security is possible and available through a loving girl and productive work.

Therefore, through this novel, it seems that Mahfouz is campaigning for faith in God, which is proven by living a life full of love and hard work. He emphasizes Islamic teachings regarding marriage as an institution that accommodates love for the opposite sex as worship. In fact, work is not only a call from God, as Weber (1865) called it, but also, in Islam, life is work and values cannot be said to be alive and meaningful until they manifest themselves in good concrete activities. The core of the holy faith is faith and humanitarian work (good deeds) as shown in the Qur'ān.(al-'Asr/103: 1-3) (see Madjid, 1992). Because it attaches great importance to work ('amal) as evidence of faith, Islam seems to adhere to the principle: "I work, I exist". In the novel it is narrated that, in seeking his father as a symbol of God (a happy life spiritually and materially), Saber meets Karima, whose morals reflected a way of life that is full of attitudes with no integrity, and is based on opportunism and conspiracy, while Elham embodies a diametrically opposite morality of sincerity, honesty, hard work and independence. However, sadly, Saber chooses Karimah, which takes him further away from his father, as a symbol of God, and into a life that is not according to his moral/spiritual demands, as well as materially, which makes him unhappy, ending his life on the gallows. As if through this plot, Mahfouz is resonating the Qur'ān (al-Shams/91: 8-10) "So He (God) has inspired in him (human souls) evil and piety. Fortunate is the one who purifies his (soul). And it's a loss for those who pollute it". Presumably, one of the things that makes Saber follow the bad path by choosing Karimah was her physical attractiveness, which is connected to illicit money, drug dealing and prostitution that her mother managed, even though Elham was available, but her soul was not strong enough to be able to guide her body (see Mahfūz, 2008).

In addition to the characters of the father, a symbol of God, and Elham, a symbol of piety/spirituality, the language used by Mahfouz in the novel also shows the same thing, a symbol of God/spirituality. The language style of the novel is not different to his other fictional works, where he also uses a standard literary language, but he also employs colloquialisms, when needed in the dialogue. Combining these different linguistic elements, Mahfouz produces a supple and vivid literary prose (Milson, 1970: 246). The style of the novel also includes many shades of meaning reminiscent of Sufi terminology. For example, the title *al-Ṭarīq*, a masculine form of *al-Ṭarīqa*, is the name of a Sufi order. In addition, the fact that Saber's grandfather made his fortune by selling liquor can be interpreted as an allusion to Sufi ecstatic experiences or states. (Kilpatrick, 1974: 102).

4. The Symbolic Dimension of Social Problems (Political, Economic, and Cultural)

Some critics have also interpreted the main characters of the novel as embodying the symbolic dimension of a socio-political problem, representing Egyptian society at the time the novel was written, or even earlier. For instance, Basima Omran has been said to symbolize the levels of corruption in Egypt. Fū'ād Dawwāra notices a similar symbolism in *Mahuz's Zuqaq al Midaq* or *Midaq Alley* and *as-Samman wal kharif* or the *Quail Autumn*. In these two novels, fallen woman are seen to be a symbol of an occupied Egypt of dictators and political opportunists (Dawwāra, 1964: 145; 1972: 155).

The passing away of Basīma, Saber's mother, represents the end of an era in Egypt. Even after her death, Basima's influence continues to persist throughout the rest of the novel. Her close friend, lady Nabawiya still practices her profession and Alexandria is still full of drug dealers, hustlers and pimps. Basima has also left behind the effects of her bad influence on her son, Saber. She has loved him and spoiled him. As he grows up, she satisfies his every need by giving him money to an extent that he becomes totally dependent on her and is unable to earn an honest living. At the same time, she is careful to keep him away from her profession and maintains him in an apartment in Nabi Danial Street. Otherwise, he could have become a crook, pimp, hustler, or a murderer. Later on, we see how Basima is resurrected with her badness and evil in the character of Karima, and this would play the biggest role in the destruction of Saber (Dawwāra, 1964: 145).

Saber, therefore, is symbolically the son of corrupt Egypt who has inherited from his mother a brothel, her beauty, and a portion of the money. He was left with no options except to find his father, whom he thought had died before he was born. This lost father has another symbolic meaning to the one already given. Mahfouz's mother says to Saber from her deathbed of his father, "[He] is a man of means in every sense of the word. At that time, he was a student, but even then, when he had the means and prestige... he loved me. I was a beautiful,

lost girl. He kept me secretly in a golden cage". He married her but did not divorce her. She ran away after some years. She was pregnant then. She ran away with a man from the gutter. This happened thirty years ago.

El-Enany claims that of all the 1960s novels, *The Search* is the novel with the least direct bearing on the political context of Egypt at that time (El-Enany, 1993: 106). However, *The Search* has generated political representations. Mahfouz had represented the romantic relationship as a symbol of politics in his previous novel, *as-Samman wal Kharif*, or *the Quail and Autumn*. This is made clear through Karima's romantic relationships in the novel. She symbolizes political opportunism, flattering every new lord. She tells Saber in her first meeting, "When I saw you coming ten days ago, I told myself, this is my man". Accordingly, her first husband can be deemed as the symbol of colonialism, a relationship she retained in spite of her new marriage with the sick old owner of the hotel and her romantic relationship with Saber. In this case, the old man could be a symbol of the collapsed power of capitalism. Mohamed el-Sawi may be the symbol of bureaucracy, which serves both capitalism and opportunism. Aly Seriakous is perhaps the symbol of the people who serve the three classes together (Dawwāra, 1964: 149).

The character of the beggar also plays a symbolic role. He is the first person Saber meets in Cairo. At the same time, Saber comes across Karima at the entrance of the hotel, who arouses his old bohemian memories: "A beggar was sitting cross-legged near the doorway chanting a religious song." The beggar's voice accompanies Saber in every crisis and critical situation he encounters, as if within him representing the voice of his conscience and his corrupt inner nature, as opposed to his nicer outward appearance. He hears it only when he perpetrates a crime, and at the same time he sees the face of the beggar. The beggar was a crook and a hustler when he was young. The last meeting between Saber and the beggar takes place when Saber hurries to kill Karima as a punishment for her betrayal. In the midst of his escape, he ran into the beggar:

"Oh! Help! Please, please, I am blind."

"I'm sorry, it is very dark," he said as he hurried. Upon running into him, Saber shuddered and mumbled to himself, "That wretched beggar! He's everywhere!"

It is this incident of Saber running into the beggar that wakes the detective up who has been observing him from the hotel and ultimately leads to his conviction (Dawwāra, 1964: 150).

There is another view of symbolism in *al-Ṭarīq*, stating that it is a symbol of the old Egyptian culture. Mahfouz expresses, through *al-Ṭarīq* and *Hamas al Gunun* or *The Whispering of Madness*, the characteristic features of the Egyptians. Saber, the hero of the novel, represents this past Egypt, which is searching for an identity. The novel could be a contemporary image of Isis (an Egyptian Goddess), which was spoilt and corrupted through the different cultures and times. This explains why Basima lived in Alexandria, a historical Greek city, and why Mahfouz calls her the queen of the night. This night is seen to be a symbol of the cultures, which Egypt has experienced since it lost its independence and identity after the seizure of Alexander. This night lasted for twenty-five centuries (Hannā, 1964: 127).

Within this context, Sayed el-Reheimy is seen symbolically to be Osiris (an Egyptian God), whom Saber is searching for in order to find some sort of membership. Karima is a necessary expansion of Isis or Basima Omran. Elham is the daybreak, connecting her with the expected father, self, history and destiny, since Osiris is the father of all good things within us, such as beauty, goodness, peace, dignity and hope. The newspaper commentator is Tut (the God of wisdom), a blind journalist, which could be a reference to his keen insight. As for Sayed El-Reheimy's only hobby of courting women, this is a reference to the culture which Osiris spread among the old Egyptians, including art, singing and agriculture, which brought freedom, dignity, peace and goodness for all people. This interpretation of el-Reheimy's hobby is also confirmed when he gives the newspaper commentator a book titled, *How to Stay Young for a Hundred Years*, referring to the old Egyptians, clinging to eternity in spirit and body (Hannā, 1964: 127-9).

The title of the newspaper, for which Elham works, i.e. the Sphinx, also has a certain connotation. The names are usually significant as far as they say something about the personality of those who carry them. In this case, the Sphinx, which refers to a monument in front of the Great pyramid on the Gaza plateau, has a human head and lion's body, indicating extreme power and extreme wisdom, the two main elements of the old Egyptian Civilization, which lasted for about ten thousand years, one of the oldest civilizations of the world (Hannā, 1964: 127-9).

Another interesting symbolic reading of Saber is Egypt after the 1919 revolution, searching for the correct way to freedom, dignity and peace. Saber's search target, el-Reheimy, can symbolize Egypt's search for a future of freedom, dignity and security. el-Reheimy also represents a number of noble values, which Egypt seeks. The right way to hold such values is a challenge. In search of a better future, Saber comes across Karima and Elham. Thus, Egypt has either the way of Karima, including corruption, opportunism, conspiracy and relying on others, or the way of Elham, comprising sincerity, honesty, work and self-reliance. Yet, Mahfouz indicates that self-reliance does not mean isolation and seclusion, through the lawyer Tantawi's comment on Saber's statement "It seems there is no use relying on anyone" by saying "There is only use in what is reasonable", Mahfouz's message is that absolute self-reliance is impossible in the twentieth century world. There should be a reasonable degree of cooperation with others, but it should be in favour of Egyptians, otherwise it will lead to a loss of freedom, dignity and security. Mahfouz does not want a tragic future for Egypt like that of Saber (Abdul-Qadir, 1997: 29-30)

Saber's dream, in which he sees his father, mentioned below, also has an element of symbolism in the loss of prospects of leading an honest life. In the dream he also imagines that his father is Elham's father, who denies him and discards all documents, which links Saber to him and proves his identity. Saber is left with no choice but to choose Karima's way, which led him to crime (Al-Rabī', 1989: 683).

The novel also points out Egypt's other social problems: that the law can be ignored and set aside by the powerful and wealthy. Saber's

father, with his wealth and power, could keep his freedom, in spite of the fact that he had many problems because of his countless love affairs in different countries. His mother, because of her prestige was also able to challenge the laws of the state within sight and sound of the authorities (Kilpatrick, 1974: 102).

There is also a reference to the tragedy of contemporary, postmodern man, who feels that life is nothing but nonsense and without purpose. Saber, the hero of the novel represents a man who is worried and searching for something to belong to and thus feel secure. The mockery of life is represented in episodes of the story. Saber succumbs to Karima, letting her manipulate him into killing her husband. Elham, on the other hand, offers him money to start a new life, but he prefers Karima, indicating that evil triumphs over goodness in some people. Thus, we are left to wonder whether evil is greater in us than good. Not everyone leads a life of crime and goes astray from the path of virtue. Only the people, who live a harsh life and are afflicted by extreme poverty, find their faith shaking, become hopeless, and lose interest in life. Man tends to escape from the bitter reality, where he lives, and the way of escaping is to say that life is purposeless and without meaning (Mikhīmar, 1964: 355-6).

Likewise, Hanna (1964: 135-6) observes that all Egyptians have a historical illness, i.e. searching for the father, origin or this history to be a member thereof. We look for roots. We live as parasites on other civilizations which themselves, in earlier times, have lived as parasites upon us. We live only in the present and separate it from the past, and this brings about a personal crisis, where we fail to have any self-awareness. Yet, the novel could be a reference to returning to our great history, which started before the dynasties. We have to discover this history and live with it, as we do with the river Nile. When we know our past and relate it to the present, we will find freedom, dignity and security along with Saber. When we have the self-awareness, we will find the way to work with others for them and ourselves.

Some critics assess that *al-Ṭarīq*'s novels not only discuss contemporary Egyptian social problems but also try to solve them. 'Abd al-'Azīz Maḥmūd, for example, observes that Mahfouz could link the symbolism with the reality in an impressive way. *al-Ṭarīq* is the way between the past and future. Finding the way out is our perception of life and this is through conceiving a great conflict within the same society. The contemporary man is connected with his past. Freedom must be guaranteed in order to have dignity. Dignity is also necessary to attain peace. However, the world is filled with obstacles, blocking our way to freedom, dignity and peace. To reach Sayed el-Reheimy is to reach our lost ideal world for which we struggle and Saber's father for Mahmud is a symbol of the lost ideal world of ancient Egypt (Maḥmūd, 1964: 46).

Saber fails midway before achieving his principal goal. He is waiting for death. Basima does the same by revealing the truth to her son and passes away. Sayed el-Reheimy was lost thirty years ago, and nothing is left of him except the wedding photo. El-Reheimy's family is dying and collapsing, one after the other, while seeking a stable life. Mahfouz refers to our lives in the twentieth century, where we are unable to secure peace and happiness. Our lives are fraught with countless problems and anxieties, arising from wars, catastrophes, spite. However, he shows that we must struggle to find a way out of these problems, even if that involves encountering death. We have to live our lives in spite of all existent problems and difficulties, because life must continue. 'Abd al-'Azīz Maḥmūd summed up his study of *al-Ṭarīq* with Liwīs 'Awad's statement (Maḥmūd, 1964: 47):

Mahfouz presents to us... a new stage and face in this fascinating kind of literature, i.e. the literature of man's search for the unseen (this includes mental images of the lost ideal world). If we consider it realistically, we will experience the tragedy of man in reality, but if we consider it symbolically, we will probe into the secrets of the unseen excessively.

5. The Symbolic Dimension of Psychological Problems

Like other Mahfouz's novels, *The Search* has been interpreted in a variety of ways. For instance, it has been construed as a dream, a phenomenon usually the object of psychological study. This can be inferred from Saber's conversation with the lawyer Mohamed Tantawi.

The whole story is like a dream; I came from Alexandria in search of my father. Strange occurrences took place which caused me to forget my original task and finally I found myself in jail.

This dream commences when Saber speaks to himself in jail, where he feels regretful and depressed.

And where are you, now, Saber? In jail, alone. No one visits you. You have no one. Elham is now a distant dream, a vision. She must have got over her failed relationship. She must be cursing it... but in jail you are liberated from the vicissitudes of life, just like the womb. Saber was arrested after murdering his mistress. Saber, there is a story behind him.

The interpretation of *al-Ṭarīq* as a dream is also affirmed in a wonderful dream Saber has after spending a lovely night with Karima (Mahfouz 1987: 40-2). Mahfouz's statement, when he talks about Saber, can serve as a commentary on this dream, as follows:

Every night the dreams haunt him. He wakes up tired and depressed, a silence continuously surrounding him. A deepening, grave-like silence. Similar to a wave before it rolls and breaks. What then? Another wave follows. His father appears in every dream. But *The Search* is no longer the main aim of his life. Rather, it is the snatched moments of love. Love is dark, savage, and passionate with an animal desire. Darkness brings back the memories of his early youth when he was almost fatally ill. (Mahfouz, 1987: 43).

Another statement by Karima, when she pushes Saber to kill her husband, Kahlil Abul Naga, confirms that *al-Ṭarīq* is a dream: "The trouble

is we dream whenever we fail to find a way out, an escape. Dreams are our only escape from reality". Saber also says:

Where is reality and where is dreams? My mother, whose last words are still echoing in your ears now lies dead.
Your dead father is seeking resurrection. And you penniless, persecuted, taint with crime and sin, looking for a
miracle that will lead you to a life of honor, freedom and peace of mind.

We should not forget that the story in *al-Tarīq* takes place in autumn and night plays a serious role, which is embodied by Karima. When we are unable to secure freedom, dignity and peace, we rush into night in order to dream (Hannā, 1964: 130).

Basima's death has pushed Saber to this dream, which begins in the cemetery: "A wailing heralded the entrance of a group of blind men who surrounded the grave and sat cross-legged..." Death, night and prison are the elements of this dream, i.e. death in the beginning, night when the crime was committed, and prison the end. In the prison, death appeared and night came and Saber wanted unconsciously to search for a symbol in order to get rid of death, night, and prison and that symbol was his father; the symbol of dignity, freedom and security. This tripling, as Tawfīq Hanna put it, is a symbol of Egypt's civilization and history (Hanna, 1964: 135). The novel presents us with several mysteries. Did Karima really want to be with Saber or did she just use him to murder her husband? Sayed el-Reheimy remains a mystery, as well: "No one knows whether Karima was truthful or a liar and whether el-Rhimi exists or not". These two questions occupy Saber's mind at the end (Al-Rabī', 1989: 691).

The mother dies and leaves her son an unusual legacy: a stained and shameful past, a hazardous future and a shaky present. He needs to search for the meaning of life and the way of freedom, dignity and peace, the psychological sides that everyone is looking for. His mother does not teach him to be self-sufficient, resulting in his failure to earn a decent livelihood. Upon her death, Saber loses whatever he received from her, including love and care. He is left alone to face the harshness of life and provide for himself, something which he never felt he had to do before, with a small amount of money and a vague promise of a father he had never known and is thought to be dead. The only evidence of her marriage is the marriage certificate and a picture of her wedding. Saber, therefore, must begin by looking for his father, and that was the way he chose for himself (Al-'Ālim, 1989: 178-9).

First Saber looks for his father in Alexandria, then in Cairo. In Cairo, Saber comes across Karima, a woman of fire, who brings back memories from his past in Alexandria, such as the salinity of the sea, the dark corners in town and his escapades. Karima was the wife of the owner of the hotel, where Saber was staying. Her husband was eighty and had promised to leave her all his wealth if she could prove to be faithful to him throughout his life. His health promises him a longer life. Saber presents her a way to renege on that promise. They establish a romantic relationship and begin meeting with each other secretly in Saber's room, every night. Finally, they conceive a plot to murder Karima's husband and plan to get married to each other. Saber substitutes Karima's love for his relationship with his unfound father (Al-'Ālim, 1989: 178-9). Later, he meets Elham, a different woman whose sweet nature is so unlike the smelting fire in Karima. He meets her in the newspaper agency, which he frequents to post missing-person ads about his father:

His ideas of the opposite sex were firmly entrenched. They were beautiful, savage beings looking for love and passion, without principles or scruples. His mother and her circle of friends reinforced this idea. However, he did not undress her in his mind, as he usually did with any member of the opposite sex. There was something more to this girl. A certain mystery, a certain magic. Some secret he had never come across before. He would not be able to enjoy her as he had others, savagely, passionately with an animal's lust. She was unique. Something quite new to him. (Mahfouz, 1987: 28-29).

He establishes a relationship with her, very different from his relationship with Karima. Elham too had no father, but it does not bother her and she does not look for him either. She knows where he has been living since he left her mother. Her uncle wanted to take her to see him, but she agreed with her mother, "Her work was more important and reliable than her father". She once rejected a suitor who wanted her to leave her job. Throughout the novel she often states, "Work is the only solution to our problem". She was helping Saber to find a job, and often the conversation between them would center on work:

Elham: What have you been doing?

Saber: Nothing.

Elham: Why do not you look for a job?

Saber: There is no good in any job that does not come by way of my father.

Elham: I do not see how.

Saber: this is true; believe me.

Elham: You can start a business.

Saber: I have neither capital nor experience!

Elham: A job then!

Saber: I have no qualifications, nor recommendations.

(After a short pause) I am good for nothing (Mahfouz, 1987: 51).

The truth presents itself before his eyes but too late. Having committed his crime, Saber finds Elham to be a capital acquired not through theft or murder but through true love. He cries, "This is love, freedom, dignity and peace". al-'Ālim remarks that Mahfouz depicts the

negative aspects of human life so as to establish a more positive fruitful attitude, which becomes his message to humanity, i.e. the true way is working, sharing and loving (al-‘Ālim 1989: 183-4).

It is remarkable that sex and crime are the two outstanding elements of the events. They are however, presented in a way different from the one in pornography or police stories (al-Rabī‘, 1989: 674). We can also see an element of irony presented through the contradictory situations/psychological choices in the novel. The first is that Basima Omran, who is careful to keep her son away from her sex work at the same time defends her profession: “Your mother is far more honorable than their mothers. I mean it. They do not know, but if it were not for their mothers, my business would have floundered... Such people have no right to speak ill of your mother, for she is far more honorable than their mothers, wives and daughters. Believe me, if it were not for them I would be out of business”. Saber refuses to practice his mother’s profession in spite of several tempting offers, indicating some goodness in him. Later on, he enters into an adulterous relationship with Karima and kills her husband. There is also a contradiction between the original aim of the journey, which is obtaining freedom, dignity, and peace of mind and the final outcome of it.

Dates can be also an important tool, contributing to the interpretation of the novel. Dates can be the first step to knowing the unknown father. The mother mentions 1952 on her deathbed, meaning that she met him in 1922, a year in which Egypt, witnessed the positive consequences of the 1919 revolution and considered to be one of the most fruitful periods in the history of modern Egypt. These post-revolutionary victories, however, were followed by several debacles and unjust measures taken by the British, following the assassination of a British Lord in November 1924, which resulted in the downfall of the government, the dissolution of the parliament, and the annulment of the constitution. This is analogous to Basima’s flight from her loving influential husband. Thus one of the most prosperous periods of the Egyptian history came to an end. Saber’s mother, while on her deathbed, mentions this period of her life when she was the wife of the powerful and wealthy husband. She considered her husband to be the only means of achieving freedom, dignity and peace of mind. This meaning is confirmed through so many references in the novel that the name of Sayed el-Reheimy became psychologically and explicitly equivalent to freedom, dignity and peace of mind (Dawwāra, 1964: 145-6).

6. Conclusion

Based on the explanation above, the conclusion that can be drawn is that *al-Tarīq’s* novel, *The Search*, is Mahfouz’s philosophical symbolic novel, like *Aulād Hāratina*, his first philosophical symbolic novel. In it there are many symbols, where the characters, settings, plot, language style, main theme, and some parts of the other novel texts contain a vague big philosophical meaning or idea, because it is hidden behind the text. Through Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory, this article seeks to find meaning, not only its denotative meaning but also its connotative meaning based on existing text fragments (*lexia*). So, behind the novel text can also be found the symbolic dimensions of the novel, both in relation to symbols of God/spirituality and symbols of social and social problems (politics, economy, culture and psychology).

Saber’s father figure can be seen as a symbol of God/spiritual, as God is called ‘Sayyed’ in Arabic. The story of the father figure is also similar to Adam as the human father on earth who is the image of God as referred to in the hadith. The novel also tells that Saber’s father did not raise Saber, which could be seen as a parallel to God, who asks humans to live independently. Interestingly, in the novel it is emphasized that finding a father as a symbol of God can only be done through hard work and living with true love, as emphasized in neo-sufism Islam.

In addition, the novel also reflects the ways in which there are symbols of Egypt’s social problems. Saber reflects the corrupt Egyptian character that is a reflection of Western colonialism which has a strong influence on contemporary Egypt, although there are also hotel owners who reflect the power of local capitalism and also el-Sawi as a complicated bureaucratic figure who shackles Egypt. At the end of the novel, it is said that the ideal attitude is an independent attitude from anything that has a strong but bad influence on Egypt. There are only state commentators who are good at talking, as symbolized by the character of a legal expert journalist who chats to Saber in prison at the end of the novel, but does not provide a solution. Thus, some analyzes say that the father figure is a symbol of the lost Egyptian ideal world. Finally, the novel depicts contemporary Egyptian problems. For example, dreams, in which Saber’s father appears, and Saber’s feeling that life in its totality is a dream, suggest that there is a difficulty engaging with reality and living in the present. The main characters embody psychological contradictions that can be said to parallel the problems of the Arabic state in the contemporary world.

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