

# **The Role of Place in Shaping Narrative and Culture in Palace Walk**

## **(*Bayn al-Qusrayn*) by Naguib Mahfouz**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the importance of place in the novel *Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*), the first part of the Cairo Trilogy by the great Nobel Prize-winning author Naguib Mahfouz. This study analyses the novel's artistic and aesthetic significance as a pivotal narrative device that shapes events and character development. The study highlights Mahfouz's use of place as a key element in character conflict and dramatic tension, in addition to framing events within a cultural and social context that reflects the reality of Egypt before and after British colonialism. Moreover, various locations were analysed, from the Egyptian street to homes and rooms within homes, and even mosques, and the description of the shrine of Imam Hussein ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Furthermore, the study focused on the narrative's interaction between place and time. It sheds light on Mahfouz's use of positive and negative places as narrative tools to enhance the reader's understanding of the characters and conflicts within the novel.

**Keywords:** Place, narrative, *Palace Walk*(*Bayn al-Qusrayn*), dramatic conflict, positive and negative places

## 1. Introduction

Naguib Mahfouz is one of the most significant figures in the Arabic language. He has enriched the Arabic novel library with many novels, including: *New Cairo* 1945, *Khan El-Khalili* 1946, *Midaq Alley* 1947, and *The Cairo Trilogy: Palace Walk* 1956, *Palace of Desire* 1957, *Sugar Street* 1957, and *Thartharah Fawq Al-Nil* 1966, etc. Naguib Mahfouz's Trilogy is closely related to the novels that followed it, such as *The Thief and the Dogs* 1961, *The Quail and the Autumn* 1962, and *The Beggar* 1965, as the Trilogy is considered a journey through the conscience and thoughts of the Egyptian people represented in the family of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad and external events. Anyone who reads the novel *Palace Walk (Bayn al-Qusrayn)* will find that Naguib Mahfouz has perfected the craft of the novel and taken care of its artistic architecture and special techniques. Through his novelistic art, he established the requirements for fame, making it enigmatic, thereby confirming the importance of these novels on the one hand and advancing Arabic novelistic taste on the other.

Naguib Mahfouz's ability to deal with his fictional subject was evident in his skill in distributing light and colour, and in his ability to clarify the characteristics of his characters in proportion and cohesion with the linguistic formulation and dialogue that kept pace with each character. Mahfouz meticulously crafted his novels, infusing them with his artistic vision, intellectual depth, and emotional resonance. Each element in Mahfouz's novels reflects his personal and creative journey. One of the elements that attracted his attention was place, so that the names of some of his novels were place characters, such as *Palace of Desire*, *Sugar Street*, *Khan El-Khalili*, *Midaq Alley*, etc. (Eid, 1974, p.8)

The spatial landmarks in *Palace Walk (Bayn al-Qusrayn)*, selected as a model for this study, are distributed among the street, houses, rooms, windows, rooftop, shops, schools, cafés, taverns, mosques, minarets, and churches. Each of these locations plays a fundamental role in shaping the narrative and advancing the unfolding events. The spatial equivalent is defined as "The entity without which nothing happens; it is a form of the existence of matter." (Al-Nasir, 1989, p. 5)

The condition for the events in the novel is that they occur with certain features, regardless of whether the place is real or imaginary. What is essential is its ability to

absorb the events in detail. The loss of the narrative work in the place undermines its privacy and authenticity. It turns into a floating subject with no roots. The novelist's process of selecting a setting mirrors that of a painter or photographer, who first frames a location before stepping back. (Khalaf, 1985, p.6)

The real events, in particular, need a specific ground on which to take place, and the loss or neglect of this ground cuts the event off from its reality and distances it from its material being. It also separates the elements of the artistic work because if they do not fall on a specific, clearly defined ground, they lose their names and important details. If art is far from containing the place, it loses its realism. (Burnouf, 1991, p.99)

Place is a fundamental element of artwork, evoking a sense of belonging, time, and locality. It is the setting where events cannot unfold. Some novelists embed their homeland and their characters' ambitions into their works. Making place a reality – a symbol – a blend of ancient and modern history, composed of real and imagined cities, villages, and sectors. (Al-Nasir, 1989, p.85)

A novel relies on narrative techniques that immerse the reader in its world. The description in the realistic novel takes on aesthetic dimensions that are fundamentally dependent on what it provides us with in terms of insights into the character or the event's location. Narration should align with the nature of the place; some places are longed for but unseen, while others are seen but not longed for. The novelist who narrates in the third person is often neutral about where the events occur, in contrast to the speaking novelist who speaks within their framework. (Yaqtin, 1993, p.75)

Place serves as the backdrop for novel events, whereas time is reflected through the unfolding of those events. In contrast, time is described in these events themselves and their development. If time represents the line on which the events and their development proceed, then place appears on this line, accompanies it, and contains it. Place is the framework in which events occur, and there is a difference in how time and place are perceived: time is linked to psychological perception, while place is linked to sensory perception. Psychological perception may be projected onto tangible things to clarify and express them. (Yaqtin, 1993, p.69)

Time is defined by life existence, while place derives its significance from lived experience, creating an independent relationship between them. The characters and

events cast their shadows on the place, and we look forward to judging them by their ages, characteristics, relationships with the world, social classes, wealth, and poverty. Place is not a rigid physical structure but a narrative tool infused with meaning, shaping events, characters, and dialogues. Naguib Mahfouz's choice of place was not arbitrary but rather subject to aesthetic and artistic considerations. (Qasim, 1984, p.76)

## **2. The Places of the Novel: Their Significance and Artistic Function:**

### **2.1 Street in *Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*)**

The novel *Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*) is named after a street in Cairo where Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad resides, a character who plays a central role in the setting. The events of this novel take place between 1917 and 1919. It tells the story of a family from the petty-bourgeois commercial class that clings to tradition. The entire family is dominated by the personality of its head, Al-Sayyad Ahmad, that strict, authoritarian father who seems to have no heart but is not devoid of a sense of his responsibilities in some respects. (Khalaf, 1985, p.174)

In this novel, Naguib Mahfouz adopted a realistic style to describe aspects of life in the Al-Hussein neighbourhood, in general, and in *Palace Walk* in particular. However, his primary focus was on the emotional depth of characters, challenging the notion that he is merely a realist critiquing society for reform. Still, the detailed, delicate images of the life of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad were the first reason for issuing this judgment on him. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.11)

While *Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*) maintains a realist approach, Mahfouz's imaginative narration elevates the street beyond direct realism, blending fact and fiction. Reality and imagination intertwine so seamlessly that distinguishing Mahfouz's creativity from actual events becomes challenging for the reader.

The street in *Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*) was the cradle of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's house, where the novel's events occurred. Perhaps we can record for Naguib Mahfouz this narrative brilliance: the place charged with events flows in the course of a perfect narrative presentation, so that he does not invade it or attack it when he invades it.

*Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*) serves as an introduction and crucial step toward the novels' focal setting, the house of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad. In this way, Naguib

Mahfouz's ability to extend a transparent, sometimes imperceptible wire between his places, whether they are close or far apart, is revealed. Through the tension or novelistic connection between the areas, we find that *Palace Walk (Bayn al-Qusrayn)* was not a title with loose endings or without roots in the soil of the novel, but rather, it interacts with the house and the events that take place in it.

The Mashrabiya in Ahmad Abdel Jawad's house is the window that connects Amina, the mother, Khadija, and Aisha to the outside world. It was nothing but a world Palace Walk. The street in Palace Walk is the whole world in the eyes of Amina, who would "Rush to the Mashrabiya and extend her wandering eyes through its holes to the lights of the carriages and cafés and strain her ears to catch a laugh or a commodity to catch her breath." (Ragheb, 1993, p.127)

Palace Walk is more than just a street; it symbolises Egypt's essence, becoming a vast literary world within the novel. The street was not an empty, lifeless place devoid of movement. Rather, it pulsed with life, a life embodied in the glowing lamps, the clatter of the carriages, and the whispers of nights' wanderers, as it was described in the novel: "The Mashrabiya was located in front of the Palace Walk Fountain, and beneath it met the Nahhasin Street, which descends to the south, and the Palace Walk Street, which ascends to the north. So the road to its left appeared narrow and winding, shrouded in darkness that thickened at its tops, where the windows of the sleeping houses looked out, and below it at its bottom, from the lights cast upon it by the lamps of the handcarts, the coffee shops, and some of the shops that continued to stay up until dawn." (Mahfouz, 2002, p.7)

Mahfouz's *Palace Walk (Bayn al-Qusrayn)* is a dynamic space, alternating between moments of vibrant motion and profound silence. "The sleeping windows and the houses leaning on both sides of the road are like a column of soldiers." (Mahfouz, 2002, p.6)

She paused to escape the tension and rigid order. Naguib Mahfouz linked the comfort of the houses, expressed in their lack of order, to Amina's aspiration for freedom, burdened by the house's order and the laws imposed by Al-Sayyad Abd Al-Jawad. The place is in harmony with the character moving through it and consistent with the event, giving the narrative its strength. When the carriage drove to the street, Palace

Walk and Al-Sayyad Abd Al-Jawad headed towards the door. The woman left the Mashrabiya in the room, took the lamp, went to the hall, then to the outer hallway, until she stood at the top of the stairs, and the sound of the outer door closing reached her. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.11)

The closing of the outer door symbolises Amina's diminishing freedom, in contrast to Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's growing dominance over the space, as he penetrated the outer space, heading towards the house, symbolising his absolute authority. Though she lived there, Amina owned nothing in this space except the small opening that allowed her glimpses of the outside world, and the outside was nothing but a street, shops, a minaret, and a bathroom.

## **2.2 Houses**

*Palace Walk (Bayn al-Qusrayn)* is rich with social spaces, primarily represented by various houses. The novel features nearly five houses, with the most prominent being Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's house, the primary setting for key events. Among the neighbours' houses were those of Al-Sayyad Muhammad Radwan, the Shawkat family, Maryam's mother, Amina's mother, Yassin's mother, and Zubeida.

The variety of houses emphasises the central role of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's house in the novel. The houses above did not significantly contribute to the events, but they fit within the framework of describing the place. They did not add any influential or effective additions to the event and conflict in the novel. However, they remained secondary, influencing Aish's perception of her family's house as she compared it to her new home with the Shawkat family, when "Aisha talked about the new house, and the Mashrabiya overlooking the gate of al-Mutawali, and the minarets that rise from close by, and the continuous stream of passers-by, everything around her reminds her of the old house, no matter how many paths and buildings surround it, there is no difference except for the names and some secondary landmarks." (Al-Hamdani, 2000, p.277)

Hence, Naguib Mahfouz endowed his fictional setting with interpretative power, integrating it into the narratives' development. The Shawkat family house was transformed into a tool for intellectual and tasteful change, no longer just a place of walls, doors, and ceilings. As for the house of Amina's mother, Naguib Mahfouz

employed it effectively in his artistic narrative, placing Amina between the old place where she was born and raised within its walls and the new place where she married, gave birth, and submitted to its laws. Amina found herself torn between an old home where freedom thrived and a new space that confined and suffocated her. This problem, created by Naguib Mahfouz, gave the novel new impetus and introduced one of its conflict factors. The old bed, with its faded pillars and the worn-out carpet, now stripped of its fibres and frayed at the edges, still retained its floral patterns, preserving traces of red and green hues. It was a reference to where Amina was born. (Al-Hamdani, 2000, p.195)

In Naguib Mahfouz's engineering of the novel's place, we find one manifestation of the novel's conflict. For Mahfouz, the place has two aspects: an old place that conveys a sense of historical continuity, while new spaces reflect the evolution of life over time. The interaction between places mirrors the characters' conflicts and aligns with the narrative's progression.

In *Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*) by Naguib Mahfouz, the setting plays a dynamic role in shaping events and characters, rather than serving as a neutral backdrop. It carries an influential energy that intertwines with the narrative's progression, reinforcing the connection between the environment and the unfolding drama. The novel's spaces actively shape the plot, guiding its course and deepening its depth.

Kamal was indifferent to Muhammad Radwan's house, except for a small section at the top of the Mashrabiya that caught his interest, which may not exceed a few centimetres, in which a pigeon sits, embracing its chicks, since the house was not strange to him. He would often pass by its small courtyard when a wheeled cart with broken wheels would be tucked away in a corner. He would ride it, using his imagination to fix its wheels and move it wherever he wanted. He would often go between its rooms without permission and was welcomed and teased by the mistress of the house and her daughter. Furthermore, to this, particular objects in the house left a lasting impression on Kamal, particularly the doves nest at Mashrabiya's peak connected to Maryam's room, the edge of which appeared above the corner of the Mashrabiya attached to the wall like pieces of a circle's circumference around which the nest and feathers were intertwined, and from which the tail of the dove or its young would sometimes appear, however it



was positioned. He gazed at it, torn between the impulse to play with it and the restraint instilled by his mother. Furthermore, the kidnapping of the young ones, and the other which was acquired from his mother stopped him at the limit of looking forward and sympathy and imaginative participation in the life of the dove and her family, and as a picture of the ambassador Aziza hung in Maryam's room, also bright in colour, radiant in skin, and beautiful in features, surpassing in her beauty the beauty whose picture he saw every afternoon in Matou Sian's shop, so he kept looking at her, wondering about her story, so Maryam would tell him of her news what she knew and what she did not know with a slip of the tongue, which she would take and monopolise. (Al-Hamdani, 2000, pp.126-127)

Naguib Mahfouz's capture of this place and his association with Kamal's pleasure confirmed the truth of the relationship between Kamal the child and the innocent dove, and between childhood and innocence – an eternal bond embodied by Naguib Mahfouz in his novelistic art. Kamal's admiration extends to the picture in Maryam's room, possibly marking the early formation of a concept linking feminine purity with artistic appreciation, as the neighbour's daughter.

As for the house of the prostitute Zubeida, the novel's hero, Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, is distributed in many places and has many meanings. From the family house, Amina's house, where Al-Sayyad Ahmad set his strict laws, and between Zubeida's house, which is corrupt and the shop, which is the source of livelihood and earnings, and between the shrine of Imam Hussein for worship, this house, Zubeida's house or a place called the party hall, the house of the prostitute Zubeida. It represents the negative place in this novel. (Al-Hamdani, 2000, p.92)

### **2.3 Rooms**

The general description of the house includes the internal description of its rooms. Every spatial area in the houses performs an artistic function separate from its other functions. Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's house features distinct spaces, including Amima's room, the living room, the living area, the dining space, the son's quarters, Fahmi, Kamal, and Yassin, the daughter's room, Aisha, and Khadija, and the oven room, each playing a unique role in the novel's narrative. Each of these places has its role and description in the novel.



Amina's room occupies a special place among the rooms of the house. Time and its dimensions, past, present, future, and place, with its diversity of old and new, negative and positive, artistic and practical, joyful and sad, were mixed. Amina was the axis that covered the space of this place with her weak, sometimes trembling steps after hearing the knock on the outer door. Naguib Mahfouz excelled in depicting Amina's room by saying: "The lamp lit the room, and it appeared with its wide square area, it has wide walls, it has high walls, and it has a ceiling with its parallel horizontal columns. However, it appeared to be the most generous furniture with its Shirazi rug, a large bed with four copper columns, a huge chest, and a long sofa covered with a small carpet with different patterns and colours." (Al-Hamdani, 2000, p.6)

This room encapsulates the emotions of an Egyptian woman whose heart brims with maternal affection, infused with religious sentiment and intertwined with the simplicity of traditional education, as seen in the Kuttab. Mahfouz masterfully interweaves spaces with characters, making each setting an integral part of their narrative presence and movement. The character of Amina was only complete with the Mashrabiya, the oven, and the room with the bed in one of the corners. It reminds her of the authority and power of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad.

The opinion of Siza Qasim, a researcher and author known for her work in literary studies, particularly in the field of semiotics and the construction of novels, in this novel, Siza Qasim, especially regarding the place, sees that Naguib Mahfouz intentionally omitted specific details in Amina's room, relying on general descriptions to stimulate the reader's imagination. The critic found fault with the novel in that, as she says, "If we read the description of Amina's room, we come across mention of the small pieces of furniture that are not absent from a room like this. Amina's room is extremely simplified, and nothing in it reminds her of its owner. Nothing in the rooms connects them to their owners or personal use. These elements are passive blending into the silent and understated decor." (Qasim, 1984, p.101)

While Siza Qasim critiques Mahfouz's minimalist description, his approach allows readers to engage more deeply with the setting, leaving their imagination to soar and contemplate what is not mentioned. This enriches the mind and incites imagination and exploration of places that can only be achieved with a critical and tasteful insight. If the

expression is correct, showing Amina's room in this miserable appearance was intended to express the realistic situation surrounding this character. Naguib Mahfouz did not impose on the place things that he could not bear, which may burden a place that could not bear them. The simplicity of Amina's room reflects her social standing and restrained lifestyle. What could be found in the room of a religious and devout woman who is only good at reading the Holy Quran, hostage to the will of her husband, whom she calls her master, and she does not know of Cairo and its landmarks except what appears to her from the windows of her house. Cairo has that noisy street, along with the many homes, minarets, and domes in that neighbourhood. It is crowded with historical mosques, but beyond that horizon is a world you are entirely ignorant of. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.47)

As for Naguib Mahfouz's references to other rooms, such as the bedroom, dining room, and reception room, indicate Amina's household troubles and the burden she endures in making food for the family with the help of the maid, Hanafi's mother. The importance of Yassin, Fahmi, and Kamal's rooms, Khadija and Aisha, but they did not rise to Amina's room, not the largest space in the house, but the largest space in the novel's description, to make the influential character of Amina and the place where she moves in harmony and equality. The diversity of rooms in Al-Sayyad Ahmad AbdAl-Jawad's house indicated the family's ample circumstances, wealth, and social status. This place was used artistically to indicate closeness to class, social status, poverty, and wealth.

## **2.4 The Roof**

Naguib Mahfouz left no space in his novelistic place except to serve the event. In the novel, the roof of the house serves a novelistic purpose: it is a shelter for domesticated animals and a space for Amina to breathe a sigh of relief when she meets the sky directly, as there is no veil between her and its inhabitants – stars and planets. The roof provides Amina with a sense of relief and joy, stemming from the absence of the confining walls that have long weighed upon her within the house.

The roof is a wide window for freedom, a wide and large window for liberty, as if it is an extension of the window, or the Mashrabiya is in her rooms, and what he imagines of holes when it is closed. Thus, a character's movement between spaces each distinct in form and structure correlates with shifts in psychological states, as Amina's

psychology and mood change with the change of her place, so Amina in the room is not Amina on The roof” and no wonder, for the roof is the new world that the big house had no covenant with before she joined it. She created it with her spirit as a new creation, while the house remained, preserving the form it had since ancient times. This roof with its inhabitants of chickens and pigeons, its trellised garden, her beautiful beloved world, and her favourite amusement in this great world of which she knows nothing. (Mahfouz, 2002, pp.34-35)

The place, and the whole house, Amina's house, changes in her eyes according to the presence of Sayyad Ahmed Abdel Jawad, whose mere presence in the house, awake or asleep, was enough to spread peace in her soul, whether the doors were opened or closed, whether the lamp was lit or extinguished. The house feels eerie and unsafe in her husband's absence, and Amina only finds peace when she hears the familiar rhythm of his knocks on the outer door. Her ear becomes accustomed to the rhythm of those knocks, which have become part of Sayyad Ahmed Abdel Jawad's personality. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.8)

What is recorded for Naguib Mahfouz is his keenness in describing the place. This description goes beyond its external material characteristics, as he addresses the issue of ownership of the place and its effect on the characters' psychological worlds. Amina's heart is torn between two feelings: the first is her feeling that she is the absolute lady in this house; no one disputes her, but rather her husband shares it with her, and she is waiting for children from him, and the second feeling that she is a representative of a sultan of whom she possesses nothing.

The house, furniture, and ownership belong to Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, which affirms the absolute authority of men in Eastern societies. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.17)

## **2.5 The Well**

Naguib Mahfouz's portrayal of the house and its rooms in *Palace Walk* (*Bayn al-Qusrayn*), with its well and its mouth sealed by a wooden beam, raises questions about its symbolic significance. In that house, Naguib Mahfouz wanted to make this well a symbol of life or a reference to the primitive water sources in Egyptian society at the time. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.17)

## 2.6 The Shop

At the threshold of Abd Al-Jawad's house, head to the street in Palace Walk, walking with Naguib Mahfouz. The first thing we encounter is the shop of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, which is the second place in the novel's hero's life. This place witnessed successive and diverse events, the most important of which was the news of the martyrdom of his son Fahmi in the demonstrations. Mahfouz masterfully crafts a prelude to this tragic news, weaving elements of suspense and foreshadowing into the narrative. The Palace Walk of Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad is a distance shortened by the news of the martyrdom. The hero's steps faltered in the distance, extending between the two places, after he was startled by the news of the martyrdom, until he raised his head, heavy with thought, and the Mashrabiya of the house came into view before his dark eyes. For the first time, Amina crossed his mind, and the weight of grief nearly made his legs falter. What could he say to her? How would she receive the news? The weak, delicate one who cries over the death of a bird! (Mahfouz, 2002, p.475)

In the narrative description of the shop, Naguib Mahfouz did not leave it devoid of furniture. He described it as "a medium-sized shop, its shelves and sides stacked with coffee, rice, flour, and soap bags. At its left corner, opposite the entrance, is the master's office with his notebooks, papers, and telephone. To the right of his seat is the green cabinet inside the wall, its appearance suggesting solidity and its colour reminiscent of financial papers. In the middle of the wall is a workshop above the desk on an ebony frame, engraved in the Basmala camouflaged in gold." (Mahfouz, 2002, p.37) Naguib Mahfouz's reference to the treasury in this place suggests the place's unseen luxury, as the treasury's financial capacity is supposedly vast, like the.

Naguib Mahfouz distributed his characters with unique narrative genius. He made those characters specialise in places, are connected to them, and grow within their walls or fences. Each character has their favourite place in harmony with their actions, inclinations, and psychological worlds. The shop is dedicated to Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, the tavern to Yassin, the shrine to Kamal, and the school to Fahmi. As for Aisha and Khadija, their place is the house, like Amina, their mother, and any Eastern mother.

## **2.7 The Tavern**

Mahfouz provided minimal direct description of the tavern, instead opting for subtle references to its atmosphere and significance. The tavern was more like a room, with a large lantern hanging from its ceiling. Wooden tables and bamboo chairs were placed on its sides, where a group of the townspeople, workers, and effendis sat. In the middle of the place, under the lantern, were a group of carnation pots. Despite the simplicity of its furniture, Naguib Mahfouz stressed the presence of a large lantern to dispel the darkness of this realistic and artistic place, since the tavern in Islamic societies is dark, even if a lantern lights it, because it is a symbol of the darkness of souls and their descent into the abyss of vice through it. In the face of the tavern, Naguib Mahfouz shines, and whoever shakes hands with the doors of the shrine of Imam Hussein (peace be upon him) rejoices. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.49)

## **2.8 The shrine of Imam Al-Hussein, peace be upon him.**

Kamal always sought refuge there, inhaling the fragrance of faith, purity, and spiritual clarity. How often did Kamal stand in front of the shrine, dreaming and thinking, wishing that his sight could penetrate the depths to see the beautiful face that his mother assured him had resisted throughout time with its divine secret, preserving its freshness and splendour as it illuminated the darkness of the resting place with the light of its forelock. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.49)

The shrine radiates a divine glow as if drawing its light from the heavens, reinforcing its spiritual significance in Kamal's perception. Amina often spoke of the shrine to Kamal, shaping his reverence for it so that each visit felt like a spiritual journey. He remained amazed by its dignity, presence, and spirituality. Naguib Mahfouz used Kamal as a mask and projected onto him childhood memories of accompanying his mother to the shrine, so Kamal is Naguib Mahfouz and no one else. (Shalq, 1979, p.46)

Beyond its descriptive authenticity, the shrine serves as a pivotal fictional space profoundly influencing the novel's events and characters. I say that the book has risen artistically and intellectually through this place and has risen from pure realism to a fertile imagination saturated with spirituality, so reality has mixed with imagination and blended until it is as if reality has become imagination for its purity, angel city,

heavenliness, and spirituality represented by Al-Hussein and his shrine, and their effect on the souls of Egyptians and the understanding of Kamal or Naguib Mahfouz he is.

Despite the sanctity of this place and its spiritual influence on Kamal and his father, it was not an excuse for Amina's mistake, which she committed by visiting the shrine without knowing that Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad was there. The poor woman, daughter of a Sheikh from Al-Azhar, remained, throughout the twenty years she spent in this street, intensely longing to visit her beloved, the holy martyr, in his mosque near her. However, her husband, that terrible jailer, stood between her and that wish... and this negligence almost led to her divorce. (Mahfouz, 2002, pp.11-12)

Her husband became angry with her and sent her back to her mother. Amina's action led to reprimand, reflecting the diminishing role of spiritual forces in Egyptian society. The inherited customs and traditions of domination and control were the strongest for Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad and all the members of the middle bourgeois class, despite their relative freedom, and their duality was embodied in his personality.

In addition to the shrine of Imam Al-Hussein, Naguib Mahfouz also mentioned religious landmarks with limited religious influence that do not rise to the level of the shrine, such as the Qalawun Mosque, the minarets, and the churches. Mahfouz's deep connection to the locales he inhabited is evident, as several of his novels unfold in the vicinity of the Al-Hussein shrine. His characters are from those around it, whether the poor and dervishes who stay up at night or the merchants whose shops surround it and who regularly perform Friday prayers there. (Khalaf, 1985, p.264)

## **2.9 The Coppersmiths' Road and Fahmi's Death**

Naguib Mahfouz gave the narrative evident attention, as he did not leave his description of the place alone but linked it to the event. The event and the place are connected, and influence flows between them. The importance of the place comes from the significance of the event. The streets of the Coppersmiths' Road, located south of Palace Walk Street, were built with demonstrations of joy and jubilation for the return of the Egyptian leader Saad Zaghloul from his exile in Malta.

Naguib Mahfouz, the owner of a penetrating novelistic mind, did not fail to establish a connection between his fictional places. The Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad

shop was a platform from which Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad looked out over the streets crowded with crowds celebrating the return of their leader, Saad Zaghloul. He used Al-Sayyad Ahmad as an artistic tool to describe the place extending from Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's shop to the end of the coppersmiths' road and its branches. He saw the effect of the happy news everywhere... in the shops whose entrances were blocked by their owners and customers as they exchanged congratulations in the windows where events crowded, and the ululations erupted from behind their quarrels, in the demonstrations that were formed improvised between the coppersmiths and the goldsmiths and the judge's house, chanting their hearts to Saad, Saad, Saad, then Saad, in the minarets whose balconies the muezzins climbed to thank, pray, and chant, in the carts and carts that gathered in the dozens carrying hundreds of women. Wrapped in sheets, dancing and singing patriotic songs. (Mahfouz, 2002, p.44)

The same streets that were built for the demonstration of joy and happiness are the same ones that embraced the bodies of those who fell dead by the bullets of the English, including Fahmi. The place changes its narrative function with changes in the event and the character that shapes its features. Fahmi's fall as a martyr gave Coppersmiths' Road real significance and shed light on it.

Fahmi's martyrdom is a turning point in the novel, and the conflict intensifies. One of the parties to the conflict disappeared from the stage, leaving behind questions that could not be answered except by the novel's heroes: Al-Sayyad Ahmad AbdAl-Jawad, Amina, Kamal, Aisha, Khadija, Yassin, the neighbours, and all the Egyptians. However, the crisis in the novel crystallised in Al-Sayyad Ahmad AbdAl-Jawad's inability to inform Amina of Fahmi's son's martyrdom. This meant, in the sad thoughts and feelings that he had... "He died... He died. Will I never see him again, neither in this house nor anywhere in the world? How can home excite without him? How can I continue being a father in his absence?" (Mahfouz, 2002, p.101)

Questions kept accompanying him as he headed home to knock on the door he used to knock on after returning from the shop, the nightclub, and the Imam Al-Hussein Shrine. However, the expressive narrative surprise was with Al-Sayyad Ahmad AbdAl-Jawad, who was burdened with grief over his son, so he did not knock on the door as usual but opened it with a key that he carried with the cruelty of the ominous news of



his son's martyrdom. He unlocked the door quietly, ensuring Amina would not be startled by the burden he carried; he was waiting for Fahmi and knew the time of his arrival from knocking. However, Fahmi was lying not far from her, but she could not see him because of social customs, and the father's strict policy might prevent it. "You will never see him... nor his body, nor his coffin, you cruel one." (Mahfouz, 2002, p.124)

As Al-Sayyad Abd Al-Jawad approached Amina, he whispered these words to himself, mourning his son. What increased Al-Sayyad Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's sadness were the echoes of a song that reached his ears as he entered the house, one Kamal had repeated: "Visit me once a year; it is forbidden to abandon me." Perhaps he said, "No more visits from now on to Fahmi, for he will not visit and will not be visited, for he has been absent from us in an eternal absence after which there will be no return." (Mahfouz, 2002, p.124) Thus, with a masterful stroke, Mahfouz drew the final curtain on this poignant tale, etching its emotions deep into our collective memory and opening a thousand windows upon it, like that window from which Amina used to breathe the air of freedom in her house located in Palace Walk.

### **3. Conclusion**

Naguib Mahfouz step by step between his various places, Mahfouz, in his drawing of the place, did not draw a house, a room, a street, a window, or a roof on a remote island, but instead drew inspiration for the images of those places from a tangible reality that included Egypt with its cities and streets and houses, for them and their history, are part of it. Mahfouz's attention to the event and the characters is linked to what gives the place a significant narrative semiotics.

The units of the novel work harmoniously and interact with each other to show the event and narrate it in a narrative language in which imagination is mixed with reality so that the reader thinks that reality is imagination, that imagination is reality, and that this is one of the features of Naguib Mahfouz's genius and the miracle of creativity in his novel. Some features – places of a religious nature, others of a social nature, and a third of a scientific nature – characterise his places. In addition, they are divided into negative places and others of a positive nature, coloured in his novel by the feelings and emotions of his various male characters. As for women's places, most are fixed and confined to the house, limiting their freedom. Hence, the place in this novel is

linked to freedom, in addition to its link to semantic codes that radiate their contents on the various structures of the novel, which there is no escape from linking that place to the development of the event and the growth of its narrative, as the place has a relationship with freedom, as some houses are like prisons, especially for the Eastern woman, as we read in the novel *Palace Walk*.

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