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The Metonymies of Unhappy Families



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ABSTRACT

The current study explores the use of certain writing devices that appear in the works of Leo Tolstoy and Naguib Mahfouz. The study develops an in-depth comparison of how these two authors implement devices such as original similes; description of characters through the narrator, other characters, and themselves; interior monologue; and metonymy to create real characters in real situations. Though the reality of the two worlds differs because of economic, geographical, social, and religious backgrounds, they both reveal the universal theme of family unhappiness, whether in Russia or in Egypt.

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Tolstoy 1; pt.1, ch. 1). Despite the cultural background of any given family, one element always will remain universally the same: if the family is unhappy, they will share their unhappiness with each other in a way that is uniquely their own. Both Leo Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and Naguib Mahfouz’s *The Cairo Trilogy* address the phenomenon of the unhappy family, one essentially Russian and the other essentially Middle Eastern. Though in comparison with one another, the two families appear culturally and, therefore, emotionally and socially different, both authors use the same stylistic writing devices to portray family unhappiness. The influence of Tolstoy’s writing style upon Mahfouz’s own style of writing in the latter’s realistic period yet remains undiscovered territory, though many interviews and descriptions of Mahfouz’s writings claim a connection and direct influence on Mahfouz by such Russian realist authors such as Fedor Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. A cultural, emotional, geographical, and social comparison of the characters of these disparate novels logically cannot yield much of an in-depth and logical connection; the focus of comparison then shifts to how Mahfouz displays a striking affinity in the realistic novels of his *Cairo Trilogy* for various stylistic devices that Tolstoy employs in his works, especially in *Anna Karenina*.

Both authors use their prototypes of unhappy families to highlight their own reality as they depict their respective cultures. What Sasson Somekh says about Mahfouz and his purpose of writing also applies to Tolstoy: “His main concern is to tell the story of his own world, past and present, mundane and spiritual [. . .] he is fascinated above all by the process of that change” (112). All of Mahfouz’s characters have their own quirks that are realistic



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enough to make them stand on their own within their families. Yet these quirks maintain a harmony with other family members to the point that they still remain well-connected within their element and do not reflect any influence of characters from other Russian literary periods except realism. The authors portray characters one might find in real life, perhaps even the family next door. In this realistic portrayal of the characters, Mahfouz creates memorable personages with an array of characteristics in a family dynamic.

Before we become acquainted with both sets of unhappy families, we must become familiar with the specific devices that Mahfouz seems to have in common with Tolstoy. Both of these authors famously use their similes to emphasize the unusual in the mundane when they describe the characters in their novels. Both of these authors

[m]ake as little use as possible of the commonplace images and instead try to forge his own metaphor. This is especially evident in a great number of original similes.... Yet the great majority of them convey a sharp observation and original viewpoint. Often the components of a simile are in complete harmony with the context, situation or character described. The images for these similes are, generally speaking, drawn from personal observation of daily life and natural phenomena. (Somekh 135)

Each simile has a dual purpose: to draw the reader to the realistic elements in the novel as well as to parallel the realistic with the nature of the character. In their similes, Mahfouz and Tolstoy recreate sensual struggles through often overlooked and common details of life. For example, the simile “thus their tunes found shelter in his

hospitable soul, like nightingales in a leafy tree” (Mahfouz 15; *Palace Walk*, ch. 2) emphasizes the duality of the family’s *paterfamilias*, Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad’s personality, and the split role of dictator and fun-loving friend he plays throughout the novel. Similes extend even to the womanizing aspect of his personality as “his affection for Zubayda was starting to go bad, like a fruit at the end of its season (Mahfouz 365; *Palace Walk*, ch. 51). The reader can easily compare these examples in Mahfouz’s writing with earlier examples by Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina* as when the young girl in love, Kitty, is torn between the men in her life and the choice that ultimately decides her fate. Though not as frivolous an affection as Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad’s, she nonetheless must find the souring fruit of her season in order to make a decision.

Between dinner and the beginning of the evening, Kitty experienced a feeling similar to that of a young man before battle. (Tolstoy 46; pt. 1, ch. XIII)

Thus she further ponders the relationships she has with her suitors and, like Abd Al-Jawad, must act according to how they make her feel. In like manner, Vronsky, Anna’s future lover, relies on his feelings when he encounters Anna’s husband, Alexei, and tries to form his impressions of this fresh-faced Petersburg native with the slightly curved back, round hat, and sternly self-confident figure who stands in the way of his and Anna’s love:

...he believed in him and experienced an unpleasant feeling, like that of a man suffering from thirst who comes to a spring and finds in it a dog, a sheep or a pig who has both drunk and muddied the water. (Tolstoy 105; pt. 1, ch. XXXI)

Vronsky cannot believe that Alexei is real until he encounters him and experiences a feeling that leaves a bad taste in his mouth. All of these similes express situations common to the human race and thus emphasize the reality of the world of these characters however unique they may be.

Tolstoy is the first to use another device which Mahfouz takes up in his descriptions of the mundane life and habits of his characters. Authors reveal the inner lives of their characters in a number of ways, for example through descriptions of the food they eat or the times in which the characters gather. These foods and the appetites these characters have for these foods can tell a great deal about possible underlying flaws of a character. For instance, Kamal, the youngest son and future scholar, has a sweet tooth, which often, at least in the beginning, forms the basis for his decisions. After all, his desire to visit a local pastry store results in his mother’s becoming seriously injured.

They were very slowly approaching the corner of al-Ghuriya. When they reached it, his eyes fell on a pastry shop, and his mouth watered. His eyes were fixed intently on the shop. He began to think of a way to persuade his mother to enter the store and purchase a pastry. He was still thinking about it when they reached the shop, but before he knew what was happening his mother had slipped from his hand. (Mahfouz 182; *Palace Walk*, ch. 27)

Kamal focuses his eyes solely and greedily on the pastry and pays no attention to his mother, who rarely leaves her home to venture outside. He does not notice his mother’s needs and fears, which confuse her to such an extent that she falls into traffic and becomes seriously injured as a result of

his negligence. In addition, this event foreshadows the adult Kamal, who constantly shows his unwillingness to settle on the more substantial things of life as he pursues the fleeting ephemera of philosophy instead of the stolid substance of a government career as a source of income.

The kinds of beverages people gather around and the times that are associated with them also can tell much about the nature of a character. Dolly, Tolstoy's example of a long-suffering wife of a womanizer and devoted mother and Mahfouz's Egyptian counterpart, Amina, gather their families together around tea or coffee ceremonies (Tolstoy 75; pt. 1, ch. XXI; Tolstoy 290; pt. 3, ch. XV; Mahfouz 57; *Palace Walk*, ch. 9; Mahfouz 69; *Palace Walk*, ch. 11). This social event is the only activity that never fails to bring the family together and acts as the only stable force in changing lives. These two women's families and households revolve around them; without them and the gathering power they bring "to the table" that represents the only lasting, established tradition on which they can rely, the families' stability founders and eventually collapses.

The books which the characters read also tell much about their personalities. Yasin, the oldest son of the family, provides a stunning example of this device of characterization. He first encourages Kamal to read and love books; however, the books which Yasin reads to Kamal mainly describe exploits. Exploits are an appropriate topic that displays adequately the character of Yasin, who indulges in numerous exploits with women (Mahfouz 57; *Palace Walk*, ch. 9) and may have led to his younger brother's difficulty in grasping the substantial over the ephemeral. Yasin loves the superficial and reads books not for their educational value but rather for entertainment. He similarly is

attracted only to the superficial in his relationships with women; he sees only their outer appearance as a source of pleasure rather than explore their inner lives as a source of lasting love.

On the other hand, the literature people read in these novels can also uplift the souls and establish the real authority of the characters in their pursuit of the spiritual world. Kitty and Amina emerge as two examples of genuine spiritual authority in their households. Kitty, raised in the Russian Orthodox Church and an avid believer in the Gospels, represents the spiritual guide who proclaims life to the dead and contributes to the realization of the meaning of life for her husband, Levin (Tolstoy 496-500; pt. 5, ch. XIX-XX; Tolstoy 811-12; pt. 8, ch. XVII). As a living testament to the sayings of the Quran and the daughter of an avid scholar of the holy book (Mahfouz 221; *Palace Walk*, ch. 33), Amina studies with her son every night in order to ensure his religious well-being. She herself becomes excited at the shrines of the figures of her faith (Mahfouz 71; *Palace Walk*, ch. 11; Mahfouz 181; *Palace Walk*, ch. 27). Thus, both women emulate the books from which they take their wisdom as they educate those around them.

What the narrator reveals about his characters and what other characters reveal about each other and themselves constitute other devices that Tolstoy and Mahfouz implement in their writings. Some examples include Zanuba's description of Yasin as a camel: "My camel, how would I know about passion?" she asked" (Mahfouz 263; *Palace Walk*, ch. 39). Her description of Yasin and his nature is quite accurate; as big as a camel, he also can hold quite a large amount of liquor. But as a man, he also demonstrates a huge capacity for women; he nightly frequents the bars as he seeks more and more liquor and even more opportunities to encounter

women. An honest creature, he, too, describes himself as an animal:

You're the most beautiful creature ever to arouse my passion. Holding your lip between mine...sucking on your nipple.... I'll wait until dawn. You'll find me very docile. If you want me to be the rear end of a donkey cart that you rock back and forth on, I'll do it. If you want me to be the ass pulling the cart, I'll do that. (Mahfouz 260; *Palace Walk*, ch. 39)

He, in fact, is "the ass pulling the cart" as he suggests because he is led by his passion and not by his logic. Finally, the narrator attributes one more animalistic trait to Yasin: that of a bull elephant, another fitting simile given the size of his body.

Intoxicating desire swept through his [Yasin's] body, and he fell on her [Zanuba] like a bull elephant crushing a gazelle. (Mahfouz 270; *Palace Walk*, ch. 39)

Such descriptions emphasize not only the sheer mass of Yasin's body but also the animalistic tendencies that compose his nature.

Another amusing example of a character's dialogue that describes his womanizing occurs in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Stepan, Anna's charming brother and Dolly's wayward husband, has a conversation with Levin in which he tries to persuade him of his own behavior toward women especially his wife.

'Why not? Sometimes a sweet roll is so fragrant that you can't help yourself.... No, joking aside,' Oblonsky went on. 'Understand, there's this woman, a dear, meek, loving being, poor, lonely, and who has sacrificed everything.

Now, when the deed is already done—understand—how can I abandon her? Suppose we part, so as not to destroy my family; but how can I not pity her, not provide for her, not try to soften it?’ ‘Well, you must excuse me. You know, for me all women are divided into two sorts...that is, no...rather: there are women and there are...I’ve never seen and never will see any lovely fallen creatures, and ones like that painted Frenchwoman at the counter, with all those ringlets—they’re vermin for me, and all the fallen ones are the same.’ (Tolstoy 40-41; pt. 1, ch. XI)

Stepan’s ludicrous description of women compares them to pastries and values the fallen women over the purity of his wife. His statement only reconfirms his love of the superficially sweet and satisfying and his weakness for the frivolities and cheap thrills of life—not unlike Mahfouz’s Kamal. These similes become important in the context of the figure of speech, metonymy, where the part stands for the whole. This device remains Tolstoy’s favorite means of characterization. Both he and Mahfouz use metonymy as a recurring trait that remains constant as the circumstances around the characters change. I shall return to this figure of speech later.

One major device, interior monologue, records the changes characters undergo as well as their reflections on the vagaries of their lives. This device offers a variety of clues into the inner thoughts of the characters and how they see themselves. Sometimes these personal thoughts may be as superficial as the characters; at other times, they offer the most shocking revelations. Of course, the level of profundity of the inner monologues exists on the same hierarchic scale as the depth or shallowness of the characters. Amina’s interior monologue at the death

of her husband comprises an entire chapter dedicated to her innermost feelings. Not only does it reveal the intensity of Amina’s emotions, it also helps to enhance and demonstrate the most vital social aspect of Mahfouz’s writings about the downtrodden women of his society (Mahfouz 1209-13; *Sugar Street*, ch. 153). Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* reflects not on the death of a loved one, but on her own impending suicide and the nature of death. Though some may not consider Anna’s mourning as sublime as Amina’s because Anna causes her own suffering out of mistaken jealousy and petulant selfishness, it may be even more profound. Amina loses her purpose in life when her beloved husband dies; Anna may kill herself out of a lack of purpose she only perceives as missing from her existence. Tolstoy assigns several chapters to her contemplation of death because of the complexity of her reasoning and eventual end. Unfortunately, both examples of these interior monologues are too lengthy to quote here.

Of all the devices Mahfouz may have learned from Tolstoy, metonymy seems to be the figure of speech that appealed most to the Egyptian writer. As they use this figure of speech, both authors assign a particular trait—or particular traits—to each character to help them stand out from the others. Because the specific trait remains constant throughout the works, it acts as a reliable backdrop to the events that change the circumstances of the characters’ lives. All of the main characters possess a unique trait that will somehow contribute to the unhappiness of their families. Of all of the main characters in *Anna Karenina* and *The Cairo Trilogy*, perhaps Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad causes the greatest amount of misery.

Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, the most tyrannical figure of the two novels, “is among the few characters who are not passive in the face of events”

(Somekh 118). He is powerfully tall, extraordinarily handsome, enormously vital, and robustly healthy; in addition he sports a stream of gleaming black hair (Mahfouz 92; *Palace Walk*, ch. 14). These outward traits become important because they contribute to his womanizing nature. Later on, these looks begin to fade as Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad begins to age and grow sickly; as Mahfouz repeatedly draws the reader’s attention to the change in Al-Jawad’s looks, to his loss of handsomeness, he simultaneously tracks his seeming loss of purpose. At the end, Al-Jawad even begins to foreshadow Amina after she loses him to death. Nevertheless, the duality of his nature seems to be more prevalent in Mahfouz’s descriptions of him, probably stemming from Al-Jawad’s desire to cover up from his family the sinfulness of his actions with the disreputable ladies he visits.

The complexity of this character can be further demonstrated by the fact that he is a man of many faces. He is one person at home (“a resolute, severe face”) and another with his friends (“a smiling, radiant face”). He is, again, different when facing his God (“a submissive face”). (Somekh 116)

Al Jawad’s whole motivation, besides luring women, is to keep up his façades, which becomes a life long task for him even to the end of his life. Thus, both character descriptions help to connect him to his family and the rest of the characters. His womanizing connects him to Yasin and to a certain extent Kamal, who cannot ever settle down to the substantial and even extends to the latter’s preferring the company of prostitutes rather than an actual wife.

Al-Jawad’s face of resolute severity also helps to establish the reign of oppression he forces his family to endure which leads to the death of his beloved middle-

son, Fahmi; to the gradual shrinking—without and within—of his wife, Amina; and to the destruction of his beautiful daughter, Aisha. One of the harshest examples of his tyranny comes when he expels Amina from the household and jeopardizes the stability of the family as he separates her from her children (Mahfouz 209-14; *Palace Walk*, ch. 31-32). Eventually, he must reverse his decision because of the intervention of his children and the introduction of several other characters who are to play a major role in the family's future times of trouble (Mahfouz 228-41; *Palace Walk*, ch. 34-35). Al-Jawad often times reserves his face of smiling radiance for his friends and various ladies of entertainment and pleasure. Rarely does he bring this aspect into his household or into close proximity with his family. Nonetheless, cases exist in which his family happens to stumble upon his expression of joy, such as during Aisha's wedding. True enough, Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad is locked away in a room from his family, a tyrant almost alone even at joyous events like a wedding; however, he also enjoys pleasant and joyous moments within his circle of friends contained inside the room. Kamal accidentally stumbles upon his father's other face in this very room (Mahfouz 274; *Palace Walk*, ch. 40). Yasin also provides another example of undesirable consequences when the two realms mix and the wrong face presents itself (Mahfouz 265-70; *Palace Walk*, ch. 39; Mahfouz 337-38; *Palace Walk*, ch. 46).

The only respite Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad finds from his two faces resembles his submissive visage before his God.

He is a genuine and naïve believer, even though he would not refrain from committing numerous acts which, he knows very well, cannot be approved by his Maker. (Somekh 116)

He prays avidly not for his sins to be forgiven, but for an addition of piousness to his repertoire of personalities.

Al-Sayyid's portrait is not a static one. The richness of his psychology and background motivations are not an end in themselves. They are instrumental in producing the tragic climax in which he is eventually placed (Somekh 117).

His main characteristic of duplicity leads him astray instead of providing him the strength and endurance he seeks. In the end he becomes as weak and frail as Amina, who recites the last religious rites over him (Mahfouz 997; *Sugar Street*, ch. 117; Mahfouz 1204-08; *Sugar Street*, ch. 152).

Yasin follows most closely after his father, but to an extreme that is at times difficult to comprehend. Like his father, Yasin is a womanizer. He stands out as a wild, lusty man who does not care what a woman looks like, as long as she is a woman. Mahfouz hilariously portrays this trait in the scene in Goldsmiths' Bazaar and reveals so much about Yasin's flawed character that Mahfouz surprises his audience with Yasin's audacity and inappropriate humor (Mahfouz 77; *Palace Walk*, ch. 12). His uncontrollable, lustful actions prove to be devastating for his family and result in the attempted rape of the faithful house servant, Umm Hanafi (Mahfouz 297-99; *Palace Walk*, ch. 41), as well as in many marriages and divorces. Somakh sums up Yasin's character in one very accurate paragraph:

His three marriages (and two divorces), his assaults on two different aged servants in his father's house, his constant pursuit of big women—such scenes are very enjoyable at first but their repetition is frivolous. In all, Yasin notwithstanding his carefully

elaborated background (again divorced parents; obsession with his mother's indecencies, etc.) is not a deep character. All in all, if we accept E.M. Forster's definition that the flat character is constructed round a single idea or quality, then Yasin is a flat character. The quality around which Yasin is constructed is sex obsession. 'His temperament made him crave the body of a woman, neglecting her personality. Furthermore his attention is always focused on certain parts of her body, never the body as a whole.' (125- 26)

Yasin represents what happens when someone fails to balance self-control with sensuality and lust.

Kamal's features stand for the main character flaw that contributes greatly to his overall unhappiness with life. He is described as

not good-looking like his brothers. He was perhaps the one in the family who most resembled his sister Khadija. Like hers, his face combined his mother's small eyes and his father's huge nose, but without the refinements of Khadija's. He had a large head with a forehead that protruded noticeably, making his eyes seem even more sunken than they actually were. (Mahfouz 53; *Palace Walk*, ch. 8)

Mahfouz perhaps uses Kamal's big head to emphasize the inflated intellect that ultimately gets Kamal nowhere in life. Instead of using his intellect to provide a living, he prefers the idle life of an intellectual. Also, his head merely seems to provide a comic relief for others and induce struggles with himself and those around him (Mahfouz 53; *Palace Walk*, ch. 8; Mahfouz 751-52; *Palace of Desire*, ch. 89). Kamal's

head, like his sweet tooth, leads him nowhere. The character with the most potential remains the least fulfilled, and ultimately the least significant.

Undoubtedly the most important female character in the whole novel is Amina. She is the first character to appear in the novel, and her death marks its end. (Somekh 126)

Her importance in the novel lies in her role as an anchor and stabilizing force for the family; all the household and family revolve around her. Thus, her attributes and metonymies become vital in understanding the environment and atmosphere of the family. Yet her traits shrink her until she eventually becomes a gray, somewhat taciturn old woman, mainly because of the death of one of her children with whom she is always associated. Mahfouz describes Amina not by her looks, but by what she does and thus emphasizes the serving nature of her personality and the depth she contributes to the family. This depth often times sharply contrasts with the frivolities of the men and shows who really wields the authority in the household. Mahfouz discusses Amina's looks only in relationship to the death of Fahmi in order to capture her own self-induced shrinking and slow loss of purpose that culminates with the death of Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad. Years after Fahmi's death, Mahfouz confronts the reader with an even more downtrodden Amina which rivals her struggles of the previous novel.

She sat there as usual, but time had changed her. She had grown thin, and her face seemed longer, if only because her cheeks were hollow. The locks of hair that escaped from her scarf were turning gray and made her seem older than she was. The beauty spot on her cheek had

grown slightly larger. In addition to their customary look of submission, her eyes now revealed a mournful absent-mindedness. Her anguish over the changes that had befallen her was considerable, although at first she had welcomed them as an expression of her grief. (Mahfouz 538; *Palace of Desire*, ch. 72)

In relation to her husband's frivolous aging that results from fleeting time and profligate behavior, Amina's senescence provides a devastating example of her weakness and pain. And just as Yasin may become a younger version of his father so, too, does the hideously grieving Aisha become her mother's extreme parallel.

Aisha's case often remains quite puzzling. She is known for her beauty, a typical European beauty but an atypical beauty for her culture. Mahfouz uses her looks in a metonymical fashion. Unfortunately, she is all too proud of flaunting these extraordinarily good looks.

Whenever Aisha looked at herself in the mirror, she was immensely pleased with what she saw. Who else from her illustrious family, indeed from the whole neighborhood, was adorned by golden tresses and blue eyes like hers? Yasin flirted openly with her, and Fahmi, when he spoke to her about one thing or another, did not neglect to give her admiring glances. Even little Kamal did not want to drink from the water jug unless her mouth had moistened the lip. Her mother spoiled her and said she was as beautiful as the moon, although she did not conceal her anxiety that Aisha was too thin and delicate.... Aisha herself was perhaps more conscious of her extraordinary beauty than any of the others. Her intense solicitude

for every detail of her appearance made this clear. (Mahfouz 147; *Palace Walk*, ch. 22)

Her looks became the basis for every experience in her life, both joyous and sorrowful. Her beauty lures a police officer to defy time-honored traditions to steal forbidden glances at her through her window (Mahfouz 28-29; *Palace Walk*, ch. 5). Her marriage also results when her beauty catches the eye of the rich Shawkat family who chooses her to be the bride of Khalil (Mahfouz 244; *Palace Walk*, ch. 36). Her concentration on the superficial exemplified by her "intense solicitude for every detail of her appearance" (Mahfouz, 147; *Palace Walk*, ch. 22) extend into her family life, especially into a controversy that sparks the jealous Khadija to condemn the pleasure-seeking lifestyle in which Aisha and Khalil allow their family to indulge. Aisha's daughter, Na'ima, dances; her husband, Khalil, smokes his pipe; and Aisha herself sings. All is indeed well and superficially tranquil, until sickness sweeps away Khalil and their two boys from Aisha's arms. At this point, Aisha's beauty begins to fade prematurely on her own accord revealing her weakness and showing a side of her that surprises the reader. Her "fading" even surpasses her mother's.

Amina's body had withered, and her hair had turned white. Although barely sixty, she looked ten years older, and her transformation was nothing compared to Aisha's decline and disintegration. It was ironic or pathetic that the daughter's hair was still golden and her eyes blue, when her listless glance gave no hint of life and her pale complexion seemed the symptom of some disease. With a protruding bone structure and sunken eyes and cheeks, her face hardly

appeared that of a thirty-four-year-old woman. (Mahfouz 985; *Sugar Street*, ch. 116)

Aisha no longer exemplifies the kind and caring woman she once had been. Instead, her personality transforms into a similar, yet more vindictive personality trait that resides in Khadija. Aisha's new portrait is one of a smoking, embittered bluish shell of woman who has gathered all her hope in one weak vessel of a daughter, Na'ima (Mahfouz 987; *Sugar Street*, ch. 116). Aisha, the great pride of the family, now becomes its greatest burden and forces them to walk on eggshells to accommodate her debilitated state in life.

Gazing sadly at Aisha, she saw the personification of shattered hopes. When she looked at this unhappy face, which seemed to have lost all its vitality, Amina's soul was overcome by sorrow. Apprehensive about distressing her daughter, she had learned to greet Aisha's rude answers and harsh comments with affectionate forbearance. (Mahfouz 988; *Sugar Street*, ch. 116)

Aisha's tragic story parallels to an extreme the devastation of Amina just as Yasin parallels to an extreme the corruption of his father. This cyclical pattern helps to establish the unhappiness of the family that can be passed down from generation to generation with each new cycle greater than the next.

Aisha's weary resting on her weak daughter, Na'ima, further establishes the mother's tragedy and her own personal reliance on beauty.

Na'ima stood out in this group like a rose growing in a cemetery, for she had developed into a beautiful young woman of sixteen. Her head enveloped by a halo of golden hair and her face adorned by blue eyes, she was as lovely as her mother,

Aisha, had been—or even more captivating—but as insubstantial as a shadow. Her eyes had a gentle, dreamy look suggesting purity, innocence, and otherworldliness. She nestled against her mother's side, as though unwilling to be alone even for a moment. (Mahfouz 985-86; *Sugar Street*, ch. 116)

Na'ima presents the strongest case for a metonymy charting the progress of a character through the novel. Aisha still leans on superficiality of beauty, but now on the beauty of her daughter, whom Naguib Mahfouz describes as “insubstantial as a shadow” (Mahfouz 985; *Sugar Street*; ch. 116). There remains nothing to Aisha but a dream of beauty that is pure, innocent, otherworldly, and unable to survive in this world. This revelation slowly kills Aisha and she becomes, in the end, merely a flat character who revolves around the ideal of beauty.

However, Khadija provides the exception to this family's cycle of unhappiness. Although she, too, does not break the cycle of death and torment that plagues her family, she does not shatter like all the others. She remains strong when she, too, loses her son—but to prison, not to death. Khadija, known mostly for her large nose and ill-temper, reflects the brashness and abruptness of her first reactions. Yet, she is also known to balance this temperament with a deep love for her family and a keen sense of motherly protectiveness. Thus, though she never acquires beauty, her looks do not fade; her temperament softens as the others' harden. She balances her gruff temperament when her sense of motherly devotion surfaces. Perhaps she is more prepared for Aisha's bitter responses in the end because she indulged in them from the very beginning.

Khadija seemed to surpass even Yasin in the flabby abundance of flesh and saw no reason to claim she was anything by happy about that. She was delighted with her sons, Abd al-Muni'm and Ahmad, as well as with her generally successful marriage, but to ward off the evil eye of jealousy never let a day go by without some complaint. Her treatment of Aisha had undergone a total change. During the last eight years she had not addressed a single sarcastic or harsh word to her younger sister, not even in jest. In fact, she bent over backwards to be courteous, affectionate, and gracious to Aisha, since she was touched by the widow's misery, frightened that fate might deal her a comparable blow, and apprehensive that Aisha would compare their lots. . . This oversight did not keep Khadija from lavishing enough affection, sympathy, and compassion on Aisha to seem a second mother for her younger sister. (Mahfouz 1005; *Sugar Street*, ch. 118)

The tables have turned in these sisters' lives, as they do in most families, and a surprising role reversal ensues.

If Mahfouz became a master of metonymy, he may well have learned the lesson of its use from Tolstoy. Although the characters of *Anna Karenina* and *The Cairo Trilogy* should be widely dissimilar because of time, place, and custom, tantalizing similarities between the two emerge, especially in the use of metonymy. Tolstoy's novel begins with a “womanizing” husband in an unhappy family, but this time in a Russian context: Stepan Arkadyich, Anna Karenina's brother. Tolstoy describes Stepan as a handsome, rosy cheeked man with vitality similar to that of Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad. He also exhibits in his face a restrained radiance that is

similar to the one that plays in Anna's eyes, one that begs to be let out; this image describes a force barely in check, one that can burst onto the scene in a matter of moments (Tolstoy 33; pt. 1, ch. X). His rosy cheeks and handsome façade only point to his sensual nature which cherishes women, wine, food, and all the finer things of life. In fact, in his opening descriptions, Tolstoy almost wallows in the marvelous luxury that surrounds Stepan.

On the third day after the quarrel, Prince Stepan Arkadyich Oblonsky—Stiva, as he was called in society—woke up at his usual hour, that is, at eight o'clock in the morning, not in his wife's bedroom but in his study, on a morocco sofa. . . . And, noticing a strip of light that had broken through the side of one of the heavy blinds, he cheerfully dropped his feet from the sofa, felt for his slippers trimmed with gold morocco that his wife had embroidered for him (a present for last year's birthday). . . . 'We'll see later on,' Stepan Arkadyich said to himself and, getting up, he put on his grey dressing gown with the light-blue silk lining, threw the tasseled cord into a knot. . . . (Tolstoy 1-4; pt. 1, ch. I-II)

So much of the description focuses on the luxury and good looks of Stepan that it does not even refer to the argument that Stepan has with his wife; in fact, he does not even remember it until Tolstoy finishes his long description. In reality, he does not even treat the matter with the seriousness that it requires and does everything except reflect on reconciliation with his wife.

After dressing, Stepan Arkadyich sprayed himself with scent, adjusted the cuffs of his shirt, put cigarettes, wallet, matches, a watch

with a double chain and seals into his pockets with an accustomed gesture, and, having shaken out his handkerchief, feeling himself clean, fragrant, healthy, and physically cheerful despite his misfortune, went out, springing lightly at each step, to the dining room, where coffee was already waiting for him, and, next to the coffee, letters and papers from the office. (Tolstoy 6; pt. 1, ch. III)

Stepan is so preoccupied with the little tasks of his life that he neglects the feelings of his wife. However, his actions demonstrate his priorities, in which his wife, Dolly, is not high on his list. He justifies his negligence of matters dealing with his wife with thoughts that he is a relatively young, handsome, and amorous man who should no longer feel obliged to feel tenderness toward the mother of his five children, since she is no longer attractive. In this way, he foreshadows the justification Abd Al-Jawad offers for his nightly activities and rendezvous (Tolstoy 3; pt. 1, ch. II). Superficiality exudes from Stepan's personality and later becomes the root of his money troubles; but the descriptions of his views of life first emphasize the extent to which a certain metonymy of wealth governs his life.

Stepan Arkadyich chose neither his tendency nor his views, but these tendencies and views came to him themselves, just as he did not choose the shape of a hat or a frock coat, but bought those that were in fashion. And for him, who lived in a certain circle, and who required some mental activity such as usually develops with maturity, having views was as necessary as having a hat. (Tolstoy 7; pt. 1, ch. III)

Societal whims and outside appearances dictate to this man who he is and what

he is expected to become. He has no life outside of this society and thus, unlike Abd Al-Jawad, remains a rather flat character throughout the novel as his life revolves around a world of changing fads and fashions.

In contrast to her husband's rich outward appearance, thinning hair and a nervous cheek twitch embody Dolly, Stepan's wife. Perhaps Dolly has faded because of his lack of responsibility to himself and to his family (Tolstoy 10-11; pt. 1, ch. IV). The family and daily cares that force themselves upon her create a terrible strain on someone not entirely strong by nature. She, in turn, neglects the reconciliation with her husband because of housework and the needs of the family.

Meanwhile Darya Alexandrovna, having quieted the child and understanding from the sound of the carriage that he had left, went back to the bedroom. This was her only refuge from household cares, which surrounded her the moment she stepped out. Even now, during the short time she had gone to the children's room, the English governess and Matryona Filimonovna had managed to ask her several questions that could not be put off and that she alone could answer. . . . (Tolstoy 13; pt. 1, ch. IV)

If Stepan parallels Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad in his womanizing, then Dolly most closely parallels Amina as the anchor of her family. Dolly's life revolves around her children. She worries if they are morally corrupt (Tolstoy 271-72; pt. 3, ch. X) and even takes time to attend to their lessons (Tolstoy 567; pt. 6, ch. VI). Though Dolly fails to be as calm as Amina in the supervision of her household, as an aristocratic Russian woman she does all she can to hold her family together despite the unhappiness a frivolous and womanizing husband causes.

Dolly's younger sister, Kitty, holds her family together quite nicely toward the end of the novel when the narrator presents a more mature version of her. However, her ascension to the role of contented, Christian mother and loving, wise wife was not an easy one. Tolstoy most closely associates Kitty in her early years with little feet and beautiful legs, which represent her lack of confidence. She totters around in the beginning trying to find whom she is to marry, how her household will be set up, and what society demands of her as a woman. A skating rink, where she is wobbly on her skates, sets the scene for her developing feelings for her suitor, Levin.

He felt the sun approach him. She was turning a corner, her slender feet at a blunt angle in their high boots, and with evident timidity was skating towards him. (Tolstoy 28; pt. 1, ch. IX)

As she newly enters the realm of courtship, she already shows shakiness in her relationship with men.

A curious use of metonymy unites Kitty, Aisha, and Na'ima. Like Aisha, Kitty is compared with a heavenly body. Where Aisha is the moon in *The Cairo Trilogy*, Kitty is the sun (Tolstoy 28; pt. 1, ch. IX). Also where Na'ima is a rose among thorns, Kitty is a rose among nettles (Tolstoy 28; pt. 1, ch. IX). Both images invoke a sense of beauty and purity, yet ethereal, changing qualities characterize the heavenly bodies and weakness characterizes a rose among hostile objects.

Levin, Kitty's ardent admirer, acts like a bear in peasant clothing; Kitty's childhood nickname is "little bear." These metaphors provide a stylistic basis for the eventual matching of these two people. Nonetheless, the metonymy that links Levin with peasants describes him best; in fact, Levin longs to live

the life of a peasant. Levin's nature refuses to conform to society, and thus his character is often set in fields and hunting grounds around his estate. Ironically enough, though he associates himself more with the peasant style of living, he never fully understands them as his brother Sergei does (Tolstoy 244-47; pt. 3, ch. III). At certain times, he even contemplates becoming one of them and marrying a peasant woman, but something in his musings always alerts him to the fact that the fields are not his place.

Levin had often admired this life, had often experienced a feeling of envy for the people who lived this life, but that day for the first time, especially under the impression of what he had seen in the relations of Ivan Parmenov and his young wife, the thought came clearly to Levin that it was up to him to change that so burdensome, idle, artificial and individual life he lived into this laborious, pure and common, lovely life... All those thoughts and feelings were divided into three separate lines of argument. One was to renounce his old life, his useless knowledge, his utterly needless education. This renunciation gave him pleasure and was easy and simple for him. Other thoughts and notions concerned the life he wished to live now. The simplicity, the purity, and the legitimacy of this life he felt clearly, and he was convinced that he would find in it that satisfaction, repose, dignity, the absence of which he felt so painfully. But the third line of argument turned around the question of how to make this transition from the old life to the new. And here nothing clear presented itself to him. 'To have a wife? To have work and the necessity to work? To leave

Pokrovskoe? To buy land? To join a community? To marry a peasant woman? How am I to do it?' he asked himself again, and found no answer. 'However, I didn't sleep all night and can't give myself a clear accounting.' (Tolstoy 275-76; pt. 3, ch. XII)

His thoughts continually portray a fogginess of thought that resembles the wavering of Kitty and the decisions she must make for her future. This point further ties Kitty and Levin together, making their match evident and almost a natural course of events to the reader.

Balding and bad teeth characterize Vronsky, Levin's early rival for Kitty and Anna's eventual love. These two images invoke a sense of decay, which could reflect the decay of his relationships with Kitty, society, and more importantly, with Anna. The deterioration of his relationship with Anna arises mostly from his declarations of his rights for manly independence. Several times he tries to assert his need for independence, and each time he pushes Anna a little closer to the edge of paranoia, loss of control, and death.

Vronsky had come to the elections because he was bored in the country and had to assert his right to freedom before Anna, and in order to repay Sviyazhsky with support at the elections for all the trouble he had taken for him at the zemstvo elections, and most of all in order to strictly fulfill all the responsibilities of the position of nobleman and landowner that he had chosen for himself. (Tolstoy 662; pt. 6, ch. XXXI)

In this case, Vronsky begins to include in his activities reasons to be away from Anna and thus begins to establish a life of his own apart from her. Vronsky

establishes his plan and true intentions for getting Anna used to his male independence.

And so, without challenging her to a frank explanation, he went off to the elections. It was the first time since the start of their liaison that he had parted from her without talking it all through. On the one hand, this troubled him; on the other, he found it better this way. 'At first it will be like now, something vague, hidden, but then she'll get used to it. In any case, I can give her everything, but not my male independence,' he thought. (Tolstoy 645; pt. 6, ch. XXV)

Here the first cracks of separation begin to appear in this unhappy family Vronsky and Anna have created. This is the first time that the reader begins to see Vronsky as he tries to release himself from the amorous nets in which he feels he is trapped. He deplors them, especially since he feels Anna is setting them. Vronsky resents her whenever he is in her presence (Tolstoy 643; pt. 6, ch. XXV). Thus, when he refuses to come home from his mother's at Anna's request, he begins the process of breaking free from her ever tightening reins, an action that ultimately leads to Anna's death and his complete decay (Tolstoy 775; pt. 8, ch. II).

The several images Tolstoy uses to hint at Anna Karenina's true nature each represent a part of her that cannot be controlled. Tolstoy first portrays Anna's full body that she carries on her light gait (Tolstoy 61-62; pt. 1, ch. XVIII). The easy way in which she moves surprises Vronsky because of its sensuality. Almost as soon as Vronsky sees Anna, her body begins to tempt him away from his duties to his mother. The reader notices that this fullness is a family trait because, though Stiva also has a full body, his step is quite

lively as well (Tolstoy 1, 6; pt. 1, ch. I, III). Stiva uses his sensual, corporal grace to lure women, while Anna uses hers subconsciously to attract men. She does not actively use her looks for such purposes at first; but later events in the novel make the reader painfully aware of her luring, sensual effect on men, especially when Anna finally meets Levin. The sensuality that she exudes, albeit unconsciously, in the initial train scene later plays an important part in her eventual downfall from righteousness. The initial image foreshadows her later lack of control in all aspects of her life.

Another symbol Tolstoy associates with Anna represents her uncontrollable sensuality expressed in the vitality that begs to be let free from her eyes.

Her shining grey eyes, which seemed dark because of their thick lashes, rested amiably and attentively on his face, as if she recognized him, and at once wandered over the approaching crowd as though looking for someone. In that brief glance Vronsky had time to notice the restrained animation that played over her face and fluttered between her shining eyes and the barely noticeable smile that curved her red lips. It was as if a surplus of something so overflowed her being that it expressed itself beyond her will, now in the brightness of her glance, now in her smile. She deliberately extinguished the light in her eyes, but it shone against her will in a barely noticeable smile. (Tolstoy 61; pt. 1, ch. XVIII)

Anna's features seem to flirt subconsciously with Vronsky and give him hidden invitations that she could not knowingly propose. This sensuality betrays her real purpose of looking for her brother at the train station. In the

passage, her eyes seem to be satisfied that she has caught Vronsky's attention when she should be looking for her brother. In addition, although Anna tries to extinguish the light and vitality in her eyes, they betray her as her lips subliminally transfer a smile to Vronsky. Most of her descriptions like "her full shoulders and bosom, as if shaped from old ivory" (Tolstoy 79; pt. 1, ch. XXII) are very sensual in nature and aid the reader in understanding her future choices.

Anna's curls also betray her inner sensuality and lack of control.

On her head, in her black hair, her own without admixture, was a small garland of pansies, and there was another on her black ribbon sash among the white lace. Her coiffure was inconspicuous. Conspicuous were only those willful little ringlets of curly hair that adorned her, always coming out on her nape and temples. Around her firm, shapely neck was a string of pearls. (Tolstoy 79; pt. 1, ch. XXII)

Only the curls that are breaking free seem to be her most conspicuous feature. These unruly curls come to be associated not only with sensuality, but with the play between control and willfulness. Though she cannot control her curls, she later tries to control Vronsky, who ultimately wants his independence, as he demonstrates when he willfully refuses to answer to her beck and call and return early from his mother's home.

Anna develops a telling habit in which she slides her wedding ring on and off her finger. Though an unconscious act, it helps to demonstrate the discontent she harbors for her marriage to Karenin and the loose bonds that connect her and her husband. Tolstoy also describes her rings easily coming off her fingers. She

gives them to Dolly's children at play, as though love were merely a game.

Something like a game was set up among them, which consisted in sitting as close as possible to her, touching her, holding her small hand, kissing her, playing with her ring or at least touching the flounce of her dress.... 'I suppose it will be impossible not to go. Take it,' she said to Tanya, who was pulling the easily slipped-off ring from her white, tapering finger. (Tolstoy 72; pt.1, ch. XX)

The rings in the first part of the quotation act merely as a part of the description associated with her and hold no more real importance than the flounce of her dress. In the second part of the quotation, however, Anna further emphasizes a certain lack of importance she associates with the rings Tanya is easily able to pull from Anna's finger and which Anna eventually gives to her. Perhaps this action foreshadows how easily she gives up her husband and allows him to fall into the hands of such women as Countess Lydia Ivanovna, a manipulating hypocrite. Later, when an Anna, pregnant with Vronsky's child, discusses the unhappiness of her situation—caught in a loveless marriage while receiving her lover only in her husband's absence—her ring shines under a lamp and is contrasted with the whiteness of her sleeve (Tolstoy 361; pt. 4, ch. III). Anna has lost her purity and has consequently tainted her marital vows. The wedding ring gleams only under the glow of an

artificial light and shows through in sharp contrast with the purity implied in the white of her sleeve.

Anna's final degradation into a corrupted woman resulting from her uncontrollable sensuality leads to her suicide as she throws herself under a train. The irony of her character lies in her desire to control another when she cannot even control herself. Anna dies because of her feeling of helplessness; even before she plunges to her death, she experiences her last moment of helplessness when she wishes to save herself, yet finds it to be too late (Tolstoy 768; pt. 7, ch. XXXI). Anna's story thus ends where it began—at a train station. She arrives in Moscow to try to help her brother contain his lust and dies in St. Petersburg when she cannot control her own.

Unhappiness runs rampant in the pages of *Anna Karenina* and *The Cairo Trilogy* and each main character plays a role in either alleviating or creating the chaos that causes the misery they endure. Tolstoy pointedly states in a passage of *Anna Karenina* that there needs to be a balance in all unhappy families.

In order to undertake anything in family life, it is necessary that there be either complete discord between the spouses or loving harmony. But when the relations between spouses are uncertain and there is neither the one nor the other, nothing can be undertaken. (Tolstoy 739; pt. 7, ch. XXXI)

Literary devices illustrate the main characters' unique personalities and how they contribute to the conflict that brings unhappiness to their families. Were it not for the conflict between the womanizing of men such as Yasin, Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, and Stepan and the resulting strain put on the wives, Amina and Dolly, their stories would merely turn into bland recollections of perfect events that hardly reflect the realities of life. The added interest in these novels lies also in their ability to capture the universality of the unhappy family yet maintain each nation's cultural integrity. Amina's reaction to the weight of the household presents a more orderly and calm approach than that of Dolly's frantic and strained control of household affairs. Yet, each woman in her own way suffers from the strain of being the anchor of the household. Tolstoy and Mahfouz transcend the boundaries of time and place as they use specific devices to portray fictional characters as real people caught up in the universality of unhappiness.

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