

# [A comparison of the time of the doves and midaq alley](https://assignbuster.com/a-comparison-of-the-time-of-the-doves-and-midaq-alley/)

A theme omnipresent in Merce Rodoreda’s The Time of the Doves and Naguib Mahfouz’s Midaq Alley is male deception. In both novels, a captivating male character enthralls the female protagonist, and leads her into miserable situations. The opening chapter of The Time of the Doves itself introduces Natalia as a submissive character; “ But she made me come even though I didn’t want to, because that’s how I was. It was hard for me to say no if someone asked me to do something” (Rodoreda 15). She is young, inexperienced and doesn’t have the guidance of her mother. At a dance, Natalia meets a charming man, who with his attractive “ little eyes like a monkey,” and sweet words, “ I’d be his wife and his queen and we’d be dancing in the Placa del Diamant,” mesmerizes, yet frightens her (Rodoreda 17).

This initial encounter is analogous to the one between Hamida and Ibrahim in Midaq Alley. Hamida is naive and has been brought up with banal expectations. When she first sees Ibrahim then, she is fascinated; “ His face was lean and elongated, his eyes almond-shaped and his eyebrows thick. His eyes reflected both cunning and boldness. ” (Mahfouz 166) It becomes clear that she is attracted to him; “ The moment she passed through it and crossed the threshold of the house, she felt an urge to go back” (Mahfouz 166). As they start conversing, Ibrahim adulates Hamida, “ Why, you are as beautiful as the stars.

.. You are mine and I am yours! ” (Mahfouz 195) While Hamida is clearly interested in Ibrahim, she, like Natalia, doesn’t think she is ready to completely trust him; “ I won’t promise anything. Let go of my hand” (Mahfouz 193). She has no guidance in her anachronistic alley where Ibrahim appears to be a foreign element, and therefore, her trepidation can be sympathized with.

After a few meetings, however, Natalia begins pursuing a relationship with Quimet and ends her engagement with Pere. When she informs Quimet of this, however, she is filled with guilt: “ And I felt worried about having said it, because Pere had flamed up like a match… And when I thought about leaving Pere it hurt me inside and the hurt made me realize I’d done something wrong” (Rodoreda 21), accentuating how she was truly unprepared to let go of the past, a symbol of customs. When Hamida is getting ready to run away with Ibrahim, she feels a similar guilt for her mother, “ This was the day she was to say goodbye forever.

.. for the first time she felt weak at the thought. Her heart went out to the woman who had sheltered and loved her..

. ” (Mahfouz 211). In both works, the female character is leaving behind the known and accepted way of life. They realize that the people in their past supported them, and feel guilt but their hopes of a more exotic future with winsome men surpass this remorse.

A peculiar aspect which is present in both novels is that the man changes the female character’s name; Hamida is called Titi and Natalia becomes Colometa. This is significant because the new names represent the beginning of a new life and give the women different identities. Hamida is no longer as pure as she once was, but rather morally decays as she involves herself into meretricious activities, and Natalia goes from living a satisfactory life to the hapless situation that Quimet leaves her in when he goes to war. The names absorb the new personalities and almost grow to define the characters. When Abbas and Hamida meet again, and Titi is addressed as ‘ Hamida,’ she is reminded of Midaq Alley and her past life.

Similarly, after Colometa and Antoni get married and he begins addressing her as ‘ Natalia’ again, she leaves her despondent past and begins a more calm and secure life. By the end of the novel, Titi completely gives up her old name, thereby losing the final connections she had with her previous life. Natalia, on the other hand, gives up ‘ Colometa’ when she returns to her old apartment for the last time; “ So I turned back to the door and took my knife and carved Colometa on it in big, deep letters” (Rodoreda 197). This symbolizes the end of one phase of her life, and she hopes to leave the unhappiness she felt over the course of her years being Colometa in that apartment.

Another similarity between the characters is that neither knew what they were entering into when they began to engage in the relationships under examination. Natalia’s only source of advice was Senyora Enriqueta, who unemotionally stated, “ I think you’re sensible to get married young. You need a husband and a roof over your head…

I think Quimet’s a better match for you than Pere. He’s got his own shop and Pere has to take orders,” with no regard to his personality and how happy Natalia would be with him (Rodoreda 30). Hamida didn’t have anyone to consult so went with the mere understanding that Ibrahim was far wealthier and cosmopolitan than any other man in Midaq Alley. In desperate need to escape the confined alley, she left with Ibrahim, hoping for the materialistic wealth which only he could satisfy. Neither character knew what they were getting into, how Quimet would give Colometa several problems in the coming years and how Ibrahim would make Hamida a prostitute.

Moreover, a depiction of how inconsiderate both of the men were towards the female characters is that every time Colometa and Titi encountered a problem or requested something, the men would change the topic in their own ways. Quimet would say “ Poor Maria,” and “ after he’d said it and he saw I was upset he’d get very quiet like I wasn’t there, but I could feel him relaxing inside” (Rodoreda 46). Occasionally, he would also accentuate the “ pain” he felt in his leg to stop Colometa from making requests. Ibrahim, on the other hand, was much more direct; “ When will you, my darling, stop talking nonsense? ” (Mahfouz 264). Furthermore, “ Whenever she (Titi) brought up the matter of her love for him he would avoid a discussion and soothe her with flattery about her work” (Mahfouz 265).

This portrays that the men were discourteous towards the pain that the female characters felt, further emphasizing how they intended to simply use the women. What enables us to attain such a profound insight into these emotions is the writing style of each novel. Midaq Alley is written in third person so we are able to attain a holistic interpretation of every character’s emotions, and The Time of the Doves is written, according to Rebecca Powell, as “ Rodoreda’s style of writing is stream of consciousness, words on top of words, and the effect is hypnotic. Her prose is sensual, though not at all in a flowery way; rather, there’s a firmness and physicality in her language which beautifully illuminates the ordinary through the graceful, almost childlike, openness of the narrator. Regardless of how upset both women were, neither indulged in reminiscence about her past life. Colometa doesn’t express any thoughts about her home until her father dies when “ for a moment, just a moment, standing in the middle of my dining room I saw myself as a little girl with a white ribbon on top of my head walking beside my father when he took my hand and we went down streets with gardens and we always walked down the street with big houses.

.. nd the dog barked as we walked by” (Rodoreda 131). Similarly, “ the only hour of her past life that Hamida missed was her late afternoon walk,” and “ she had no happy memories of the past..

. ” (Mahfouz 261). It can then be analyzed that either both of the women were extremely preoccupied with their vocations or simply didn’t have a joyful past. Nevertheless, their lives didn’t turn out the way they had expected them to when they first met the men. Quimet and Ibrahim were extremely captivating; evident by how Colometa didn’t ever think about getting a divorce and she even feared Quimet’s return after she was married to Antoni, and Hamida didn’t give up her meretricious activities even when she realized there was no hope of a real relationship with Ibrahim. Climatically, the male characters dramatically changed the women’s lives, and lead them into a period of unhappiness, uncertainty and in one case, financial instability.

In the end, both of the female protagonists leave the men and become more content with their lives.