DYSTOPIA IN KHALID TAWFIK UTOPIA

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Abstract

Unlike Utopia, dystopia represents a city full of poverty, frustration and misery in fiction; it is a new phenomenon motivated by human failures and various historical disasters, such as World Wars, the Cold War, the nuclear war, which have led famous writers, like Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, to depict devastation in their novels instead of portraying utopian contexts in the twentieth century.

Dystopia has emerged recently in Arabic literature, especially after the events of the Arab Spring, and the complication of various social and political problems in some Arab countries. Ahmed Khalid Tawfik, a contemporary Egyptian writer, was one of the most prominent contemporary writers in the horror genre and, generally, fiction. His Utopian novel, in contrast to his title, depicts a dystopia. The present study was conducted in order to examine, relying on social criticism, especially the views of Lucien Goldmann, the dichotomy of the image of self and others in contemporary Arabic novel and the worldview reflected in this novel.

Keywords

Contemporary Egyptian Novel, Utopia, Dystopia, Ahmad Khalid Tawfik

1. Introduction

The idea of 'utopia' has long been one of the most important philosophical and social concerns of human beings, and it can be considered both as an old and new thought which has haunted human though at the time of necessity. This idea is presented in each specific era according to the problems and

aspirations of human beings. The common denominator of all these utopian cities is that they function as protests against bitter and undesirable facts and introduce a hope for a world free from ugliness and oppression. (Al-Najm, 2006:269)

Utopianism is a prehistoric theory and a kind of pessimistic thought towards the status quo, which, by neglecting the present state of society, seeks to achieve the ideal state of affairs. With utter negation, utopianism hopes to present and construct an ideal future that is only possible by negating the existing community. (Mohammadi Monfared, 2008: 40)

Thomas M. Moore, a 16th-century English politician ,and thinker, adapted the term 'utopia' from Greek for the first time, which in essence means "nowhere", something and someplace which do not exist (Azzam, 1994, 27).; the term comes from the root "ou-topos" meaning nowhere, an ironic representation of a place in which goodness rules. He wrote his most famous work in 1515 and 1516, which was very influential in the history of European thought. Although Thomas Moore adhered to his Christian faith, he lived in one of the most important periods in the history of Europe; the Renaissance movement had begun and the church's actions and ideology, especially with the advent of the Protestant religion and Luther's thoughts, were diminishing. (Moore, 1992: 16-22)

Utopias are nowadays divided into two types of classic philosophical and modern science. Classical utopia was posed by ancient philosophers like Plato, Abu Nasr Farabi, and Thomas Moore; on the other hand, modern utopia has penetrated the world of literature due to technological advancements of the modern world. (Azzam, 1994: 27-35)

In contrast, Dystopia, which is translated as' the city of destruction' in Arabic, originates from the failure of the thought of the designers of utopia (Heydarian et al, 2011: 89); *Brave New World*, written by Aldous Huxley, an English writer who wrote in 1932, is the first and most famous dystopian novel; *Animal Farm* and *1984*, written respectively in 1945 and 1948, are two other dystopian novels written by George Orwell, a well-known English writer.

The term "dystopia" is adapted from Greek and means "evil"; dystopian novels usually depict the worst social conditions full of poverty, misery, suffering, death ,and illness, which is not desirable by any human being. Devastating novels describe the dark societies in which humans lack freedom and security, and even have lost their human emotions. (Parchegani, 2017: 136)

Recent years has witnessed the proliferation of devastating stories in contemporary Arabic literature so that this phenomenon can be considered as one of the features of contemporary Arabic literature; this event, in turn, reflects the political and social developments of the Arab world in recent years. (Parchegani, 2017: 132)

2. The Writer

Figure 1: *Ahmed Khaled Tawfik*

Ahmed Khaled Tawfik Farrag (June 10, 1962 – 2 April 2018) was an Egyptian author and a physician, also known as Ahmed Khaled Tawfek who wrote more than 200 paperbacks, in both Egyptian Arabic and Classical Arabic. He was the first contemporary writer of horror and science fiction in the Arabic speaking world and also the first writer to explore the medical thriller genre.

Tawfik is considered by many to have been one of the most influential writers of his time. His legacy has influenced thousands of Arabic language authors.

Born in June 10, 1962 in the northern Egyptian city of Tanta. Tawfik graduated from Tanta University's medical school in 1985. He attained a PhD in 1997. In 1992, he joined the Modern Arab Association publishing company and began writing his first series of novels the following year.[9] In January 1993, he published the first installment in his horror/thriller series *Ma Waraa Al Tabiaa*, which translates to *beyond nature* or "Metaphysics". He also writes periodical articles for journals and web-based magazines such as *El Destoor* and *Rewayty*. His writing style has appealed to both Egyptian and broader Arabic-speaking audiences, gaining him popularity in Egypt and the Middle East.

Tawfik's novels typically feature all Egyptian characters and are set both in Egypt and around the world. Some of his characters are semi-autobiographical. Tawfik draws from personal experiences in their creation; fans consider him their "godfather" and identify him most closely with his character, *Refaat*

Ismael, who was featured in the *Ma Waraa Al Tabiaa* series. His book *Utopia* may even reflect Egypt as it is becoming, with rich and poor and no middle-class.

He began writing his stories when he was only ten years old and he wrote, in all, more than 500 books. His series *Fantasia* was the first of its kind; a plot that presents famous literary works to young people, through an interactive presentation.

Other works include:

- An Arabic translation of Chuck Palahniuk's novel *Fight Club*.
- *Utopia* is about Egyptian people living in a dystopian and utopian society, separated by walls. It's a fictional, political-minded novel, published by Merit, translated into English by Chip Rosetti and chosen to become a major motion picture, with a scheduled release date of 2017.
- *El-Singa* (Egyptian slang for *The Knife*) is an Egyptian politically-flavored novel published by Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing.
- *Just like Icarus* is a fictional political-minded novel, published by Dar El Shorouq.
- Ahmad Khaled also wrote periodical articles for "*El Dostoor*" newspaper in Egypt.
- Rewayat (*Egyptian pocket novels*)
- *Shabeeb* Novel

Ahmed Khaled Tawfik died on April 2, 2018 at El Demerdash Hospital in Cairo, Egypt. He had undergone, on the same day, a cardiac ablation surgery to correct his long-term arrhythmia. The immediate cause of death was reported to be cardiac arrest due to ventricular fibrillation that he suffered few hours after waking up from the surgery. (en.wikipedia.org)

3. Genetic Structuralism

Genetic structuralism enabled Lucien Goldmann to link between sociology and structuralism. In his study of the structure of literary work, he tries to reach the intellectual structure of the social class to which the creator of the work belongs. He emphasizes the structure of thought that manifests itself in the social class worldview and the cultural and social context that underlies this worldview. From his point of view, this worldview is a moderate structure that goes beyond the emergence of literary work and is like an infrastructure that plays a role in the development of literary work. (Asfoor, 1981: 84)

In Goldmann's view, which is rooted in historical materialism, economic conditions play a crucial role in the formation and role of the social classes, because in his view it is the economic conditions that forms the social class and its role in the structure of society; these two factors, the economic status of a

social class and its role in the social and economic structure, determine the collective consciousness of the subjects belonging to this specific class. It should be noted that this collective consciousness differs from what Freud had in mind in its psychological sense. This specific form of consciousness has a historical nature and describes the orientation of the social class in understanding its social reality in such a way that it manifests itself in the values and behaviors of a class and distinguishes it from other classes. In Goldmann's view, ideology seeks to find solutions to the problems afflicting the social class; in fact, ideology is a continuous line of social problems and solutions. This ideology is not the product of subject but the product of society; it manifests itself in literary, intellectual, and artistic works of one class. Therefore, literary works have both social and individual aspects, because they represent the consciousness of the group or class that to which the author of the book belongs. (Asfoor, 1981: 85 and 86)

Given that Ahmed Khalid Tawfik portrayed two contradictory worlds in this novel, the researchers have tried to answer the following questions in the present paper:

1. How has the author portrayed the ideology of the aristocracy?
2. How has the author portrayed the ideology of the poor and the common?
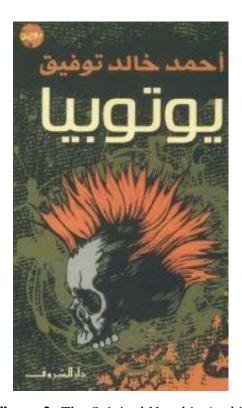
4. Plot Summary

Figure 2: *The Original Novel in Arabic*

The novel was published in Cairo in 2008. Although the title of the novel is *Utopia*, the author depicts two different and conflicting worlds in this book. A city called Utopia, which is drowned in wealth and prosperity and is separated by impermeable walls from other regions. The caretakers are American retired Marines and the residents are wealthy and prominent individuals. In front of the city, there are poor neighborhoods that, of course, have no particular name in the novel; however, the residents of such habitations are plunged into poverty, misery, destitute, and, in fact, dystopia. The protagonist is a sixteen-year-old teenage boy who passes the walls of the city with his girlfriend, Jeminal, into the impoverished area and brings one of its inhabitants into Utopia for creation and playing hunting game with him.

The experience of such an adventure by the protagonist and his girlfriend, Jeminal, is the major event of the novel. But this time, they are caught by some poor people who realize that they have come from Utopia before they have the chance to contact their families and ask American mercenary helicopters to take them back. A young man named Jabir decides to help them in exchange for drugs and does not allow angry poor who are thirsty for the blood of the Utopian population to Hurth them. He offers refuge to these two young individuals, and those two inevitably experience a few days in where the poor people live which if full of poverty and deprivation. He teaches them how to speak, behave and survive in such misery and shelters them so that the other residents of the slum don't realize where they have come from. Eventually Jabir takes them back to Utopia through a secret tunnel before the young man, aged sixteen, and his friend are abused and killed by gangs. However, the protagonist, who had raped Jabir's sister before escaping the slum, kills Jabir with rock strikes, cuts his hand and keeps is as a souvenir.

In the end, the poor people who have come to their senses and are disillusioned with the oppression and humiliation of the Utopians decide to usurp their city. Subsequently, a state of emergency is announced in Utopia, and while terror is spreading across the city, American mercenaries decide to kill protesters. The protagonist, who does not even regret what he has done, opens fir even before American mercenaries.

5. The Society of Utopia

The utopia depicted in this novel is a materialistic utopia. Its inhabitants are drowned in prosperity and are all prominent people, either from high ranking Egyptian officials or reputed businessmen each of whom having monopoly on activities in one of the economic domain. The city is separated from other areas by imperturbable walls and is not protected by Egyptian soldiers but American mercenaries. The mercenaries who are mostly old retired commando of the US military and are very merciless. Anyone who wants to approach the city from outside will be knocked down by these mercenaries without any

questions. The people of this city, who are always afraid of the uprising and riot of the poor people living out of the walls of the city, have personal airports in their palaces, enabling them to escape to Europe and the United States when they are in danger.

5.1 World View

The purpose of Goldmann from the worldview is the set of ideas, aspirations and emotions that unites a social class and puts it in conflict with the rest of the class. This worldview is different from every class to the other. (Antaki, 2009: 270)

In the Goldmann' point of view, worldview is a way of thinking that it imposes itself on a group of people who have similar social and economic attributes, namely a social class. (Goldmann, 1996: 20)

In this novel we witness the conflict of two world views: the worldview of the wealthy class and the poor world view. The hero of the story, who represents the wealthy class, treats based on the world view of his class. So he is arrogant and optimistic, despising the poor and justifying their abuse and infringement of their rights.

Against, Jabir, as the representative of the poor and marginalized, represents the worldview of his class: a disappointment of the loss of trampled rights. He hates the rich, and longs to destroy them, and seek revenge.

5.2 Ethics and Family Relationships

The emotional relationships and the respect represented in the novel between parents and children are so loose; they do not even use the words 'dad' and 'mom', and call them merely with their little name. Their children are mostly young individuals living in unconditional pleasure and welfare. The fathers are so immersed in jobs and collecting money that they do not pass time with, or pay attention to, their children. Mothers have also spoiled their children so much that rebuking them or trying to give them advices will fall in vain. Even, the protagonist of the novel says proudly that he hit his father the day he had rebuked him, because it is his father who has brought him into this world and should accept his responsibility with courage. (Tawfik, 2008: 124)

The youth are unemployed individuals who do not need to work because of the wealth of the family, so they spend their leisure time with various kinds of indigestion and the use of various kinds of drugs in the novel.

Abortion has become a commonplace issue among adolescents in the city. The protagonist is sixteen-year-old, with almost half of the novel's events being narrated from his perspective. Like the majority of young people living in the city, he is so tired of all his wealth and burn with the desire for excitement. From what he says, one can find out that most of his peers are turning to various drugs and

high-risk sexual behaviors for excitement and avoidance of monotony, which they consider to be a kind of fun. But even more, this entertainment is dull and repetitive for him, and he is looking for a new thrill. (Tawfik, 2008: 18)

The most fun excitement for teenagers in this city is hunting, not animal hunting, but hijacking and hunting poor people from outside the Utopia; adventurous young individuals secretly go out of safe boundaries of the city, sneak into poor areas, kidnap a person and return to their city after calling their parents and asking American military helicopter to pick them up and take them back. After chasing and following the kidnapped individual for fun, they kill their own victim and cut off their hand as a memorial and hold it to themselves. (Tawik, 2008: 19)

5.3 Dystopia

Out of the materialistic utopia, which is rich in prosperity and wealth, there are poor areas where hunger and deprivation are wavering; such a residence is a dystopia in every sense of the term. These areas have been abandoned for many years, and even the government does not care about its social and economic problems. Poverty, prostitution, crime, and criminal gangs abound and residents do not have hope for the future. The only official channel of communication between this dystopia and the Utopia in which rich people live is the workers who go from these deprived areas to perform low-paid jobs in the morning and return at night with special buses. This entrance is carefully controlled by American mercenaries. Even female workers are not immune from the harassment of the youths of Utopia, who regard the humiliation of the poor as their absolute right. (Tawfik, 2008: 42)

5.4 The Hero of Utopia

The main character in Utopia is a lively and adolescent teenager. He represents a happy, entertaining, and irresponsible youth who has no goal in life, except for seeking fun and pleasure. The writer depicts his moral, behavioral features and his appearance; "he has shaved half of his head like the Indians; on the other half, he has worn a violet necklace with skulls hanging from it. He has painted a bloody figure on his forehead, which has just come into fashion; he has even dyed his teeth. He is a young student, but he does not believe in anything and he does not adhere to anything (TawfiK, 2008: 13 and 14). Of course, reading books is a kind of narcotic for him (Tawfik, 2008: 15)

The author of the story analyzes some social issues from the language of the protagonist; for example, he compares the tastes of the television audience in the two cities, saying that people here are interested in watching criminal, violent and sexually explicit films. It is strange that they are interested in such films on their cheap TVs as well; however, the reasons differ. People of the utopia watch violent

movies to escape the monotony of life and those living in improvised dystopia watch violent movies to satisfy their oppressed complexes. (Tawfik, 2008: 39)

5.5 Self and Other

The class contradictions are so clearly depicted in this novel that the inhabitants of Utopia refer to the poor by the term 'others', and they fully believe in the dichotomy of wealthy self and poor other. In other words, the inhabitants of Utopia are unwilling to consider themselves and poor people as citizens of the same country; they seem to be living in two separate countries. This difference is not only manifested in the terrible classical gap between the two places, but also in the hatred and alienation between the two. Each inhabitant of these two cities consider the residents of the other city as 'other' and hates them. The poor are dreaming of revenge on the inhabitants of Utopia, and the inhabitants of Utopia view the poor as stupid folks who should be brutally suppressed and exploited. The poor hate the residents of Utopia so deeply that the protagonist and her girlfriend have to be strayed as beggars, because if the poor realize that they come from Utopia, they will kill them. (Tawfik, 2008: 116)

5.6 Permanent Comparison between the City of the Rich and the Poor

The writer constantly compares from the perspective of the main character of the novel; for example, there are religious people in both cities, the difference being that believing in religion in Utopia roots in the fear of losing wealth and power, but believing religion among the poor is the only factor that helps people endure all this misery and poverty. (Tawfik: 2008: 51-52)

Drugs are so abundant and available in Utopia that it no longer provides pleasure for the user; the main character, who has experienced all kinds of drugs by the age of 16, believes that drug is enjoyable as long as it is secretly prepared and taken, rather than being easily accessible and at hand. (Tawfik: 2008: 16 and 17)

5.7 Documentation

Another feature of this novel is providing figures on the abnormalities and social problems of the Egyptian society; for example, according to the statistical press, there were 172 cases of violence against women in Egypt in 2005, details of how to kill people, the causes of violence, the geographical distribution of crime, and murder and crime weapons (Tawfik, 2008: 83-81); page 98 provides statistics on the use of drugs in Egypt.

The writer has managed to depict the misery of the people easily; for example, they use spice in order to not feel the taste of rotten foods (Tawfik; 2008: 105-106)

Taking drugs is one of the similarities of these two places, with the difference that utopians take drugs to avoid monotony and amuse themselves, but residents of poor areas take drug to forget about suffering.

Jabir speaks of the differences between the two cities: a city owns everything, but the other does not have anything. (Tawfik; 2008: 107)

5.8 Unemployment

Youth unemployment is another case of similarity and common point between two cities, with the difference being Utopian young people are unemployed because they do not need to work due to being in absolute welfare; but the young poor living in impoverished area are unemployed because their fathers are not officials and rich people. (Tawfik; 2008: 111)

5.9 Dystopian Properties in Utopia

The only Utopian property of the city of the rich presented in the story is its wealth; in every other sense, such as ethics and humanity, it is an absolute dystopia. Morality and spirituality have lost their meaning. Although some elderly people are religious, the main reason for their tendency to religion is fear of losing the facilities they possess. Major entertainment and recreation of young people is drugs and sexual relations. Parents are obsessed with nothing except for collecting money. The fathers of these young people often hold key businesses in their personal possessions.

The ideology of the residents of Utopia is expressed from the perspective of a young 16 year individual. Particularly, he keeps mocking Safiyah, Jabir's sister, and the people she lives with when he harasses her; he considers them to be dumb people who are doomed to live in poverty and misery because they are not as lucid and have not taken advantages of the chances life might have presented them as the inhabitants of Utopia. (Tawfik, 2008: 164 and 165)

5.10 Dystopian Properties in Poor Residence Presented in the Novel

The impoverished area is a dystopia both materially and spiritually. Poverty, hunger, unemployment, violence, prostitution, crime, disappointment in regard with future, and suppressed rage toward the rich had dominated these neighborhoods; morality and spirituality have lost their meaning and have turned into absurd concepts. Although some people are religious, they resort to religion to escape hopelessness and frustration life has brought upon them.

6. Conclusion

The underlying ideology of the main character of the novel is class difference; the 16-year-old Utopian protagonist has a colonial worldview. He and the rest of the city think only of themselves and their interests and do not care about the suffering of their compatriots. They not only refuse to help the poor, but also keep humiliating and ridiculing them, and believe that their power and influence derives from their wisdom and the misery of the poor roots in their stupidity.

The ideology of the inhabitants of the poor area is full of frustration, hopelessness, anger and revenge; people are either unwilling to take action to improve their state of health, or free themselves from narcotics and prostitution, or are angry with the desire to revolt and revenge the rich.

The author seems to be trying to warn against the polarization of the community presented in the novel and its consequences and repercussions.

It seems that the main concern of the author is the problems and social anomalies of the Egyptian society. That is divided into two very rich and very poor classes. Such a situation could lead to a social explosion. So the novel ends with a social revolt. While the military forces are trying to suppress it harshly, the end of the story is not known and lost to the reader. It is as if the author wishes to show that the consequences of such transformations cannot be easily predicted.

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