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DOSSIER THÉMATIQUE :

Le crime à l'écran dans le monde arabe

THE TRAGIC OUTLAW HERO IN MODERN EGYPTIAN FICTION

A Case Study on Naguib Mahfouz's
The Thief and The Dogs

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Abstract | Cet article examine la figure du hors-la-loi dans la fiction égyptienne moderne à travers le prisme du cadre conceptuel du banditisme social et de la tragédie classique. Il offre un angle d'analyse unique de l'une des œuvres les plus prolifiques de Mahfouz qui émerge à une époque d'anxiété politique croissante suite à la révolution égyptienne de 1952. En lisant l'adaptation cinématographique de 1962 du *Voleur et les chiens* de Naguib Mahfouz réalisée par Kamal El-Sheikh comme une projection de l'incertitude sociopolitique de l'ère Nasser post-révolutionnaire, cet article considère la figure du hors-la-loi dans la condition d'aliénation sociale. En utilisant les frontières conceptuelles fixées par Eric Hobsbawm et Graham Seal autour du « bandit social », le protagoniste de Mahfouz, Sa'īd Mahrān, est un amalgame à la fois de banditisme social et d'héroïsme tragique. C'est à travers cette juxtaposition complexe que Mahfouz et El-Sheikh parviennent à leur commentaire politique en présentant un personnage qui personnifie un sentiment général d'aliénation dans le contexte sociopolitique égyptien.

Mots-clés | Égypte, Naguib Mahfouz, film, héros hors-la-loi, tragédie

Abstract | This article examines the outlaw figure in modern Egyptian fiction through the lens of the conceptual framework of social banditry and classical tragedy. It offers a unique angle of analysis of one of Mahfouz's most prolific works that emerges in times of growing political anxiety following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Reading the 1962 film adaptation of Naguib Mahfouz's *The Thief and the Dogs* directed by Kamal El-Sheikh as a projection of the socio-political uncertainty of the post-revolution Nasser era, this paper considers the outlaw figure within the condition of social alienation. Using the conceptual borders set by Eric Hobsbawm and Graham Seal surrounding the 'social bandit', Mahfouz's protagonist, Sa'īd Mahrān, is an amalgam of both social banditry as

well as tragic heroism. It is through this complex juxtaposition that Mahfouz and El-Sheikh achieve their political commentary by presenting a character that personifies a general feeling of alienation in the Egyptian socio-political context.

Keywords | Egypt, Naguib Mahfouz, film, outlaw hero, tragedy

Introduction

The outlaw whose story is narrated in a plethora of cultural artifacts such as plays, literary works, films, and television series, hero has been one of the most prominent figures in various cultural traditions around the world whose story is narrated in a plethora of cultural artifacts such as plays, literary works, films, and television series. Presented under different names, either *futuwwa* (thug), *balṭaji* (hoodlum), *ḥarāmī/liṣṣ* (thief), or *khārij ‘an al-qānūn* (outlaw), this outlaw persona has occupied a significant role in Egyptian popular culture, ranging from numerous interpretations and representations of this character in Egyptian cinema and the Egyptian *riwāyā* (novel). Bedouin outlaws, gangsters, thieves, and thugs are among such representations in prominent Golden Age Egyptian films such as, *‘Antar Ibn Shadād* (1961), *Abu Zayd al-Hilālī* (1947), *al-Waḥsh* (1954), and many more.¹ Naguib Mahfouz’s novel *Al-Liṣṣ Wa-l-Kilāb* (*The Thief and the Dogs*) published in 1961 constitutes a significant development of the outlaw character personified in the novel’s protagonist Sa‘īd Mahrān. As Adel Ata Elyas argues in a thorough analysis of the novel, “almost all of the major literary critics have agreed that *The Thief and the Dogs* is one of Mahfouz’s finest and most important works”.² The novel was later adapted into a film in 1962 directed by Kamal Al-Sheikh. The novel and film emerged following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 and the rise of the Nasser regime, which marked what many historians identify as the “realist” age in Egyptian cinema.³ The era saw the emergence of a vast number of realist political films with Henri Barakat and Kamal Al-Sheikh being considered as the “mainstream directors” of the era.⁴

While previous research concerning the period of Egyptian fiction has analyzed the socio-political context and how it shaped Egyptian fiction and storytelling through the 1960s, little attention has been paid particularly to the outlaw narrative in such stories, primarily considering what Viola Shafik identifies as the rise of “sympathetic” outlaw characters “victimized by society” in this era.⁵ Rather than being merely mythical imaginations in popular folklore tales, bandit and outlaw stories have been studied by historians, philosophers, social theorists, and anthropologists in an attempt to identify the profound cultural and socio-political significance of these stories for the societies in which they were created. Most notably, Eric Hobsbawm’s book *Bandits* represents this endeavor. Hobsbawm introduces the term ‘social bandit’ through which he aims to capture the reoccurring patterns within various stories of banditry and outlawry across different cultures,

1- SHAFIK Viola, « Egyptian Cinema », in LEAMAN Oliver (dir.), *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*, New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 57-58.

2- ELYAS Ata Adel, « A Thief in Search of His Identity - Naguib Mahfouz Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb (*The Thief and The Dogs*) - A Critical Analysis with A Translation of The Novel », *Oklahoma State University*, Oklahoma State University Library, 1979, p. 14.

3- SHAFIK Viola, « Egyptian Cinema », *op. cit.*, p.27; GINSBERG Terri, LIPPARD Chris, *Historical Dictionary of Middle Eastern Cinema*, Lanham, MD, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2010, p. xxxix.

4- SHAFIK Viola, « Egyptian Cinema », *op. cit.*, p.27.

5- *Ibid.*, p.58.

thus establishing an outlaw ‘rubric’.⁶ Hobsbawm understood social bandits not as “simple criminals” but rather as “peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their peoples as heroes [...] and in any case as men to be admired, helped, and supported”.⁷ Despite the criticisms of such interpretation of social banditry and the elements applied in Hobsbawm’s analysis of outlawry, the essential notion that the outlaw figure in many bandit stories cannot be confined to the definition of ‘criminal’ alludes to the need for a better understanding of a highly complex character with longstanding socio-political and cultural significance.⁸

Drawing on parallels between the 1962 film adaptation and the novel I will consider the development of the outlaw character in *The Thief and the Dogs* by examining how the outlaw narrative in Naguib Mahfouz’s *The Thief and the Dogs* constructs a tragic outlaw hero in a way that transcodes a sense of social alienation. Using Douglas Kellner’s concept of transcoding, this essay examines how the social alienation of the outlaw figure is “translated” and “encoded” in both the novel and the film.⁹ Through understanding the outlaw figure “in conjunction with [...] the political”,¹⁰ it will be argued that *The Thief and the Dogs* presents a complex outlaw character situated in– and structured by a society of alienation. Beyond the parameters of the classical social bandit in Hobsbawmian terms, Naguib Mahfouz’s protagonist occupies an ambiguous space between being a figure of resistance and being a disenfranchised tragic hero in the face of alienating forces of society and political authorities. Ultimately, Mahfouz creates an ambiguous outlaw character who epitomizes an overall socio-political feeling of alienation and uncertainty characterizing Egyptian society following the 1952 Revolution. Understanding the outlaw figure through this context is quintessential as it raises questions considering the contemporary development of the outlaw character in Egyptian cinema and a series of implicitly political films such as *Al-Jazīra* (The Island) (2007, 2014), *Ibrāhīm Al-Abyad* (2009), *Al-Hūrūb* (The Escape) (1991), *Al-Irhāb Wa-l-Kabāb* (1992) (Terrorism and Kebab), *Wāḥid Min al-Nās* (An Average Citizen) (2007).

The Outlaw Bandit: A Theoretical Framework

The study of the outlaw character has primarily focused on the re-occurring patterns in outlaw stories across various cultural traditions. Through studying outlaw stories in a peasant and rural context, Hobsbawm’s analysis introduced an outlaw rubric which he identified in popular stories about the so-called “noble-

6- HOBBSAWM Eric J., *Bandits*. New York, Abacus, 2010, p. 8.

7- *Ibid.*

8- SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend: A Cultural Tradition in Britain, America, and Australia*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 3-4.

9- KELLNER Douglas, *Cinema Wars: Hollywood Film and Politics in the Bush-Cheney Era*. Malden, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 2.

10- SEAL Graham, « The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History, and the Social Bandit », *Journal of Folklore Research: An International Journal of Folklore and Ethnomusicology*, vol. 46, n° 1, 2009, pp. 84–85.

robber”.¹¹ According to Hobsbawm, the noble robber character as a figure of resistance and protest can be seen as “the most famous and universally popular kind of bandit”.¹² Hobsbawm contends that the relationship between the noble robber and his peasant society is structured around nine points, namely:

First, the noble robber begins his career of outlawry not by crime, but as a victim of injustice, or through being persecuted by the authorities for some act which they, but not the custom of his people, consider as criminal. Second, he ‘rights wrongs. Third, he ‘takes from the rich to give to the poor’. Fourth, he ‘never kills but in self-defense or just revenge’. Fifth, if he survives, he returns to his people as an honorable citizen and member of the community. Indeed, he never actually leaves the community. Sixth, he is admired, helped and supported by his people. Seventh, he dies invariably and only through treason [...]. Eighth, he is – at least in theory– invisible and invulnerable. Ninth, he is not the enemy of the king or the emperor, who is the fount of justice, but only of the local gentry, clergy or other oppressors.¹³

Hobsbawm understood the social bandit to be a hero and a “systematic defender of his people’s rights against injustice and oppression”.¹⁴ This pattern of “producing” and “perpetuating” a story of the outlaw hero is what Graham Seal describes as the “Robin Hood principle”.¹⁵ Similar to Hobsbawm, when it comes to the framework structuring the outlaw story, Seal delineates an outlaw rubric based on twelve aspects identical to Hobsbawm’s criteria, he adds, however, other elements, namely: 1. Kindness to the victims, 2. Disguise and the use of tricks, 3. Use of magic and other superhuman attributes, 4. The outlaw is brave and strong, and 5. He may escape death.¹⁶

Numerous criticisms have been directed at Hobsbawm’s thesis. Most notably, Anton Blok highlights the mythical aspect of social banditry as being predominantly a product of human imagination which does “not correspond to actual conditions”.¹⁷ As I will illustrate in the course of this paper, the distinction between myth and reality concerning the outlaw figure as studied in this article is not concerned with the extent to which reality proves the existence of the social bandit, but rather with the imagination of such a complex outlaw figure within a specific socio-political setting.¹⁸ Hence, the distinction between myth and reality, fact and fiction, although relevant, does not capture the contextualized

11- HOBBSBAWM Eric J., *Bandits*, op. cit., p. 46.

12- *Ibid.*

13- *Ibid.*, p.47.

14- *Ibid.*, p.53-54.

15- SEAL Graham, « The Robin Hood Principle », op. cit., p. 68, 85.

16- SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend*, op. cit., p.170.

17- BLOK Anton, «The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered », *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 14, n° 4, 1972, p. 500.

18- HOBBSBAWM Eric J., *Bandits*, op. cit., p.168; CRONIN Stephanie, « Noble Robbers, Avengers and Entrepreneurs: Eric Hobsbawm and Banditry in Iran, the Middle East and North Africa », *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 52, n° 5, 2016, p. 847.

importance of the bandit figure, who despite in some cases being a product of social fantasy has had 'real' socio-political significance.¹⁹

According to Seal, the importance of the outlaw hero story regardless of whether it is based on facts or merely a myth, is that it "is immensely powerful, widespread, and long-lasting".²⁰ For Seal, the imagination of such figures attests to the human tendency to invent and develop personas who are not simply criminals but rather carry a deeper cultural and political meaning through their stories of outlawry.²¹ This explains why Seal concludes that "Hobsbawm is undoubtedly correct in identifying outlaw heroes as a different and special form of criminal, regardless of how many other studies strive to prove that many such figures are just common thugs".²² The imagination of the outlaw hero is contingent on the socio-political context, in other words, "whenever and wherever the appropriate set of social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances arises it is highly probable that one or more figures will emerge who wear the mantle of the outlaw hero".²³ In a contextual analysis of outlaw narratives, the emphasis lies on the conflation between myth and reality, more specifically a political reality and climate which enable the formation of a partly, if completely, mythical outlaw hero.

Sa'īd Mahrān's character in the film's adaptation of Mahfouz's semi-mythical protagonist can be situated between the social bandit rubric and the classical tragic hero. First, Mahrān's character is a product of imagination induced by a real figure in cultural tradition and the socio-political conditions during the emergence of the novel, and later the film. According to Mahfouz, the inspiration for Sa'īd Mahrān's character came from a highly sensationalized outlaw in the media by the name "Mahmud Amin Sulayman," who was referred to by the press as *Safāḥ Al-Eskandariyya* (The Alexandria Serial Killer).²⁴ Mahfouz argued that he became obsessed with Mahmud and had been following his story closely in the press as it occupied the public for several months in 1960.²⁵ Moving away from the details and exaggerations made by the media concerning Sulayman, Mahfouz argues that he "hadn't written the story of" Sulayman, but he only saw in his story "an opportunity to embody the reactions and thoughts" he was thinking "but could not express — the relation between the individual, authority, and society".²⁶ Although the character is thus primarily a myth, reality commingles with the myth firstly through the real existence of Sulayman, as well as the real socio-political significance of Sa'īd which Mahfouz aims to bring

19- *Ibid.*

20- SEAL Graham, « The Robin Hood Principle », *op. cit.*, p. 84.

21- *Ibid.*

22- *Ibid.*

23- *Ibid.*, p.85.

24- AL-GHITANI Jamal, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*. Trans. DAVIES Humphrey, Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2007, p. 106-107; 'ISSA Ṣalāḥ, ووثائق دراسات.. تراجم.. ذكريات.. العجب: شخصيات لها العجب: ذكريات.. تراجم.. دراسات.. ووثائق, Cairo, Nahdet Misr Publishing Group, 2010, p. 530.

25- *Ibid.*; AL-NEMI Hassan «The Dramatization of Fiction Naguib Mahfouz's Novels into Films », *Indiana University, UMI Company*, 1995, p. 160-170.

26- AL-GHITANI Jamal, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

forward. This study also considers Mahfouz's Sa'id Mahrān to be a complex character who does not necessarily comply with Hobsbawm's 'social bandit' and 'noble robber' rubric in all aspects. While Seal presents an important and detailed outline of the outlaw hero story several problems arise considering the "wider applicability" of the rubric of the Robin Hood principle to the story of Sa'id Mahrān.²⁷ As will be demonstrated below, rather than being merely a figure of resistance and/or an epic hero in Robin Hood fashion, Mahrān exemplifies the bewildered tragic hero rather than an ideal hero.²⁸

Political Disillusionment and Social Alienation

Following the 1952 revolution, Mahfouz's returned to the literary scene following a five-year break from writing. *Children of Our Alley* (1959) and *Adrift on the Nile* (1966), implied as El-Enany argues, Mahfouz's "disillusionment" with the Nasser regime.²⁹ Rather than being explicitly opposed to the revolution or its ideals, he expressed what he felt was the "usurpation" of power by the revolution elite and government, the continuing corruption, as well as an uncertainty for the future and unnoticeable economic progress.³⁰ As Mahfouz argues: "There is no doubt that the declared aims of the 23 July 1952 revolution would have been to me and to my entire generation very satisfactory only if they had been carried out in the spirit in which they were declared. I wanted nothing more than true socialism and true democracy. This has not been achieved".³¹

What occupied Mahfouz was the disillusioned and alienated individual or the so-called "unhappy conscience of the man" caused by an atmosphere of "political uncertainty" in the post-revolution context.³² Mahfouz portrays therefore what he saw as the "betrayal of the revolutionary ideals once power, with the privileges that come with it, are achieved".³³ From here emerges the plot of *The Thief and the Dogs*. Sa'id Mahrān, who completes his four-year prison sentence after being arrested for robbing a villa, wants to take revenge from his ex-wife (Nabawiyya) and his best friend (ʿIlīsh) who both betray him by handing him to the police and by getting married while he is in prison. He is released from prison after the revolution and finds that everything has changed; his best friend and wife are unfaithful, his daughter Sana' does not recognize him, the poor law student Ra'ūf ʿIlwān who taught him it was just to steal from the rich,

27- CARLIDGE Neil, «Robin Hood's Rules: Gang-Culture in Early-Modern Outlaw Tales?», *Cultural Dynamics*, 28:1, 2016, p. 16.

28- HUNTER Richard, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 9-10.

29- EL-ENANY Rasheed, *Naguib Mahfouz: The Pursuit of Meaning*. New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 25.

30- GREENBERG Nathaniel, *The Aesthetic of Revolution in the Film and Literature of Naguib Mahfouz (1952-1967)*. Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2014, p. xxii-xxiv; COOK Steven A., *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 72; AL-GHITANI Jamal, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, op. cit., p. 116.

31- EL-ENANY Rasheed, *Naguib Mahfouz*, op. cit., p. 26.

32- GREENBERG Nathaniel, *The Aesthetic of Revolution*, op. cit., p. xxv.

33- EL-ENANY Rasheed, *Naguib Mahfouz*, op. cit., p.102.

is now a famous journalist and has joined the aristocratic class he himself used to despise. Everyone Sa'īd used to trust and love have become *kilāb* (dogs) striving for power, except for Tarazan his friend and owner of the neighborhood's café, and Nūr, a woman with a good heart who is in love with Sa'īd.³⁴

The external factors of alienation central to the novel inform Mahfouz's socio-political critique by presenting Sa'īd as a socially alienated figure of resistance. Sa'īd's first criminal act is somewhat ambiguous as he is caught stealing a watch from a student. In the film, Ra'ūf 'Ilwān reassures Sa'īd that he has an excuse to steal because he considers what Sa'īd has done to be a legitimate act of thievery. He notes that this is a recurring phenomenon throughout society as the rich steal from the poor and the poor from the rich to survive. The conversation between Sa'īd and Ra'ūf at the student hostel is crucial as it clarifies how Ra'ūf creates a "moral code" for Sa'īd:³⁵

Ra'ūf: I cannot blame you for stealing, because there is simply no equality or justice in the life we live, as some people live in luxury while others are struggling to barely survive.

Sa'īd: What a blessing it would have been if one was born rich.

Ra'ūf: You think that's the solution? That's egoism, if you were born rich you would have never known what it means to be poor and the suffering that comes with it. [...] The solution is precisely in what you have done; if the rich cannot recognize our rights, then we shall take it from them. Whatever has been taken with theft by the rich can be retrieved with theft. But we need a plan or an organization to do so, to bring equality.

Sa'īd: [...] You have revealed the truth to me.

Ra'ūf: Take your rights with your own hands because otherwise, no one will ever give it to you [...] I have nothing to offer you but these books, read them and remember me.³⁶

Sa'īd's outlawry thus begins with a small act of thievery and subsequently is given moral justification at the hand of 'Ilwān's advice and support. The narrative sets poverty and Sa'īd's feeling of hopelessness and alienation as the conditions for Sa'īd's first crime and 'Ilwān supplies him with the moral code thus turning his acts of stealing into a justifiable act of resistance.

Sa'īd's alienation persists even after adhering to Ra'ūf's moral code of stealing from the rich. Upon his release from prison, he finds himself in an even bigger existential crisis and confusion in a post-revolutionary society in which principles of resistance have now merged with power symbolized in the novel and film by *al-kilāb* (the dogs).³⁷ In the scenes added in the film of Sa'īd's time in prison,

34- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*. Trans. LE GASSICK Trevor, BADAWI M. M., New York, Anchor Books, 2008.

35- SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend*, op. cit., p.171.

36- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p. 104 ; adaptation cinématographique : *Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb*, réalisé par AL-SHEIKH Kamal, Égypte, 1962, séquence (23:29–26:51).

37- AL-TAWATI Mustafa, « Place in Three Novels by Mahfouz », in LE GASSICK Trevor (dir.), *Critical Perspectives on Naguib Mahfouz*, Three Continents Press, 1991, p.77.

after Sa'īd reads 'Ilwān's article in the newspaper, he describes 'Ilwān as a "shikh mansar", a phrase used to describe a person who is a master in theft and deception.³⁸ While Sa'īd's cellmate, Mahdi, introduces himself to him as a shikh mansar, Sa'īd later explains to him that Ra'ūf, whom he considered to be his teacher, is no different from himself or Mahdi; Ra'ūf is also a thief or sheikh mansar but "on a higher level".³⁹ Ra'ūf 'Ilwān in many ways resembles Mahfouz's Mahjub 'Abd al-Dā'im's character in his 1945 novel *Modern Cairo*; the typical poor student who leaves rural Egypt for Cairo and then undergoes a radical transformation resulting in the abandonment of "values, ideals, belief systems, and principles" in order to gain more power.⁴⁰

After being Sa'īd's teacher and supporter, Ra'ūf joins the 'dogs' in chasing the thief; he uses his power in the press to portray Sa'īd as a monster. As the chief editor of Ra'ūf's newspaper tells him: "As you are searching for the victims of Sa'īd Mahrān, you should consider whose victim Sa'īd Mahrān is himself. Who converted him from a man to a criminal?".⁴¹ Ra'ūf symbolizes the power and propaganda facing Sa'īd who consequently finds himself in a new prison either in a literal or figurative sense. As the Sufi Sheikh al-Junaydī—whom Ra'ūf regularly visits—often tell him: "You, my son, have left the small prison to enter the bigger prison".⁴² The social alienation continues in this bigger prison because in this sense the narrative revolves around "the metaphysical and existential level of the word 'prison,' a journey from nothingness to nothingness." Sa'īd argues in the film: "I returned to prison, first I had one jailer, now I have a thousand".⁴³ This constant agony caused by a feeling of confinement constitutes Sa'īd's inescapable social alienation in the context of his external reality. It is this alienation that Mahfouz presents at the beginning of the novel through his allegorical detailed description of the city; as Sa'īd leaves the prison he comes face to face with the new prison of the city with its "stifling dust" and "unbearable heat".⁴⁴

Amidst this "gloomily abstruse pessimism" that dominates the novel as well as the film, sympathy and support in Sa'īd's external reality as a victim of society also present little to no relief from alienation. This sympathy comes directly from Nūr and Tarazan who continue to help Sa'īd even after he commits murder. There is also an indirect form of sympathy towards Sa'īd as a figure of resistance from the public who read about him in the press. As the editor-in-chief of the newspaper 'Ilwān is working for tells him: "There are people who consider Sa'īd to be a hero and sympathize with him, and this is the result of the unjust and

38- Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb, (19:17- 19:33).

39- Ibid., (17:20-17:37); MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p.104.

40- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *Modern Cairo: An Egyptian Novel*. Trans. HUTCHINS William M., Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 2013, p. 19.

41- Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb, (1:15:15- 1:15:30).

42- Ibid., (47:24-47:28); MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p. 28.

43- Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb, (1:26:59-1:26:02).

44- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p. 13; MAHMOUD Mohamed, « The Unchanging Hero in a Changing World », *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 15, n° 1, janvier 1984, p. 58.

biased coverage of his case”.⁴⁵ Sa‘id also reassures Nūr that people love him and support him and that “most Egyptians neither fear nor dislike thieves [...] but they do have an instinctive dislike for dogs”.⁴⁶ As put in Sa‘id’s words, this sympathy emanates from the public’s ability to identify with him and consider him to be primarily a victim. This is highlighted in a scene in which Sa‘id imagines through an internal monologue what he would tell his prosecutors in court:

I did not kill Rauf ‘Ilwan’s servant. How could I kill a man I did not know and who didn’t know me? Rauf ‘Ilwan’s servant was killed because, quite simply, he was the servant of Rauf ‘Ilwan. Yesterday his spirit visited me and I jumped to hide in shame, but he pointed out to me that millions of people are killed by mistake and without due cause.⁴⁷

In the film, Sa‘id delivers this monologue while looking into the courtroom and gazing upon four men resembling him, symbolizing that there are many like him who suffer similar injustice, he argues: “Everyone sympathizes with me even if they do not say it”.⁴⁸ He continues:

Whoever kills me will be killing the millions. I am the hope and the dream, the redemption of cowards; I am good principles, consolation, the tears that recall the weeper to humility. And the declaration that I’m mad must encompass all who are loving. Examine the causes of this insane occasion, then reach your judgment however you wish.⁴⁹

Sa‘id insists that everyone is a victim, namely a victim of the dogs and he sees himself as the embodiment of the victims’ suffering against injustice. Yet, Sa‘id always remains isolated from the “resistant community” and its support.⁵⁰ Most importantly, there is no “active support” for the outlaw, instead, throughout the storyline, Sa‘id is alone always isolated from this community. As Sa‘id’s internal monologue in the novel narrates: “He was quite alone, separate from everyone else. They didn’t even know, did not comprehend the language of silence and solitude”.⁵¹ Sa‘id declares: “The worst of it is that despite this support from millions of people I find myself driven away into dismal isolation, with no one to help. It’s senseless all of it, a waste. No bullet could clear away its absurdity”.⁵² The support of the community is therefore mostly passive with no implications for helping Sa‘id escape his social alienation and isolation thus presenting no active psychological or physical relief for him.

45- Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb, (1:15:07- 1:15:14).

46- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p.114.

47- Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb, (1:45:44-1:46:18).

48- *Ibid.*, (1:46:36- 1:46:38).

49- *Ibid.*, (1:46:39-1:47:09).

50- SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend*, op. cit., p.170.

51- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p.97.

52- *Ibid.*, p.123.

Tragedy and the Heroic Temper

Although Sa'īd's character aligns with Habsbawm due to Sa'īd being a figure of resistance victimized by society and its injustice and having passive and ineffective support from the public, the ultimate tragedy of the narrative and Sa'īd's failure in "righting wrongs" transforms him into a classical tragic hero.⁵³ In the tradition of epic heroes including Homeric heroes in the Iliad and Odyssey, the hero is primarily "antitragic".⁵⁴ According to Richard Hunter, the basic characteristic of epic heroes is being "if not idealized or perfect figures, at least admirable ones who inspire in listeners and readers an awe and a desire [...] to imitate them; heroes should be exemplars of moral and physical action".⁵⁵ The grandeur of the epic hero emanates from his adherence to a moral code that does not only involve resistance against injustice but also control of violence by refraining from killing the innocent and thus complying with what "supporters" and sympathizers "consider appropriate and tolerable".⁵⁶ Therefore, in Hobsbawm's terms, the epic hero social bandit depiction would insist "on the standard attributes of the morally approved citizen".⁵⁷ On the other hand, the tragic hero, as presented in Aristotle's *Poetics*, is "antiepic" because he "is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, and yet it is through no badness or villainy of his own that he falls into misfortune, but rather through some flaw in him" in classic Oedipal fashion.⁵⁸ The tragic mistake or hamartia (ἁμαρτία) is what leads the tragic hero towards his tragic fate, and it can be defined as an ignorance stemming not from "evil intent" but from an error of judgment.⁵⁹ Thus, the tragic hero is situated between good ("ἐπιεικεῖς") and bad ("μοχθηρούς") and rather than being an exemplary persona, the tragic hero induces among the audience the vital dramatic objective of tragedy which is a sense of pity ("ἐλέος") and fear ("φόβος").⁶⁰

Along these lines, it could be argued that Sa'īd Mahrān's hamartia as the tragic outlaw hero lies primarily in his insistence on a sense of exaggerated self-confidence and arrogance, as he compares himself to a "lion".⁶¹ This blinds him from seeing the reality of his actions and convinces him that he is able to stand in front of the dogs. As he tells Nūr: "I'll get away [...] as soon as I decide to. You'll see. [...] Don't you know yet who Sa'īd Mahrān is? All the papers are

53- SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend*, op. cit., p. 170; HOBBSAWM Eric J., *Bandits*, op. cit., p. 47; AL-TAWATI Mustafa, « Place in Three Novels by Mahfouz », op. cit., p. 177.

54- MILLER Dean A., *The Epic Hero*. Baltimore, MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, p. 7.

55- HUNTER Richard, *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 9-10.

56- SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend*, op. cit., p. 8.

57- HOBBSAWM Eric J., *Bandits*, op. cit., p. 54.

58- ARISTOTLE, « *Poetics* », trans. FYFE W.H., in *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 23. Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1932, 1452b 7-8.

59- LUCAS Donald W., « Appendixes », in LUCAS Donald W., *Poetics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980, p.302.

60- ARISTOTLE, « *Poetics* », op. cit., 1449b 27; 1452 34-37.

61- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p.94.

talking about him”.⁶² He is therefore obsessed with the idea of revenge and cannot judge the situation rationally while ultimately being fixated on his pre-prison reality. As Mohamed Mahmoud notes, Sa‘id’s “impervious determination to take vengeance is indicative of his complete failure to come to terms with an external reality of deprivation and change”.⁶³ After killing the first innocent person, instead of ‘Ilīsh and Nabawiyya, he insists on continuing with his revenge plan rather than pursue the other options available to him such as becoming a tailor, a skill he had learned during his time in prison or considering Sheikh Al-Junaydi’s spiritual and religious advice or even escaping with Nūr. Rather he is blinded by his lack of equanimity, his recklessness and arrogance. As Knox argues, the tragic hero is “one who [...] makes a decision which springs from the deepest layer of his individual nature, his physis, and then blindly, ferociously, heroically, maintains that decision even to the point of self-destruction”.⁶⁴ After killing the first innocent person, instead of ‘Ilīsh and Nabawiyya, he insists on continuing with his revenge plan rather than pursue the other options available to him such as becoming a tailor, a skill he had learned during his time in prison or considering Sheikh Al-Junaydi’s spiritual and religious advice or even escaping with Nūr. Rather he is blinded by his lack of equanimity, his recklessness and arrogance. As Knox argues, the tragic hero is “one who [...] makes a decision which springs from the deepest layer of his individual nature, his physis, and then blindly, ferociously, heroically, maintains that decision even to the point of self-destruction”.⁶⁵

What lies at the heart of Sa‘id’s tragic flaw can be found in what Knox defines as “the heroic temper” idiosyncratic to the tragic hero. Primarily through his excessive sense of pride and superiority and the overpowering will to prove himself right. Being given free will, Sa‘id:

Is faced with a choice between a possible [...] compromise which if accepted would betray the hero’s own conception of himself, his rights, his duties. The hero decides against compromise, and that decision is then assailed, by friendly advice, by threats, by actual force. But he refuses to yield; he remains true to himself, to his physis, that nature [...] which is his identity.⁶⁶

Sa‘id refuses any form of compromise and is unable to look beyond his revenge despite him killing an innocent person in a moment of rage. Ironically despite being overtly self-confident, Sa‘id makes a small but tragic mistake of leaving the receipt at the pharmacy when getting medicine for Nūr which leads to the police knowing where he is and tracking him down. He does not get caught because

62- *Ibid.*, p. 110; *Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb*, (1:09:38- 1:10:33).

63- MAHMOUD Mohamed, « The Unchanging Hero in a Changing World », *op. cit.*, p. 58.

64- KNOX Bernard M.W., *The Heroic Temper*. Berkley, University of California Press, 1964, p. 5.

65- *Ibid.*

66- *Ibid.*, p. 8.

of betrayal but as the result of his own poor judgment.⁶⁷ Following his failure to murder Ra'ūf 'Ilwān and after killing his innocent doorkeeper instead, he is consumed by his frustration and anger as he is failing in asserting his pride. In a typical tragic plot, Mahrān's suffering from isolation and alienation intensifies and he finds himself in what he describes as a true "*dawwāma*" (maelstrom).⁶⁸ Towards the end of the story the narrative reaches a point in which Sa'id's external and internal reality collide. It is not only the external reality that forms his alienation but also his own internal reality. Bewildered by societal injustice, passive sympathy, and his own internal battles, his alienation and tragic condition is a product of the synergy of all of these elements. As he argues: "Even the sympathy of the millions for you is voiceless, impotent, like the longings of the dead".⁶⁹ Sa'id's tragedy formed by the abovementioned synergy reflects Mahfouz's desire to present a post-revolutionary tale that creates blends the elements of "the individual, authority, and society".⁷⁰ Thus, Sa'id's character is informed by this synergy producing a character whose freedom was and will always be restricted as he finds himself imprisoned by symbiotic external and internal conditions. As Al-Tawati notes, the element of the prison and Sa'id's constant confinement - exemplified in the film by reoccurring scenes of Sa'id standing behind bars, fences, and windows - functions as a metaphor for Mahfouz's critique on his political context as one that "devalues freedom" and therefore "in its fundamental sense disintegrates, while opportunism and greed flourish".⁷¹ It is this external "sensibility" that also informs Sa'id's internal reality and heroic temper due to his constant fight against confinement, no matter the cost. As Knox argues:

Immovable once his decision is taken, deaf to appeals and persuasion, to reproof and threat, unterrified by physical violence, even by the ultimate violence of death itself, more stubborn as his isolation increases until he has no one to speak to but the unfeeling landscape, bitter at the disrespect and mockery the world levels at what it regards as failure, the hero prays for revenge curses his enemies as he welcomes the death that is the predictable end of his intransigence.⁷²

Sa'id's internal heroic temper leads to his failure in righting wrongs in the external reality and even in adhering to a moral code or being a morally approved citizen after murdering two innocent people. Mahfouz's tragic outlaw character possesses the impulsive determination to achieve absolute justice and escape his constant confinement and alienation by any means necessary. Sa'id presents himself to be a man against the world, relentlessly trying to overcome

67- SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend*, op. cit., p.170; HOBBSAWM Eric J., *Bandits*, op. cit., p. 47.

68- Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb, (47:35).

69- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, op. cit., p. 134.

70- AL-GHITANI Jamal, *The Mahfouz Dialogs*, op. cit., p.107.

71- AL-TAWATI Mustafa, « Place in Three Novels by Mahfouz », op. cit., p. 72.

72- KNOX Bernard M.W., *The Heroic Temper*, op. cit., p. 44.

the internal and external factors facing him. It is through this willingness to stand in front of all of these limitations that Sa'īd as a social bandit acquires the epithet hero and it is through his failure in achieving the point beyond these limitations that grants him the epithet tragic.

The element of freedom and the devaluation of one's freedom by society lends the film its crescendo as Sa'īd finally discovers that despite his conviction that he freely directs the course of his actions, he was in fact never free. His external and internal worlds fueling the tragic flaw within him were destined to lead him to his fate of tragic demise; in other words, overpowered by his heroic temper, he was led to his fate.⁷³ Sa'īd's inner monologue narrates in the novel:

Yes, he thought, you're the top story today, all right. And you'll be the top story until you're dead. You're a source of fear and fascination –like some freak of nature–and all those people choking with boredom owe their pleasure to you. As for your gun, it's obvious that it will kill only the innocent. You'll be its last victim.⁷⁴

Hence, the only true freedom and salvation from alienation occurs with death. As Sa'īd argues in the film when looking over the cemetery across Nūr's apartment: the graveyard is "a city of silence and truth, where success and failure, murderer and victim come together, where thieves and policemen lie side by side in peace for the first and last time".⁷⁵ Mahfouz captures the essence of this tragedy through his choice of a poem by Ibn al-Farid which Sa'īd hears as *Sufi dhikr* shortly before his death when he seeks refuge at Sheikh Al-Junaydi:

"وا حسرتي ضاع الزمان و لم أفز
و كفى غراما ان أبيت متيما
منكم أهيل مودتي بقاء
شوقي امامي، و القضاء واري

My time in vain is gone and I have not succeeded. For a meeting how, I long but hope of peace is ended. Love enough to lay me down enthralled: My passion before me, my fate behind.⁷⁶

It is through these words that Sa'īd discovers that he was never free. While he continues to resist the police until his last breath, he meets his death bravely after being shot by a policeman and finally surrenders to his misfortune while inducing the pity and fear central to the tragedy's purpose.⁷⁷

Sa'īd Mahrān's character presents complex and philosophical insights into the persona of the outlaw hero. The development of the outlaw character in *The Thief and the Dogs* surpasses Seal's and Hobsbawm's simple rubric of the social bandit. Sa'īd is a socially alienated social bandit only by being a victim of injustice

73- MAHMOUD Mohamed, « The Unchanging Hero in a Changing World », *op. cit.*, p. 73.

74- MAHFOUZ Naguib, *The Thief and the Dogs*, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

75- *Ibid.*, p. 89; *Al-Liṣṣ wa-l-Kilāb*, (1:12:52- 1:13:31).

76- *Ibid.*, p. 153; IBN AL-FARID, ديوان ابن الفارض, AL-TABA, ' Omar (dir.), Dār Al-Arqām Ibn Abi-Arqām, 2016, p. 15, 19.

77- ARISTOTLE, « Poetics », *op. cit.*, 1453b 1-14; SEAL Graham, *The Outlaw Legend*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

and a figure of resistance, yet he is the tragedy's tragic hero unable to escape his misfortune and spends a life filled with bewilderment, isolation, agony, and imprisonment. He fails primarily in righting wrongs, he lacks active support from the public, kills the innocent, and is led to his demise as a result of his heroic temper constituting his tragic hamartia and consequently induces a pity and fear among the readers and audience due to his somber life and fate as well as the survival of the 'dogs'. It is this synergy between the internal and external reality of the character that gives Mahfouz's outlaw protagonist his tragic elements as well as captures a general feeling of uncertainty, disillusionment, and alienation in the Egyptian political context. The melancholic existence of the tragic outlaw figure Mahfouz produces mirrors the socio-political anxiety that surrounds the novel and the film. There is no doubt that tragic outlaw heroes such as Sa'īd Mahrān's character will continue to emerge and inspire Egyptian fiction in light of a similar socio-political context to represent the social alienation felt by those who feel marginalized by the political elite, forgotten by the state and its assumed justice.

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ملخص | تتناول هذه المقالة شخصية الخارج عن القانون في الرواية المصرية الحديثة من خلال عدسة الإطار المفاهيمي للصوعية الاجتماعية والمأساة الكلاسيكية. وتقدم زاوية تحليل فريدة من نوعها لأحد أكثر أعمال محفوظ غزارة والذي ظهر في أوقات القلق السياسي المتزايد في أعقاب الثورة المصرية عام ١٩٥٢. وبقراءة الفيلم المقتبس عام ١٩٦٢ من رواية نجيب محفوظ «اللس والكلاب» من إخراج كمال الشيخ باعتباره إسقاطاً لعدم اليقين الاجتماعي والسياسي في عصر ناصر بعد الثورة، تنظر هذه الورقة إلى شخصية الخارج عن القانون في ظل حالة الاغتراب الاجتماعي. وباستخدام الحدود المفاهيمية التي وضعها إريك هوبسباوم وجراهام سيل المحيطة بـ «السارق الاجتماعي»، فإن بطل محفوظ، سعيد مهران، هو مزيج من اللصوعية الاجتماعية وكذلك البطولة المأساوية. ومن خلال هذا التقابل المعقد، نجح محفوظ والشيخ في تقديم تعليقهما السياسي من خلال تقديم شخصية تجسد شعوراً عاماً بالاغتراب في السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي المصري.

الكلمات المفتاحية | مصر، نجيب محفوظ، فيلم، بطل خارج عن القانون، مأساة

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