



**An-Najah National University
Faculty of Graduate Studies**

**GOTHICISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY ARAB FICTION:
A STUDY OF AHMAD TAWFIK'S APPROPRIATION OF
MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN***

By

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my dear father, Mohammed Jawabreh, who has been nicely my supporter until my research was fully finished, and my beloved mother, Sana'a Jawabreh, who, for months past, has encouraged me attentively with her fullest and truest attention to accomplish my work with truthful self-confidence.

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Declaration

I, Sana Jawabreh, do hereby declare that the work submitted in this dissertation is the result of my own efforts and that to the best of my knowledge. Where any secondary information is included, it has been duly acknowledged.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that I submitted the thesis entitled:

GOTHICISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY ARAB FICTION: A STUDY OF AHMAD TAWFIK'S APPROPRIATION OF MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

I declare that the work provided in this thesis, unless otherwise referenced, is the researcher's own work, and has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or qualification.

Student's Name: Sana Mohammed S. Jawabreh

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Date: 17/04/2023

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Abstract

This thesis studies the appropriation of Mary Shelley's classical gothic novel *Frankenstein* by the contemporary Egyptian novelist Ahmad Tawfik which is entitled *The Legend of Frankenstein*. It highlights the main features of this evolving genre within the context of postmodern Egypt, arguing that Tawfik, by projecting both the creator and the creature into the contemporary Egyptian scene, manages in his *The Legend of Frankenstein* to create new roles for the Gothic genre that embody the anxieties of the contemporary Egyptian youth. In doing so, Tawfik has arguably denounced the orthodoxy of the current dominant genres and has penetrated the Egyptian polysystem of genres. Tawfik succeeds in the creation of a unique appropriation, deploying his own style and painting his own series' protagonist with the colors of contemporary Egypt. In this appropriation of the classic gothic, the author maintains the main features of the original story's plot line, only to relocate it in postmodern Egypt, thus enunciating important aspects of the sublime and generating new perspectives that fit with the contemporary Arab youth culture. The supernatural component of the Gothic is neutralized, and therefore, the research will explain how and why this deactivation of the supernatural takes place. In view of that, the researcher highlights the modification introduced through Tawfik's appropriation of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and, in doing so, she will draw the main features of the Arab contemporary Gothic Literature.

Keywords: Alter Ego; Carnavalesque Gothic Postmodern Egyptian Youth culture; Mediocracy; Monstrosity; Postmodern Arabic Literature; Postmodern Gothic.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis attempts to carry out a rigorous and systematic study of the appropriation of the classic Gothic Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* by the Egyptian contemporary writer Ahmed Khaled Tawfik. Tawfik acknowledges the influence of this classic work on him: "My English was not yet good enough to read horror literature, so I started writing it myself," he once said. (Tawfik, 2011, para. 1) Instead of reading the originals, he only read the translated works, thus his exposure to the world of Gothic literature was mediated by translation. One of the few works of English literature that he read and that greatly influenced him was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Eventually, Tawfik created an appropriation of the Frankenstein story through which he communicated the turbulent lives of the Egyptian youth. His work, *The Legend of Frankenstein*, was first released in 1999. As a newcomer into the field, Tawfik managed to create his own niche within this field through two important steps. On one hand, he denounces the orthodoxy of the dominant literary conceptions that were common in postmodern Egypt. On the other hand, he adapted the gothic style to the Egyptian context. As Mohammed Saad puts it, "Ahmed Khaled Tawfik is the godfather of Egyptian horror fiction. [He] was more than a fiction writer; he was a phenomenon who showed a generation of young readers a whole new world." (Saad, 2018, para. 2).

Tawfik has contributed to the emergence and rapid spread of the Gothic genre in the Arab world. Amro Ali states that, "Ahmed Khaled Tawfik knew that it would happen after his death. The big fame, that is, the fame that the translated from 15 million copies increased into 81 best-selling novels in a genre that was quite frankly non-existent in the Middle East up until he and his work arrived" (Ali, 2020, para. 5). His gothic collection of pocket stories has catalyzed this process of emergence. In fact,

the last 10 years have witnessed a dramatic surge in the production of Gothic literature across the Arab world. For instance, Yasser Alazzah's *Caminos Letter* (2018), Ali Abu Al Reesh's *Umm Al Duways* (2013), and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013) are all examples of widely read, contemporary Arabic Gothic novels.

However, modern works of Gothic literature such as the appropriations of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Tawfik's *Legend of Frankenstein*, appear to have a different motivation than the romantic motivations of Mary Shelley. While Shelley represents her motivation for *Frankenstein* as an "obligation to think of a story which would speak of [the] mysterious fears of our nature" (Shelley, 1818, p.23), modern Gothic works tend to pave the way for modes of resistance. For instance, Marwa Al Khayat demonstrates this motivation in her article *Gothic Politics in Ahmed Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad* claiming that "the new twenty-first-century monster is a zombie to defy marginality and associate monstrosity with deviance to reinforce the process of transformation in order to usher new modes of resistance." (Alkhayat, 2022, p.47)

Indeed, Tawfik's works have gained international fame. Netflix displayed an adaptation of Tawfik's Paranormal series. This will be the first of its kind with Netflix contracting Egyptian producers. Amr Salama, the director of this series who brought Tawfik's novels to a global audience, said that "if we achieve this, it will be a breakthrough for Egypt and the Arab world. It will raise the standard of what we can provide for the world" (Salama, 2020, para. 3). What Tawfik provides here is not a clone of the old Gothic tradition but a special, postmodern version of the Gothic style.

This study investigates the relevance of the postmodern Gothic in the context of Egypt, exploring the contemporary Egyptian youth's anxieties in relation to Tawfik's protagonist Refaat Ismail and tracking the uncanny in the context of contemporary Egypt through Peter Frankenstein and his alter ego, his creature who demonstrates the

gradual rebellion and who becomes a reflection of the imperfect image of silenced and suppressed Egyptian youth. It also examines the forms of appropriation of the classic Gothic within Tawfik's own work and demonstrates the thematic and formalistic strategies used to situate this classic work in contemporary Egypt. In light of this analysis, the researcher highlights Tawfik's contributions to the shaping of the Arab gothic as an emerging genre in the Arab world interrogating generic conventions from which develop concepts such as the double and alter ego.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be used to provide an insight into the emergence and rapid spread of the Gothic genre in the Arab world, a genre which was relatively non-existent before the recent surge in the late 20th century. In addition, this emergence is significant not only because it has been part of a shift occurring within the polysystem of genres particularly in Egypt, but also because it has allowed new possibilities, roles, and functions for this evolving genre. Yet this genre, especially in the East, has not received enough scholarly attention with the scarcity of resources available on the postmodern gothic tradition in the Arab World. This thesis will make significant contributions to the development of the scholarly work on the Gothic genre, with focus on the appropriation of an Egyptian contemporary writer. Through the works used in this study, a new form of the Gothic genre in contemporary Arab works is created contributed to the understanding of a very specific context which is the context of the contemporary Egyptian youth.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study is expected to achieve the following objectives: it demonstrates that the protagonist, Refaat Ismail, in Tawfik's *The Legend of Frankenstein* is a mere representation of contemporary Egyptian youth and the crisis of their identity, exclusion, and economy due to Mubarak's repressive and bankrupt regime, providing examples in the novel that portray a clear image of the contemporary Egyptian culture.

Moreover, this study provides the image of the rebellious Egyptian youth in Egypt's 2011 revolution through the creatures created by the creator in Tawfik's novel and their alter ego Peter Frankenstein who by his rebellious actions and fragmented identity portrays the uncanny characteristics and scenes that were present in the rebellion against Mubarak's regime.

1.4 Questions of the Study

This study seeks to answer these questions: How does Tawfik's novel successfully address the contemporary Egyptian youth and their instability? What kind of escapism does this Gothic carnivalesque provide Tawfik's readers with? Do the uncanny and monstrous characteristics presented in Tawfik's novel reflect the harsh reality of the Egyptians?

1.5 Methodologies of the Study

To answer these questions, this study employs comparative approach in analyzing the features and functions of the postmodern Gothic, shedding light on Tawfik's appropriation of Shelley's *Frankenstein, The Legend of Frankenstein*, considering the different context by which this genre is approached (Postmodern Egypt) and which explains its evident mutation. This thesis also refers to psychological theories, specifically applying Freud's theories in analyzing both the conscious and unconscious behaviors and conflicts of Tawfik's characters. Moreover, through this psychological lens the researcher is able to view the unconscious dimensions of the characters' minds reflected in the novel as well as the author's and every other young Egyptian reader's personal psychology. Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque has been used as both a model and a structure to Tawfik's work based on its characteristics of humor in Rifaat's endless jokes, chaos in Peter's character as well as Rifaat's, grotesque of Peter's creatures, and upside-down world in the whole novel. Such a literary mode occupies Tawfik's novel and becomes the novel's dominating style. This mode is not strange to Egypt, a country who settled for mediocracy due to its political stream. The

concept of mediocracy in the novel symbolizes the social and political instability, economic grievances, and other roots of corruption that were present at that time in Egypt. Therefore, this novel draws a combination of the disturbingly terrifying and the strange, very much like the uncanny which is a unifying theme in the Gothic. A trope that draws on the uncanny is the doppelganger trope which is evident in the relationship of both the creator Peter and his creatures. As far as I am aware, no academic or professional study has yet analyzed Tawfik's novel *The Legend of Frankenstein*, although Tawfik is a very famous Gothic writer at least in Egypt and his novel is an appropriation of a very famous novel, Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Moreover, by drawing Bakhtin's theory of carnival, this study serves to bring to light the subversive themes in this contemporary Egyptian gothic story and emphasizes the escapism it provides to contemporary Egyptian youth. The escapism that this approach serves takes a lighthearted approach in opposition to a serious and authoritarian world. Finally, this study employs a sociological approach as it addresses societal forces and reflects on attitudes towards political structure, drawing on the protagonist's struggle which is symbolic to a larger struggle of instability in the dictatorship of Mubarak's regime.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

This study is limited due to very few critics who wrote about the writer Ahmed Khaled Tawfik and his Gothic novels, since Tawfik died before he was well known by readers outside Egypt. Also, only few interviews were made with him as a writer as he does not like being on TV or even being interviewed. Moreover, only few Arabic works are Gothic, so it is a new genre in the Arab world. Therefore, the case of the emergence of this genre in the Arab world is so rare. However, Arab readers were acquainted with Gothicism before Tawfik, at least through the translations available to them: Edgar Allan Poe's short stories and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Another limitation is that Tawfik's Gothic novel *The Legend of Frankenstein* is until today not translated to English. This also limits the number of readers and critics who read his

books, and allows no non-Arab readers to approach his books. Therefore, the researcher is left with very few Arab critics who are able to read and criticize his books, limiting the perspective of other interviewers, readers, or critics. However, this is a potential limitation as this may change since few of Tawfik's novels are adapted to movies on Netflix.

1.7 The Scope of the Study

This study consists of three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter introduces a general background about the Postmodern Gothic genre and its emergence in the Arab world, surveying available literature reviews and specifying the methodologies employed. The second chapter outlines the sociopolitical instabilities and the economic crisis of the contemporary Egyptian youth which are reflected clearly in the novel, and which the Gothic genre pushes them to escape using Bakhtin's carnival theory, thus making it a Gothic Carnavalesque. It highlights how the role of the genre matches the demand of Tawfik's readers. This chapter describes Tawfik's protagonist, Refaat Ismail, and his frail character that lacks supernatural abilities, which further influences his readers to the relatable character of his protagonist. This chapter also introduces the concept of mediocracy through Ismail's character and the frustrations he faces, symbolizing the mediocracy in Egypt. Then, this chapter uses Bakhtin's theory of the Carnavalesque as a model to Tawfik's novel, offering the readers with an escapism which they need the most in the midst of the chaos at that time in Egypt. The third chapter addresses the protagonist's, the creator's, and creature's psychological intricacies, highlighting the uncanny aspects of the country's state during Egypt's 2011 Revolution. It also emphasizes the allure of the uncanny in this novel, which is exemplified in the alter ego and monstrous suppressed subjectivities. In this chapter, the researcher demonstrates monstrous characteristics portrayed in the novel by the main characters. This chapter also symbolizes the motherless creature in the novel with the fact that Egyptians at that time of protest were also considered

motherless. It also uses Freud's uncanny to show the gradual revolutionary spirit that is linked to the rebellious spirit of the Egyptian youth.

1.8 Literature Review

Spooner (2006) notes that because of contextual issues such as "millennial anxiety" and "desensitization," postmodern gothic fiction allures to the popular imagination.(p.8) By millennial anxiety he means "anxiety over the change in social and political structure" (Spooner, 2006, p.8) which, as Jessica Bomarito (2006) argues, is analogous to "events such as the French Revolution, the rise in secular-based government, and scientific advances and industrial development". (p.1) Such periods of conflict and unrest are similar to our contemporary historical moment. As Ashlee Joyce (2019) puts it in her book *The Gothic in Contemporary Trauma Fiction*, "Gothic [is] not only a response to latent collective cultural anxieties but also a reaction to spectatorial nature of contemporary, media-saturated culture, in which we are simultaneously confronted with images of atrocity on-screen, but numbed, somehow, to the material reality of this violence." (p.2) While desensitization refers to the process of "habituation" which approaches towards "fear-inducing stimuli such as a persistent increase in gore." (p.38) Gothic-postmodernism may be understood as a link to the harsh sensation of plurality that is important to the subjective self, as well as the voice of postmodernity's unspeakable terrors. (Beville, 2009, p.56) The crisis of the identity, the fragmentation of the self, and the dark human psyche are all reflected in Gothic and postmodernist fiction. These neo-gothic tendencies provide the Gothic ample justification to survive inside the postmodernist paradigm on both a literary and philosophical level. (Beville, 2009, p.53) Accordingly, this type of literature, like other types, reflects the common anxieties of a generation. Likewise, Tawfik summarizes the function of his own gothic type to the anxieties of the Egyptian youth.

Gothic-postmodern literature serves as creative expressions and investigations into the perplexing subjective experience of horror, focusing on its unbelievable repercussions to look into the possibility of accessing what Baudrillard or Levinas would describe to as "the real" or as "infinity." They employ Gothic envisioning to apply the concept of objectified dread to the internal, yet inherently unstable locus of the distinctive human being. They also expand on Hogle's thesis, which holds that all "abnormalities" we would divorce from ourselves are a part of ourselves, deeply and expansively (Hogle, 2002: 12), and that the Gothic in contemporary literature evolves in part to increase the likelihood that all "abnormalities" we would separate from ourselves, are a part of ourselves. (Hogle 2002, 12) We could indeed conclude that they strive to undermine established opponents like self vs. other and good vs. evil by focusing the Gothic fantasy on the postmodernist notion of reality as boundless and undefinable, the postmodern, varied nation's gender, sexual orientation, and race prejudices are exposed. They do this by blending Gothic and metafictional literary themes such as spectacular, paranormal, mystery, suspense, and the bizarre. Beville (2009, p.53) emphasizes the 'symbiotic relationship' which exists between the ideologies of the postmodernist and the Gothic genre, enhancing the strength of both and causing the expression of the terror of the lack of identity which is the center of the character in postmodern Gothic. Therefore, the role of this Gothic is not only to entertain the reader but also to let them explore ideas of existence and the inner self.

As they characterize it, "neo-Gothic reprise" is significant in Gothic postmodernism (Bryon & Punter 2007, p. 52). By exhibiting well a concern with the "negative," the "irrational," the "immoral," and the "fantastic," the Gothic-postmodernist works elevate postmodernism to a new, incredulous dimension where all conceptions of realism are colored by the gloom and horror of transgression. Further, the Gothic has birthed new genres, engaged with works of literature, social constraints, and historical situations. Spooner defines the Gothic as a diverse, ill-defined collection of literary themes and narrative patterns from the very beginning (Spooner, 2006, p. 26).

The concepts of completeness and scarcity in current times lead to a scary reality. The prospect of nuclear war, fascism, and genocide committed in the name of liberal democracy have successfully made us feel as terrified as possible. According to Baudrillard (2001), now, in postmodernism, we unknowingly await the destruction of the "whole" and the restoration of "pure heterogeneity". (p.104) It is a sublime effect of something that cannot be expressed, recognizable by feelings of fear and joy. This effectively summarizes the general idea and aims of Gothic postmodernism. The core feature that Gothic literature plays in expressing the postmodern experience in literature is "that sense of darkness, uncertainty, and loss of purpose and power in a dulled world that faces estrangement and mortality on a daily basis." (Beville, 2009, p.53) As a result, Gothic postmodernism is crucial in the search for postmodern subjectivity. Readers are given the chance to redefine the 'self' after being exposed to the concept of the unthinkable through the reconstruction of the novel's horror. In order to fulfill our duty to the unrepresentable, Beville (2009 p.56) claims that picturing the "unimaginable" is to attempt to obtain access to Baudrillard's and equally Lyotard's unthinkable, "the real," by dismantling binary oppositions once again.

Since it first appeared in the chaotic 18th century as a powerful force against the fears, wants, and worries that afflicted society as it developed into capitalism, terrorism has been at the center of Gothic literature. The specific fear of the Gothic book, in Verma's words, produces a mystical air of spiritual dread and psychological fear, as well as a particular superstitious shiver towards the hereafter. (Varma 1957, 130) Since the advent of postmodernism, terrorism has, in a contemporary sense, been at the center of political discourse. More recently, it has served as a key component of social and popular cultural orientation. Beville (2009) claims that the reader's belief in the reader's concrete forms is undermined by the subsequent abstract understanding of dread and evil. In connection with Gothic-postmodern texts, it's a personal experience in the simplest sense. The fear is that you are in a state of hesitation or buoyancy. Fear is just a precursor to unimaginable horror, and you can wander while waiting to reveal

what will happen next. The setting in which the original Gothic reached its peak during the French Revolution might be compared to that of our postmodern day. (Beville, 2009, p.19) Recently, the word ‘terrorism’ has taken on a new significance in political discourse. In light of this, it is possible to think of terror as an experience that induces an altered state of consciousness and allows us to concentrate our attention on aspects of life that maybe outside the scope of our normal, subjective frames of reference. (Beville, 2009, p.24)

Terror is the reigning principle of the sublime in all circumstances, whether publicly or latently. It is what Edmund Burke calls it “the ruling principle of the sublime” (Burke, 1998,86) In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke adds that what ignites feelings of ‘pain and danger’, such as dreadful objects of actions, is said to be ‘a source of the sublime’ which is considered the most powerful emotion a mind could bear to feel. (1998, p.86)

The fascination with the sublime and terror as an overpowering experience of the topic persisted during the development of the Gothic era. With the genre's transition to postmodernism, this sharpening of concentration is evident. What Zizek indicates as the sublime is the contradictory object that offers a viewpoint on the unrepresentable aspect in a negative light. (Zizek, 1998, 203) However, Burke states that this negative way of representation and the negative experience it provides are more powerful than the positive ones. Burke writes that he is certain the concepts of pain are far more potent than those which come on the part of pleasure and it is seen as envoy of this monarch of fear death in reference to the source of sublime horror. (Burke, 1998, 86) This means that the sublime horror experience is magnified, eschewing cognitive reason and objectivity in favor of imagination and desire.

In the postmodern setting, Gothic is likely a set of discourses that live on renaissance; but the process has been sped up, and Gothic now merely reveals the hole at the core of postmodern readers. In modern culture, Gothic is observed as “having lost its older

intensity”, “saturating contemporary culture” which provides the modern consumer with normative images.(Hogle 2002, 287) Gothic previously gave a space for the realization of the Enlightenment's gloomy ambitions, but now it only displays the hole at the core of current reader culture. As David Punter (1996) puts it in his *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day*: “Once the dark under- side of modernity, Gothic horror now outlines the darkness of the postmodern condition.” (p.114) It is a perfect product in itself, easily available, and easily adapted to the needs and purposes of the most diverse consumers. It represents the “subterranean areas behind everyday experience.” (Carter, 2006, 133) According to Julia Kristeva, the social or discursive aspects of the Gothic subgenre serve as a place of abjection for the fears, wants and anxieties that create the gloomy innards of contemporary culture.(Kristeva, 1980, p.108) Thus, Gothic is present in Gothic-postmodernism not due to "diffusion" (Botting 2001, 14), but rather because to our desire for dread and the examination of its capabilities in representing the unrepresentable. For example, Tawfik’s reimagination of Shelley’s Gothic required a new system that better fits the life anxieties of the contemporary Arab youth. “Tawfik believed that the Arab youth were ready for these types of books, so he targeted them and devoted his imagination and creativity solely to the young generation. They never rejected him, and from this moment onward he began to take a place in their minds and enter their hearts.” (Essam, 2021)

From its earliest days, Gothic served as the model for psychoanalytic and deconstructive theories because it centered on the dispersion of created systems of meaning that imposed hierarchies based on difference and silence. Gothic can be understood as a quest for subjectivity, an epistemological study of oneself, and what one can. Therefore, Gothic horror serves as a destructive counter-narrative that portrays the dark side of subjectivity, the other spirits that trouble our frail self, and is frequently endemic to their monsters and othered bodies. As the lines separating oneself from others blur, there is a dread inherent in the sensation of emptiness; "an

un-nameable non-object" (Kearney 2003, 89). The role of the postmodern Gothic is stressing on ideas of loss, fragmented identities, and the make-believe as the "other" of the world that rules us, and which must be expressed in mainstream literary discourse. It also strives to focus experience on imagination and profound emotion.

Additionally, according to Kearny, monsters "remind the ego that it is never entire or sovereign... and ghost the edges of what may be thought and uttered lawfully. (Kearney, 2003, p.4) Kearney believes that such othered bodies are markers of psychological damage, denoting severe events that push us to the edge and put the known and unknown at risk. (Kearney 2003, 2). Beville (2009) mentions that "Gothic-postmodernism is a deconstructive genre; a counter-narrative which amalgamates the metafictional and the supernatural and arrives at 'a third space', a fourth dimension in literature." (p.53)

Ahmed Khaled Tawfik, an Egyptian writer, has revived Shelley's *Frankenstein* and relocated it in an Egyptian context. As a contemporary writer, Tawfik is a newcomer into the world of Gothic literature, a genre that, up until recently, was not widespread in Egypt or the Arab world. Since the Gothic genre was "non-existent in the Middle East", so there were very few Arab authors who read Gothic novels or used to translate them into Arabic. (Ali,2020) Therefore, "the gothic novel occupies a contradictory place in [our] culture." (Fales, 2018). This is more evident when we come to find that the sources of the tradition of the Gothic genre in the Arab world are scarce. In the late 20th century, Arab writers started adopting and reviving this genre in their own style. Tawfik was criticized by the Modern Arab Association, which was founded and managed by Hamdi Mustafa, when he presented his first novel under the name "The Vampire Legend" (1992). The novel was rejected because "publishing houses at the time did not believe that the horror genre had a readership in Egypt. When Tawfik presented the draft of his first book, *The Legend of the Vampire*, in 1992 to a publishing house, it was rejected, and he was told to write action and police fiction

instead” (Saad, 2018). The polysystem in Egypt includes “main literary genres [that are] documented throughout Egypt’s textual history, namely autobiography, wisdom texts, narrative, the so-called “king’s novel,” religious hymns, and love poetry” (Loprieno, 1996, p.7). Moreover, there are other literary genres that were brought by famous Egyptian writers into the mainstream of the Egyptian polysystem. For instance, there is “Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), an Egyptian writer, who did much to establish [his] novel as the dominant literary genre in Arabic to bring realism into the mainstream of Arabic prose fiction” (Stanton, 2012, p. 306) Tawfik’s target readers are the Arab youth whom he “feel[s] responsible for, therefore, he created works that suit them most. He never abandoned his young fans who made his fame and success (Tawfik, 2011). Tawfik further states, “I will never stop writing for them. A whole generation considers me their father, and they really made my fame and success. They grew up, but many of them still look at me as a mentor. Many of my students occupy important careers in today’s Egypt” (Tawfik, 2011). Tawfik used the protagonist of his series, Refaat Ismael, as the voice of his young readers.

Chapter Two

Addressing Egyptian Youth: Mediocrity and the Carnavalesque Gothic

2.1 Introduction

Many young Egyptians grew up reading Tawfik's works; some report that they frequently finished his novels in one sitting, thanks to his distinctive writing style, which attracted a large and diversified readership. "Following on from Tawfik's point of view, novels that depend on science or technology are not seen as texts or information books in the Arab world, as they don't provide the desired escapism. The Arab readers' imagination was not yet ready to accept science fiction, horror, fantasy, or a plot that is weighted in gloom" (Essam, 2019). According to Tawfik, one of the explanations for why older readers tend to choose facts or truths over imagination is that this is a characteristic of Arab culture, i.e. a means of survival in the midst of political and social upheavals. The Arab culture heritage under dictatorships is loaded with calls for silence and avoiding turbulence. Proverbs like "walk by the wall and ask God for protection" and "live as a coward and die protected." These phrases refer to someone who avoids problems by being too cautious for their safety or well-being. 'Fire erupts into ashes' is also a well-known saying in Egypt for decades, according to Mahmoud Al-Tamani, a farmer from Al-Azazieh. Al-Tamani points out that the saying gives hope and wishes for the demise of calamities, which the saying likens to a fire burning all night, so it soon becomes ashes if the morning dawns, hinting that the saying is frequently used to console people who face problems. Another Egyptian proverb is "squeezing a lemon on one's self". It is believed that the origin of this phrase is when a person squeezes a lemon on an unappetizing food so that its taste becomes acceptable and easy to eat. It means to force oneself to endure or to do something undesirable, distinctively sour. These proverbs advise people to stay off radar in order to keep out of trouble.

However, these are cultural attitudes that do not appeal to the younger generations, generations who lead the revolution during the Arab Spring. As the Egyptian rapper Mohammed Osama mentions in his rap song, 'Egyptian Citizen' (2011), "I need to see the next generation, not walking next to the wall, a new generation of revolutionaries starting to sow the fields." (Osama, 2011)

These are cultural attitudes that do not appeal to the younger generation, a generation which lead the revolution during the Arab Spring. Faced with grim realities, the younger generations sought new experiences, much more radical than their predecessors. Young people make up at least 90% of Egypt's unemployed population. In a 2009 survey by the Population Council of youth in Egypt, 30% of males aged 15 to 29 said they were considering migration primarily because they did not expect to find employment in their country. In the same survey, 70% of young people who were unemployed claimed that there was simply no work available. One indication of the systemic corruption that sparked the revolution is that more than 40% of respondents believed that having personal connections was more crucial to landing a job than having personal abilities. Egyptian adolescents are familiar with such complaints, both political and personal: Poverty reduction, economic expansion, health reform, and educational reform were listed as some of the most urgent national goals in the 2009 national survey.

Tawfik expresses his own motivation behind writing postmodern gothic fiction in these terms: "I see myself irritatingly boring." This is because he believes that he has not participated in major crimes such as the assassination of Lincoln neither had he kept dead bodies in graves to control them by his supernatural powers. (Tawfik, 2018). This drive for change, for exploring the unknown, and for responding to the calls for adventure emanating from his inner self found good listening ears among the young readerships who view him as their godfather.

Tawfik committed all of his imagination and inventiveness to young people, believing that the Egyptian youth were ready for these kinds of publications. They never turned away from him, and as a result, he started to establish himself in their hearts and thoughts. "The older generation is too concerned with their own problems; they want to read books that mirror their economic and historical problems. Young people, however, appreciate the connections between art, imagination, and technology" (Tawfik, 2018). In an interview with The National newspaper, Tawfik recalled: "[The Egyptian youth] can grasp a sci-fi theme" (Tawfik, 2018). But as things have changed, more and more adults have developed a passion for science fiction books, especially after witnessing how devotedly their kids became attached to those books.

Tawfik's *Ma Wara Al-Tabia*, a supernatural pocket series, has attracted Egyptian youth and formed an important part of their lives, thus contributing to his fame. In fact, young Egyptians were introduced to the novel's main character, Dr. Refaat Ismail, through the film "Ma Wara Al-Tabia." Refaat Ismail rose to fame, and a lot of young people looked forward to reading about his experiences each month. In celebration of the fantastic figure he invented, Tawfik started to be identified with his character, often referred to as "Refaat Ismail" by many people. Refaat is a cynical hematologist with a dark sense of humor, who undergoes a 'journey of doubt' in which his world is turned upside down after his lifelong scientific beliefs are called into question. In the novel, he recounts his adventures as he nears the age of seventy. Whether or not he fully comprehends the paranormal and extraordinary phenomenon, Refaat usually finds the solution and always survives. "He is old, weak, and ill, and not very attractive. Despite that, perhaps because of it, he is a very charming character, and his humor in the face of the horrors is his most memorable characteristic, one which made him a memorable character in Arabic literature." (Al-Mahdy, 2018) His mediocrity makes him iconic in the eyes of the young generations. He lacks any traits that are typically associated with heroes. In fact, he does not consider himself to be a believer in the supernatural and would never consider himself a hero. Also, his

presence in the novel creates the most conspicuous conflict that the novel has which is the conflict between the orient and the occident. This clash occurs when Refaat sets foot in the novel of Frankenstein causing a clash between the Western 'occident' and the Eastern 'orient'. However, Tawfik claims that this is not the first time that he allows his character, Refaat Ismail, into Switzerland in one of the novels in his *Paranormal* series. Expectedly, Tawfik tells us that "the name of this novel is *The Legend of Strangers*. (Tawfik, 2000, p.23 my translation) This name draws further emphasis on the conspicuous conflict between the orient and the occident.

The youth elements are pervasive in the novel. The revolutionary content, the scenes which embody the anxieties of the young generation, and the exhilarating sense of escapism for young readers mark this novel as the voice of youth. *The Legend of Frankenstein* draws attention to a young generation who is excluded, a generation who is ridden by ignorance a thousand of times every day. Egyptian identity becomes much more fluid, and this fluidness leads to an identity which is much more open to change. Therefore, Tawfik's perfect creature chooses to flee from his creator, Peter, an unpredictable rebellious act from a creature, who favors a fluid and a fragmented identity. "Peter was furious...because the creature Prometheus that he had made had fled [...] He disappeared... He vanished completely." (Tawfik, 2000, p. 122, my translation)

This chapter examines the ways in which *The Legend of Frankenstein*, a novel which so closely mimics the gothic mode of writing, speaks of the life worries of the contemporary Egyptian youth. The author argues that this rebellious mode of representation captures Egyptian youth anxieties, escapism, excitements, and the rebellious modes of self-expression.

2.2 The Call for Mediocracy in the Egyptian Contemporary Culture

The contemporary generation of young people grew up in the midst of constant sociopolitical instability, which adds to the various strains facing young people in Egypt today. Income inequality is increasing in Egypt, and the gap between the rich and the poor is growing. “Egypt is a place where ‘the rich are few and have much, the poor are many and have little.’ Forty percent of the population lives in abject poverty, subsisting on less than \$2 a day.” (Hartman, 2011) There is a tiny, very wealthy elite, some of whom have derived their money and power from political connections, sweetheart deals, the right family name. For 30 years, they’ve plundered the public purse and stashed untold billions in domestic shares and foreign currency, gold bars and Liechtensteinian bank accounts.” (Hartman, 2011) Many of them reside in luxurious new houses with expensive new cars, behind security gates and magnificent walls studded with barbed wire. Meanwhile, “unemployment rates are highest amongst the younger segment of the population. Nearly one in two jobless Egyptians is between the age of 20 and 24, while one in four is between 25 and 29 years old.” (Ahram Online, 2011)

The country has witnessed an overall rise in political turmoil, more frequent instances of violence. The large-scale popular protests in January 2011 were only an example on the tremendous level of frustration that marks this period in Egypt’s history. The Egyptian youth movements played a crucial role in planning the revolution against Mubarak rule. Several youth movements, such as Kefaya (Enough!), the 6 of April Movement, utilized their popularity to mobilize Egyptians to rebel against the corrupt, aging regime. These movements also influenced the creation of the new government in the post-Mubarak years. Mahmoud Saber, a 29-year-old man who joined the Kefaya Movement while still in high school testifies that the revolution “had a frame that called for economic and social justice and respected the right of workers to organize, and the freedoms of individuals.” (Wirtschaftler, 2017) Saber, who took part in the uprisings to remove Mubarak, was out in the public calling on Morsi to step

down. Saber criticizes Morsi saying “he had no economic program, had no regard for worker’s or women’s rights and had no real connection to the demands coming from the youth on the streets.” (2011) This young man, like thousands of Egyptian youths, participated in the revolution against Mubarak, and, in a year's time he was out in the streets demanding the end of Morsi's presidency. All these are signs of their thirst for social equality.

These are but a few examples on the boldness of young Egyptians to dare the terrible political and social realities in their country. Asmaa Mahfouz, a 26-year-old blogger and activist in the Sixth of April Youth Movement, summarizes the youth agenda as "demand our fundamental human rights as human beings... say no to corruption... say no to this system!" (Asmaa Mahfouz, video blog, 18 January 2011). Ahmed Raafat Amin says that he went out to the streets to protest corruption, torture, injustice, inequality and the lack of freedom. Someone had to stand up and say, ‘enough is enough’, he went on saying that he would do anything to gain freedom. (Ahmed Raafat Amin, 22, Cairo)

According to Angy Essam, a journalist and the head of Art and Culture section in *Egypt Today* magazine and website, “Tawfik believed that the Arab youth were ready for these types of books, so he targeted them and devoted his imagination and creativity solely to the young generation. They never rejected him, and from this moment onward he began to take a place in their minds and enter their hearts.” (2021) The readers’ demands influence the writer’s purpose of writing, affecting the role of the genre itself. Tawfik’s target readers are the Arab youth whom he “feel[s] responsible for, therefore, he created works that suit them most. He never abandoned his young fans who made his fame and success (Tawfik, 2011). Tawfik further states, “I will never stop writing for them. A whole generation considers me their father, and they really made my fame and success. They grew up, but many of them still look at me as a mentor. Many of my students occupy important careers in today’s Egypt”

(Tawfik, 2011). Therefore, Tawfik used the protagonist of his series, Refaat Ismael, as the voice of his young readers. On one level Tawfik's hero, Refaat Ismail, embodies these youthful energies invested in transforming their uneasy daily lives. In Tawfik's words, the young Egyptian readers, are introduced to the story of Frankenstein from a different yet relative perspective to that of the traditional gothic hero through the eyes of Ismail, a distinctive representation of a contemporary Egyptian youth. In this sense, Refaat Ismail acts as a catalyst of protest, change, escape, and adventure, all elements that characterize the lives of Egyptian youth who are trapped in what seems to be an endless situation of political suppression, economic depravity that tames the shrewdness of an Egyptian adult. Nader Bakkar, the head assistant of Al Noor media affairs, states that:

Tawfik's gothic novel embodies the Egyptian and Arab character. It has a great impact on the conscience of the Egyptian youth who read this book, that of creating a whole generation who owes him a particularly deep debt of gratitude. (Bakkar, 2014)

Unlike the classical Gothic hero, postmodern Gothic hero is neither the creator nor the creature. "Dr. Ahmed is considered one of the few who wrote literary series in a specific field, such as the series "Paranormal"...just as Arthur Conan Doyle had its hero Sherlock and Agatha Christie's hero Hercule Poirot... Dr. Ahmed chose the character of the old doctor "Rifaat Ismail" as the hero of his aforementioned series.. And Rifaat was the opposite of the hero we always imagined.. He was not macho or huge, but was just a skinny old man.. He did not possess miraculous abilities with which to save himself from death, but only the providence of God was kind and saved him in the most difficult situations." (Al-Jazira) Ismail, an elderly haematologist, discovers a world where local mythology and universal folklore have taken the place of logic and scientific reason. Ismail embarks on a 'journey of doubt,' facing a number of health issues while carrying a ready supply of medications in his pockets. He is an anti-hero who is so weak and common that he gained popularity. Ismail, in contrast

to other heroes in Arabic literature, reflected the multitude of flaws and paradoxes in Arab societies. He was portrayed as a departure from ‘the squeaky clean image of the hero in Arabic writing’ in the local newspaper ArabLit. Arabic folklore has typically favored moral absolutism and ‘knights on horseback.’ Ismail was unassuming but had enough imagination to transport the reader to his vivid world.

Tawfik’s appropriation of the classic *The Legend of Frankenstein* presents us with a postmodern Gothic hero who is neither the creator nor the creature. Ismail is the exact opposite of the hero we have always imagined. He was not macho or huge, but a skinny old man with no miraculous abilities with which to save himself from death; only the providence of God was kind enough to save him in the most difficult of situations. Ismail, an elderly haematologist, discovers a world where local mythology and universal folklore have taken the place of logic and scientific reason. He embarks on a ‘journey of doubt,’ facing a number of health issues while carrying a ready supply of medications in his pockets. He is an anti-hero who is so weak and common that he gained popularity among Egyptian youth. Ismail, in contrast to other heroes in Arabic literature, reflected the multitude of flaws and paradoxes in the contemporary Egyptian society. He is portrayed as the antithesis of ‘the squeaky-clean image of the hero in Arabic writing’ (Al-Mahdi, 2018). Arabic folklore has typically favored moral absolutism and ‘knights on horseback.’ Ismail was unassuming but had enough imagination to transport the reader to his vivid world.

Egypt under dictators makes mediocrity a model of action for the young generations. Mubarak's Egypt, it might be argued, promotes mediocrity as a dominant ethos. Sisi’s speeches call upon the youth to cope with their condition, preaching kindness, patience and donations. Ismail has enacted this mediocrity, a state that does not qualify him to the status of neither the traditional nor the postmodern gothic hero. By contrast, the gothic hero Victor Frankenstein’s superior scientific faculty is quite literally embodied in a monstrous shape, a knowledge incarnated out of hideously joined limbs

plundered from graveyards. The traditional hero, observes Lord Raglan, gains his “victory over the elements and over man” through possessing a “power [...] conferred by divine descent and the absorption of divine wisdom” (Beville, 2009). Ismail is the opposite of a traditional hero. Ahmed Amin aptly describes his status as an antihero who is ‘frail’ and ‘sarcastic’ which makes him so unlike usual Arabic literature heroes. Furthermore, Refaat Ismail, tends to be alone throughout the novel and also never believes in the paranormal. (Ahmed Amin, 2020)

The majority of Tawfik's characters belonged to the "antagonistic hero" school, which describes the common hero who lacks the customary tournament traits like sportsmanship or physical prowess. Many believe that the character of "Refaat Ismail" is the one that most closely resembles Tawfiq due to his unwavering pride, unrelenting pessimism, love of unity, avoidance of social gatherings, and enthusiasm for both medicine and the practice of the university professor profession.

Tawfik explained why he chose a common protagonist without supernatural abilities: "Simply because I want to believe that one like me is not good at flying, and taekwondo cannot work, and I want the reader to believe it too." (Tawfik, 2018).

Tawfik’s audience identified with his protagonist as they can easily relate to him and to his frustrations. “Tawfik’s enormous readership and success with the pocket novel series featuring the cynical, dark-humoured Dr Refaat Ismail was proof positive that it was exactly what the region was looking for” (Amro Ali, 2020). There is a high level of identification between Tawfik’s hero among his young audience. “This hero has a special charm. Identification is to imagine yourself as this hero. It is impossible to imagine myself as James Bond. But I can imagine myself raising Ismail, who does not have supernatural talents, but is able to overcome difficult situations” (Tawfik, 2014). Ismail echoes this tendency to create a confused, helpless protagonist:

I was sleeping in the dark room...alone...

I was talking and yelling and making nervous movements...

I was ignorant of the danger, if there was a danger...

I was unable to see who was with me in the room if someone was with me...

I was weak and feeble... It is the hour of guilt in which one becomes like a helpless infant. (Tawfik, 2000, p. 95, my translation)

These few lines from Tawfik's novel do not only describe Ismail's own situation but that of a whole generation's journey of doubt. It describes their inability to sleep in a country with a dark future, their nervousness, anxieties, and inner screams, their fear from danger that they try to ignore, their blurry future, and their weakness and helplessness. Poor, silenced, and unemployed Egyptians are called upon to be patient and patriotic. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi continuously urges people to exercise 'patience' as the nation faces challenging economic times. "Shaping the future is a joint effort. It is a contract between the ruler and his people, where the ruler is responsible and committed before God and the people and displays honesty, loyalty, honour, and patriotism. But the people are also expected to work hard and show patience..." (Al-Sisi, 2013) Two years later, Al-Sisi still calls for endurance and appreciates Egyptian citizens for their patience. "Endure for Egypt. I'm serious! [...] My all-time favorite thing about Egyptians would definitely be... patience." (Al-Sisi, 2015) Political leaders, religious figures, educators encourage tolerance of mediocrity as the nation's greatest virtue.

It is true that Tawfik's protagonist presents the Egyptian youth with a model of mediocrity. In that sense, he looks very much like them, or they see much of their anxieties in him. However, he uses sarcasm to mock this model. "Rifaat Ismail is just a hematologist in a blue suit who smokes cigarettes with nonstop coughing. Rifaat Ismail was an entertainment for children born in the eighties and nineties, reassuring them that they are not strangers, affecting their use of linguistic expressions and changing their concept of homeland." (Bassant Ibrahim, Momkin, 2014). His sarcasm

appeals to a young audience who listens on daily basis to voices that preach modesty instead of rebellion. Ismail, at the beginning of the novel, mocks the Egyptian culture which he believes promotes mediocrity. Although most of the events of the story happened in Switzerland, it was narrated and led by Refaat Ismail, a typical Egyptian character who provides a wide Egyptian lens view of the novel. Through Refaat's character, Tawfik amplifies the Egyptian voice and perspective interpreting Ismail's thoughts, motives, actions, and emotions. When Ismail travels from Egypt to Switzerland to attend a conference, Ismail describes how Peter was upset that none of the Egyptian scientists believed him saying: "You, bunch of narrow-minded people, pretending you're not! Tell me one difference between you and those who mocked Pasteur when he spoke of the existence of bacteria, or those who accused Copernicus of heresy." (Tawfik, 2000, p. 37, my translation)

The blend of mediocrity and mockery that characterize Ismail's life and language tells the tale of young Egyptians who witnessed two revolutions in less than one year, saw the hope coming with democracy and lived the pain of a country regressing into dictatorship.

2.3 The Gothic Carnavalesque

Reading *The Legend of Frankenstein* through a Bakhtinian lens helps illuminate the subversive elements in this postmodern Egyptian gothic tale. Yaqoob sees escapism as one important function in Tawfik's work, "it takes a greater leap of imagination [from Tawfik] to envisage this mild-mannered professor, [Rifaat Ismail], of tropical diseases as the voice of Arab youth, giving them an exhilarating sense of escapism with his horror and thriller novellas" (Yaqoob, 2012). Lefebvre defines "escapism [as] the desire to get away from everyday life." (1987, p.85) To cope up with life pressures, people shift their attention away from their difficulties and onto happier or more gratifying pleasures. Some people may view the consumption of pop culture as a survival mechanism. Since we spend so much time being stimulated by our daily life

activities and chores, we then become exhausted, trying to engage in any other pointless activity to recharge ourselves. The Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) coined the word "Carnavalesque," which according to him, is frequently used in literature as a one type of protest against hierarchical social powers. Social and behavioral norms being broken is what causes 'the atmosphere of joyful relativity characteristic of a carnival sense of the world' (Stevens, 2007, p. 107) by allowing 'free and familiar contact among people' who in the normal course of things are divided by 'impenetrable hierarchical barriers' (Stevens, 2007, p. 123). In this sense, the carnivalesque constitutes an uprising against the institution or group that asserts absolute traditional authority. Even while the Carnavalesque's revolutionary effects only persist for a little period of time, they nonetheless serve as a declaration of and about people's instability on all fronts—political, social, emotional, etc. According to Timothy Jones, in gothic literature, "rather than describing the real, the carnival Gothic provides an escape from it." (2015, p.39). Douglas Winter (1982), author of *Stephen King: The Art of Darkness*, a book which many critics agree belongs in all King readers' libraries, and describes the psychological impact of the subjective fantasies provoked by watching or reading horror works. Winter believes that horror fiction, a method of escapism, suppresses the reality and overwhelms the horror we live every day. However, this escapism is bitter and grievous rather than rewarding, bringing upon our 'worst fears and darkest desires'. (Winter, 1982, p.3)

The gothic therefore empowers culture consumers by overpowering the horror of everyday life, thus signaling a reassuring message to the audience that it can be worse as you can see in the film. This role of the gothic translates into practical coping mechanisms through comparisons with worse scenarios than our own. When you see the tragedies, others are going through, your own tragedies would feel less tragic. It can be argued that Tawfik's works signal such reassuring messages. In fact, when he was asked, "Why Arab youth resorted to reading his gothic horror stories if their own lives were already steeped in pain, anxiety and uncertainty? Exactly what type of

escapism could books like these possibly provide?” Tawfik’s response underscores the role of postmodern Gothic as carnivalesque in contemporary Egypt:

Horror provides a nominal escape from your problems because, no matter how bad your life is, the horror story can show us that it could be much worse. Gothic writers, like Stephen King, suggest this substitution fear theory. For instance, if you are terrified because a guy flirts with your daughter, you can simply read werewolf legends where you encounter the worst possible outcome of the situation, and you know that no matter how dangerous this guy can be, he will never transform into a wolf at night. The idea of reading horror is that you approach death without dying. (Tawfik, 2014)

This “nominal escape” provides the postmodern Gothic genre a function of offering mercy to its readers. His postmodern audience is not seeking more terror in his Gothic book, but they are looking for the relief from the anxieties of everyday life in country that is As Botting puts it, “the postmodern audience that has popularized such texts is not looking for the presence of an authentic Gothic aesthetic based on terror and instead opts for ‘pick n mix interpretations’ of gothic, avoiding meaning and seeking out acceptable figures of horror which function as titillating exercises in reassurance” (Botting, 2001, p. 134). Tawfik’s audience needed this reassurance given the harsh realities of contemporary Egypt. Due to the Egyptian crisis that started during the 1967 defeat, when “the Nasser regime began to experience economic and political troubles”, Egyptian adults, teenagers, and even kids were threatened by the instability of their country. (Shehata, 2018) When Tawfik was studying in an elementary school, the year when Nasser’s soldiers were defeated, he, every other child in all Egyptian schools, and their parents were threatened by the rumor that since soldiers needed blood donors they will pass by and forcibly take blood from the abdomen of children in school. Tawfik mentions that his mother’s “face was the color of this white paper, and the servant at school hid us under the stairs so Nasser would not be able to take from their blood.” (Tawfik, 2014) This ugly and harsh horror that

Egyptians lived at that time as well as many other ones is what led Tawfik to approach the Gothic genre in his stories which he believes is an entertainment to the youth who are still encountering traumatic experiences till now in Egypt. Tawfik states that “reality is reality, dreary and harsh” and that is why he offers such gothic stories that allow his readers an escape from this reality. Moreover, he states that this threatening reality and its scariness is what makes the genre “emerge slowly in Egypt”. (Tawfik, 2014)

His audience is not seeking more terror in his Gothic books, but they are searching for reassuring statements that would relieve them from the pressures and anxieties of political suppression and social corruption in today's Egypt. Tawfik's audience needed this reassurance given the harsh realities of contemporary Egypt due to the Egyptian crisis that started during the 1967 defeat, when the Nasser regime began until today. In fact, the scenes on Tahrir Square showed Egyptian youth enacting a pick and mix reality with demonstrations and protests during the day and the carnivalesque stage in the late night songs. Sarah Carr, an Egyptian-British journalist and blogger who wrote ‘A letter received by our aunt agony’. Through Carr's letter, Carr portrays the Egyptians' relationship with Mubarak through a letter from an oppressed wife who is trapped in a loveless marriage.

Dear Aunt Agony,

After 30 years with my husband, I feel like I need a new start, but he doesn't feel the same way, and now I can't get rid of him. [...]

He soon developed a taste for the husband role however and within weeks was preventing me from meeting in groups larger than five and locking me up in our bedroom for weeks without telling anyone where I was if I criticized his taste in shirts. (Carr, 2011)

Carr here uses the husband to demonstrate the Mubarak regime, and the Egyptians as the oppressed wife. Carr reflected, "Interestingly, the tougher circumstances get, the

more the jokes increase, which explains why Tahrir Square was essentially a comedy explosion." (2011) Tahrir Square becomes a minicarnival in which the existing social and political discourses are mocked and parodied.

This sarcastic approach to dealing with corruption and suppression is heavily used by Ismail to bring the needed equilibrium in the most intense of experiences. Ismail thus introduces the dose of black humor that has traditionally provided Egyptians with a coping strategy, a safety valve, to escape the tyranny of their governments and to simultaneously release much of the intensity of living in the midst of injustice, corruption, and miserable life conditions. As he accompanies Peter Frankenstein to watch his experiment, he makes this sarcastic exchange with the scientists:

Frankenstein: 'What do you know about lasers?'

Ismail: 'I don't know anything about them ... I know about them exactly what my aunt knows about rocket fuel!'

His eyes widened in astonishment, as he exclaimed: 'Your aunt is an expert in rocket fuel? What a scientific progress is in your country!' Ismail to himself: 'I felt real enjoyment, and I told myself that my days with this idiot were an unforgettable experience ... a real pleasure for which I was supposed to pay money... I kept hearing what he had to say with pleasure.' (Tawfik, 2000, p.43-44, my translation)

Peter Frankenstein has an obsession with the notion of giving life to lifeless matter. Ismail enthusiastically joins him to see how he does it. Though Ismail does not believe in Peter's experiments, he still agrees to go with him to Geneva to observe and examine his unusual experiment. "'That's what I expected!' said Schonder cheerfully. 'We thank you, Dr. Ismail, and eagerly await your report!'" (Tawfik, 2000, p. 39, my translation) Ismail's mission was to seek for a carnival spirit in the chaos of science.

Early in the novel Tawfik mentions that Ismail's young audience told him: "Tell us another story, but let it be terrifying this time... Do you hear us, terrifying old man!" (Tawfik, 2000, p.7, my translation) Young Egyptians are enjoying the escapism this genre offers them. Moreover, they beg for a more terrific story every time Tawfik writes a Gothic story. Neither Tawfik nor Ismail is surprised by such requests. The worse their realities become the more they wish to escape it. Tawfik's narratives are not only an escape to his audience but also to him. Therefore, Tawfik is happy to choose Gothic over their terrifying reality. At the beginning of Tawfik's novel, *The Legend of Frankenstein*, Refaat states that:

Praise be to God that I have not yet begun to talk about the egg whose price is a Millieme, and the chicken whose price is five Milliemes, instead I am talking about ghosts and werewolves, and the coffins that open at the ticking of hours in the middle of the night. Her eyes are looking forward to the next story. I am Dr. Rifaat Ismail, who is waiting for the young faces surrounding him, and their eyes widening and longing for the next story. (Tawfik, 2000, p.5, my translation)

Tawfik is swapping economic distress and instability with the tales of 'ghosts and werewolves'. He chooses Gothicism over realism and social realism. Similarly, he expects his readers to find in them what he himself has found. If read discursively, his words imply that it is this reality that drives him to talk about the horror stuff.

This escape mode that the Egyptian youth are eagerly seeking for is quite similar to Bakhtin's concept of the 'carnival'. Bakhtin appropriates a subversive and unfamiliar view of carnival customs in Medieval Europe in his "Rabelais and His World" (1984). He contends that the everyday life of medieval man, which was governed and suppressed by the state, the church, and the feudal system, was momentarily suspended by carnivalesque events like popular comedic performances and other celebratory rites and activities. Carnival sparked freedom and a rediscovery of

significance by letting go of all social and cultural norms and hierarchies. Bakhtin (1984) describes how,

a person of the Middle Ages lived, as it were, two lives: one was the official life, monolithically serious and gloomy, subjugated to a strict hierarchal order; full of terror, dogmatism, reverence, and piety; the other was the life of the carnival square, free and unrestricted, full of ambivalent laughter, blasphemy, the profanations of everything sacred, full of debasing and obscenities, familiar contact with everyone and everything. (p.129-30).

Therefore, it is generally argued that carnival is a playful approach or a comic art form of social, political cultural protest and resistance to the serious, dogmatic and authoritarian world. Indeed, in the contemporary Egyptian society, the views of nation and nationhood shape the generational and class differences. Carnival, however, dismantles barriers and puts a stop to social immobility and distance. Bakhtin likens it to a "stage without footlights" where everybody may perform freely without being seen. (1984, p. 117) On this stage Egyptian youth feel free to perform the way they want since they are not judged or sorted by their social class. Additionally, there is no physical restraint or classification on the carnival stage. The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the power of all hierarchical positions (social, estate, rank, age, property). As a result, the carnival participant is limitless since they are free to engage in the carnival fully with their body, mind, and emotions. However, for the Egyptian youth, this carnival spirit will never truly be fulfilled.

Social segregation under the feudal system forbade contact between the upper and the lower classes. Yet carnival breaks down distance and suspends social immobility and barriers. Therefore, Bakhtin compares it to a 'stage without footlights' in which everybody participates without solemnity and surveillance. Besides, there is an absence of bodily control or categorisation on the carnival stage. As he argues (1984a), 'the behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority

of all hierarchical positions (social, estate, rank, age, property)...'(p.123). In view of this, the carnival participant is boundless as s/he is allowed to participate in the carnival wholly with their body, mind and feelings. The challenge for drama pedagogy is to use acting to subvert the mind-over-body hierarchy and the rational-versus-emotional dichotomy of the schooling system.

This chapter has highlighted Egyptian Youth's uncontrollable passion for freedom. We have demonstrated that irony and sarcasm are the main tropes used to evade the social pressures and political tyranny of the ruling powers. The postmodern gothic tale, framed by mockery and parody, is narrated from a carnivalesque perspective. The youth's frustration and will to lead and to be free is reflected in Tawfik's creature when he chooses to flee after Peter started controlling him. As soon as Peter starts shaping the mindset of his creature the way he wants, the creature chooses to flee. This attitude was not expected by Peter and made angry.

Peter was furious...because the creature Prometheus that he had made had fled. It happened yesterday at sunset... He took him to the shore to see the lake... He was in the course of teaching the creature the details of the external world... He must be dictated the first words and the habits of human beings... Frankenstein says that he wandered as usual, so he stared at the lake in astonishment, and when he woke up, he did not find the creature next to him... He disappeared... He vanished completely ... (Tawfik, 2000, p. 122, my translation)

The spirit of mockery gives way to a strong desire to defy the oppressive cultural and political codes. This reflects the Egyptian youth's discouraged path to freedom. When Prometheus gained his freedom, Peter was furious. The freedom that Tawfik demonstrates in his novel is just like the promise of freedom that is given by the World Youth Forum to the Egyptian Youth. Therefore, this freedom is demonstrated in the monster created by Peter. As a supernatural creature, we expect him to have unreal

characteristics such as being free. In Egypt this is no real freedom, on the illusion of freedom. While Shelley's creature demands his creator's guidance, Tawfik's creature abandons his creator right after his creation. Tawfik's creature's flee demonstrates his rebellion against his creator. Furthermore, the creature flees without prior notice. Such an act is unusual as the creature rebels against his master.

2.4 Conclusion

As we present the carnivalesque components in the novel we relate this to the political context of Mubarak's oppression in which this novel was created. The more oppressive the system was the more carnivalesque the festivities are and the more sarcastic the carnival audience gets. His fleeing represents the Egyptian youth's unconscious desire to rebel against the Mubarak regime. The creator, Peter, took the creature to the shore to see the lake. This was in context of the indoctrination of the details of the external world, his first words, and the habits of men. Unlike Victor, Peter acts like a guardian who works on the indoctrination of his creature. However, the creature chooses to escape from his creator whom he considers a restrictive and disabling force. The disappearance of the creature before being indoctrinated by his creator was an outbreak to his creator much like the outbreak of the Egyptian Revolution which gradually started from the year 2000 (the same year Tawfik wrote his novel *Frankenstein*). "In 2000, [...] hundreds of young people without activist experience joined in the [...] informal, decentralized, heterogeneous, and non-hierarchical Egyptian Popular Committee. The sometimes very risky activism between 2001 and 2003 heightened the cohesion of the newly established networks in which the youth was a dominant actor. This applies also to Kifaya. The movement was established in 2004 and attracted young Egyptians as well as students, most of whom had no protest experience but were eager to get active." (Preiss & Brunner, 2013, p. 164) Unlike Victor's creature, Peter's creature shows no acts of violence throughout the novel. Similarly, nonviolence was adopted the Egyptian youth as they integrated into activists' networks.

Unlike Shelley's creature who was the protagonist who drove the whole novel, Tawfik's creature was excluded from most of the novel's plot. This exclusion resembles the exclusion of the youth in Egypt during the Mubarak regime. Tawfik's creature was silent, excluded, disobedient, rebellious, and confused just like the Egyptian youth whose government has hardly been responsive to their demands as citizens, and often the elite and higher-class within Egyptian society do not even hear citizens demands due to the large divide between the groups. The regime attempts to exclude the youth who view the regime as 'radical' since they want to dethrone their masters. Furthermore, the regime works on eliminating them from participating in any decision related to the country by silencing them. Therefore, the youth are considered the unbearable resisting force for this regime. The declining presidential interest in youth affairs was clearly shown through Mubarak's words and actions. The first sign was the decreased frequency of references to youth issues in presidential speeches. "The word 'youth' and its derivatives were mentioned twice or less on average in the speeches the president made at the joint sessions of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council in the period 2005–10 and when mentioned, focused on old issues." (Wardany, 2012, p.2) The second sign of reduced presidential interest in youth issues has to do with the rare appearances of the president in youth events in the past ten years. "In 2002, he even stopped showing up for the annual meetings of university youths, which he had attended regularly since coming to power. He also failed to attend any session of the four national conferences for youths held between 2007 and 2010." (Wardany, 2012, p.2) Furthermore, youths were completely deprived from their rights as citizens. "Youths, thus, were not able to exercise their citizenship rights either in terms of political participation or social activities which were prohibited particularly at public universities" (Assaad et.al, 2007:7). Treating the Egyptian youth as ignorant is reflected in Tawfik's novel. Tawfik's creature was mentioned twice only. First time was when he was created, and the second time was when he fled. "He disappeared... He vanished completely..." (Tawfik, 2000, p. 122, my translation)

Tawfik unplugs the creature from the narrative. The creature does not say a word throughout the novel; he only yells and screams. Similarly, Egypt's youth have largely 'unplugged' from their nation; poll findings revealed that only 12% of eligible youth were registered to vote, less than 50% ever discussed politics, and less than 5% engaged in any kind of organized engagement. However, as the enormous upheaval of the past few weeks has shown, youth involvement is crucial to change a nation's status quo. Egypt's education system is in crisis. One in five Egyptians is between the ages of 15 and 24, and half of the population is under the age of 25. This "youth bulge" is a significant driver of the country's regeneration.

Chapter Three

The Uncanny and the Egyptian Contemporary Gothic

3.1 Introduction

As a gothic work, Ahmed Tawfik's *The Legend of Frankenstein* invites psychological interpretations, particularly Freud's uncanny. According to Selden et al "The uncanny is clearly relevant, as this suggests, to literary narratives, especially science fiction, horror, fantastic and gothic genres including instances of the postcolonial gothic, where the figure of then alien, or Other, proves to be the projection of a repressed inner self and unsettles notions of a unified personality". (2005, p. 155) The Gothic genre always emphasizes the strange, the uncanny, the invisible, and the dark side of the human self; it invokes the characteristics of the unconscious. Freud describes the uncanny as the *unheimlich*, which precisely refers to something hidden inside the home that was never meant to come to light. This is where the meaning of *unheimlich* and *Heimlich* or uncanny and canny overlap. Though invisible, it represents one side of the truth about the self, about others, and about the self in relation to others. To resolve such paradoxical relationship, Freud highlights the concealed feelings and suppression that we tend to hide, which when unexpectedly appear we become frightened. As we grew into adults such 'childish fantasies' become not easy to believe. However, those belief stay with us waiting for any opportunity to be confirmed in the midst of adulthood beliefs. (Freud, 1919). The childish fantasies are the fantasies of rebelling against one's masters of suppression. However, such odd fantasies are silenced by parents and replaced by the idea that the master should always be obeyed. Parents practice different kinds of authority to suppress these fantasies because, of course, they are deemed odd, wrong, or socially unacceptable. Parents coach their children into obedience, often labeled as acting rationally, so they can fit into their society. Under the pressure of social tradition, family rules, school

order, genuine desires, these wishes, and fantasies are relegated into the realm of the unconscious.

Under authoritarian regimes, this process of suppression is practiced with severity in order to turn a whole generation into obedient subjects. Dictators coach their citizens into obedience, silence protests, and suppress dissent. A good citizen in dictatorship is the one who silently serves their masters, patiently accepts injustice, while simultaneously singing songs of praise to his oppressors. Dissenters and rebels are outcasted by the regime. For example, the Tunisian fruit and vegetable vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, who sets himself on fire in an act of protest against the state, quickly became an iconic Christ figure among the Arab public for daring to challenge his masters. On the morning of December 17, 2010, the Tunisian police seized Mohammed's scales because he worked illegally. He went to Sidi Bouzid to complain about that issue to the governor, but he was denied admission into the building. In an act of despair, Mohammed set himself on fire in the street outside the building. This uncanny scene of a burning body, unleashed youth protests in Tunisia which brought an end to a dictator's rule that lasted for twenty-four years. It ignited "a revolution that has changed the face of the Arab world with dictators and despots toppled in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya" (News Wires, 2011). The twenty-six-year-old man enacts the suppressed desire within every Arab youth to revolt against the long years of silence. Though strange, his act mirrored their desires to break free from their fears.

Using the premises of psychological theory, the researcher reads the monster in Tawfik's novel as a representation of the uncanny in the context of contemporary Egypt. I argue that Peter creates his other self, mirroring his rebellious actions and fragmented identity through the monster and its uncanny transformation, both being unnamed and motherless, to threaten a master's suppressive power and control. The uncanny is represented in direct connection to rebellion and as reflection of the fractured, fragmented self of the protagonist. Tawfik's *The Legend of Frankenstein* is

the novel that perhaps embodies the possibilities of contemporary Gothic as it constantly interrogates the generic conventions from which it springs such as the 'double', the 'other I', the 'alternate self', and the 'alter ego'. The researcher connects Tawfik's young scientist's desire to create a perfect self and the repeated imperfections that come out of this process to the uncanny acts of the suppressed and silenced Egyptian youth. It also focuses on the way the three creatures embody the youth's monstrous acts of rebellion which gradually turn into uncanny figures.

3.2 The Alter Ego

According to a majority of critics, the uncanny figures have continually provided us with a methodical means of identifying as well as masking our suppressed wants and concealed fears (Hogle (2002) and Kearney,2003).We experience a weird attraction to Gothic 'abjections' while writing them off as 'others' because we need and have always required them to identify our 'self' (Kristeva, 1980, p.108). This technique appears to have its roots in Freud's psychoanalytic treatment of Gothic literature. In his 1919 essay "Das Unheimlich," he demonstrates how the uncanny in Gothic stories works by constructing "othered" versions of our most fundamental needs and desires—those that are inherently "known" to us. They are then drawn from our unconscious repressions when they are presented in unpleasant, externalized forms, a process which results in a lingering fear and unease that coexists with a curious need and fascination. Richard Kearney (2003, p. 4) explains these othered bodies in his widely quoted research "Strangers, Gods, and Monsters" as indications of wounds of the human psyche', representing what extremely jeopardize the familiar with the unfamiliar.

In Tawfik's novel, Dr. Frankenstein creates his alter ego. Derrida phrases this relationship in terms of an 'alter ego', an other self: 'the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I' (Derrida, 1995, p.195). Believing that the alterity within is the source of our accountability (this is reminiscent

of Lyotard's 'obligation to the unrepresentable'(1991, p.210) and Levinas's 'face of the other' (1961, p.199). Alterity within is desired and denied at the same time. Thus, though we distance ourselves from these creatures, monsters are in some sort a recreation of our suppressed subjectivities. Throughout the novel, Peter was 'straying' (p.122), 'rebellious' (p.122), 'bellowing' (p.108) , 'shaking' (p.108), and 'drooling' (p.108). All of these emotions are projected onto his creature. The creature mirrored all his creator's rebellious actions from the moment he was created. Kearney (2003, p. 4) claims that monsters are fragmented creatures who lack unity just like the 'ego'. According to Kearney, 'a third way' needs to be found in order to help those monsters (2003, p. 18). The Gothic would fulfill this purpose at both individual and societal levels. Jacques Lacan's notion that the self is located where the self does not think provides another intriguing way to approach this same issue that is especially suitable to the postmodern Gothic- genre and the psychological components of identity. "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think." (Lacan, 1977, 183) This is connected to the idea that the truth is revealed in the presence of a shield where 'realism' excels through metaphor. It is also connected to the inability to obtain meaning except 'through the double twist of metaphor'. (Lacan, 1977, 183)

Tawfik's creator and creature signal the idea of the double, an idea that signals the desire and its negation, the self and its opposite that is not really its opposite, or that is really its truth; the truth that instigates fear inside the self. Freud, describes the uncanny in terms of such contradictory emotions. "The 'uncanny' is that form of terror that leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar"(1952, p.336); however, it has grown alarming because it represents something that was suppressed and has come back.

The creature represents an encounter with Peter's own self that has been suppressed and has come back in this creation. Therefore, his creation was an immense imperfection and a great fragmentation for that matter. The creature is described in

these terms: "In the end, the first creature was able to open his eyes and get up... He was pathetic and terrifying, and he was more distorted than anything you or the cinema can imagine, but he was moving, he had a beating heart, and a will of his own..."(Tawfik, 2000, p.83, my translation). "The double," Freud wrote citing Heinrich Heine, "has become an image of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons" (1910). In light of this, the double or doppelgänger represents the repressed self.

To understand the doubling process, it is crucial to analyze both the doubled and the double. In addition, it is essential to understand the many ways the gothic double functions in the work in order to comprehend the horrors it produces. Tawfik's creator, Peter Frankenstein, is "a young East German doctor" (Tawfik, 2000, p.30, my translation). Through his creation, Peter's demon was visible to us and to him as well. Refaat Ismail describes Peter saying,

Peter Frankenstein was disheveled, constantly wandering and making serious mistakes, and this gave him a special charm that befits scientists. I tried to get to know him several times, but he was the type with a mind that never settled down, and did not notice anything... His intelligence made him closer to the lunatics, and if it were not for shyness, he would be drooling as he wandered the corridors of the conference...(Tawfik, 2000, p.31, my translation)

As a young doctor, Peter is full of imperfections; yet his desire for perfection made him utterly reject his alter ego. This rejection is embodied in the two creatures that he has created and in the process of getting rid of them directly. Agatha, Peter's sister explained that, "[a] few days later, my brother destroyed this creature, and dissolved it in acid because he was a deformed creature; my brother does not want to make deformed creatures ... he strives for perfection..." (Tawfik, 2000, p.84, my translation). These acts of murder convey the youth's hope for their personal progression and their diminishing to hate their 'self' and becoming unfriendly. Peter

would have embraced those creatures instead and dedicated his time to taking care of them. Instead, Peter chooses to keep trying until he gets a perfect creature.

Peter's constant desire to create a perfect creature amounts to his striving for self-determination through a process which Levinas terms 'hypostasis'. Through this process, which basically causes the ego to recoil in fear at its own anonymity, Peter embodies his creator's status of being or knowing nothing. This signals Tawfik's young audience who suffer from their lack of identity. In other words, in their case, it is impossible to think about or imagine the self. Therefore, keeping these theories in mind, it may be claimed that contemporary notions of the self center on the ontological sense of the word. 'There is' a self. However, this self tries to exist, and through the process of hypostasis, it becomes an 'existent'. Tawfik's creator, Peter, seeks for a perfect existence and a being with a perfect identity. Peter also claims that he "choose[s] the most beautiful parts of every human being. The face is the face of a cinema actor, the arm is the arm of a wrestler, the foot is the foot of a runner, and the brain is the brain of a thinker" (Tawfik, 2000, p.85, my translation). According to Levinas' theory of the function of hypostasis in the formation of subjectivity, the outcome is a split self, similar to a Gothic doppelgänger. The timeless self reflects on itself in an unchanging way while becoming conscious, i.e., comprehending the (im)possibility of wholeness or perfection is changing in this stage of hypostasis. "The second creature was better in kind, but he was afflicted with a kind of dementia, and he did not stop screaming until he turned our lives into hell and was about to reveal our secret, so my brother got rid of him, and then he started creating the third creature" (Tawfik, 2000, p. 84, my translation). It is as if Peter is doomed to meet imperfection, an imperfection which mirrors the imperfect, fragmented self in contemporary Egypt, a self which is split into public and private due to political suppression, a self which desires perfection but cannot find it anywhere. The Egyptian proverb "the eyes desire what the hands can't reach" bespeaks of such impotency resulting from the split around the desire and its negation. The creature's screams echo Peter's own screaming

self, wrecked by fragmentation. Deleuze and Guattari speak of creatures criticizing their nostalgia for “the condition of a body recognized as a unitary body, that is, a body that passed through the mirror stage (which witnesses the birth of the subjectivity structure in humans.)” (1987, p. 171). Unable to recreate this unitary perfect condition, Peter decides to put an end to the life of his imperfect creature.

Never attempting to name his imperfect creatures, Peter negates their existence as subjects. Butler (2011, p. 72) describes this identity negation, “it is the name itself, the signifier, which supports the identity of the object [...] To be named is thus to be inculcated into the paternal law and to be formed, bodily, in accordance with that law”. As unnamed creatures, the monsters’ identity is jeopardized rather than supported. Moreover, the monsters’ one and only parent, Peter, kills them, which is consequent to not giving the monster a name, making him not inculcated into the paternal law of Peter. According to Lacan (1977, p. 445), giving a title or a name to someone “would constitute an act of symbolic order”, an act which would have provided the monster with his own identity and an autonomous existence. The reason that the monster’s name is undecided and that the monster is labeled with such negative terms is that the monster’s existence defies scientific explanation. Derrida explains that monsters are present just like any other creature. However, it’s unidentifiable by us as it is ‘unnameable’ which makes it more frightening. It also belongs to no species on Earth, just a shapeless, silent, and terrific offspring which makes it more monstrous. (1992, p. 369-370)

The monster cannot be given a proper name, since it does not actually exist as a human being. Unlike any other offspring, the birth of such “formless” and “terrifying” creature drove his creator away the moment he saw his creature, not willing to name him or even see him again. Therefore, the monsters try to “proclaim [themselves]” but eventually fail as Peter takes away their lives. Peter’s creatures appear only in a single scene in Tawfik’s novel when Peter decides to educate his creature about the world.

In this scene, nothing much was said about the creature except the fact that he vanished. Refaat only tells how Peter was furious about the creature's disappearance. For Derrida (1992, p. 386), however the "monster is also that which appears for the first time and, consequently, is not yet recognized." Since people never saw a creature as ugly or hideous as this monster, they are not able to recognize it or even look at it. Unable to recognize the monster, the monster is an anti-existence, who is visually incoherent and without a name. "Branagh's 1994 Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* directly grapples with the issue of naming and existence in a way that suggests the creature is a psychological splinter of the creator" (Dauber, 2019, p.58). Despite Peter's effort, and desire for that matter, to create a perfect creature, he ends up creating his own fragmented self, a loathsome self which he does not dare to catch a glimpse of. In Christine Berthin's *Gothic Hauntings: Melancholy Crypts and Textual Ghosts*, Berthin states that, the monster's characterization as a disheveled creature makes him more of an outsider, putting him in an unendurable title of the 'melancholic crypt.' (Berthin, 2010, p. 97)

The uncanny presence of the wretch unsettles the patriarchal laws inscribed through the suppressive power of the master. Its screams reawaken the masked fears and pierce through the silence that has engulfed the suppressed self for years. It forces the society/state out of its comfort zone. Therefore, it is not tolerated and has to be suppressed as it shows its face in public (the creator wishes to kill the creature). In the Egyptian culture and religion, the mere thinking of giving life to the dead or creating a human being is blasphemous or sacrilegious. There is a repetition in Tawfik's novel of the idea that these attempts are the work of the devil: "I seek refuge in God from the cursed Satan". (Tawfik, 2000, p.112, my translation) The repetition of this single phrase over and over throughout the novel echoes the uncanny scenes and figures in Tawfik's novel. Bearing in mind this reading of the disruptive force of the uncanny figures, the screams of the monster, the burning body of the Tunisian young man, and the chanting of thousands of demonstrators who flooded Egyptian streets in protest

against the state will all be perceived as acts of self-expression that disturb the fake sense of perfection (symbolic order) dictated by state-imposed or self-imposed censorship.

3.3 Monstrosity, Maternal Loss, and Dethroning Masters

The psychic counterpart of a person represents psychic projection, a mechanism which exposes a person's more sinister side. In this sense, the creature represents the negative aspects of humanity. The psychic opposite of Peter Frankenstein is reflected in this creature. Frankenstein's psychic instincts have been externalized in the form of the creature's malevolent effects. In this section we reflect on the triangulation of monstrosity, maternity and rebellion against the master. We argue that the three monsters enact a gradual movement towards dethroning the master and taking control of their own destiny.

Peter's monster represents an anti-maternal action, whereby "the absent mother is a source of the engagement with the monstrous" (Beville, 2013, p.82). This absence is what creates monstrosity. The monster is an offspring that does not form naturally in a womb of a mother; instead, he is artificially or socially made. Ellen Moers writes that the "[b]irth is a hideous thing, even before there is a monster" because the creature is made from dead matter; it is also hideous because the womb in which the creature is "grown" is not part of his creator's body, but is, instead, an artificial incubator (Moers, 1996, p. 220).

Tawfik's novel *The Legend of Frankenstein* was written at the time of great social and political upheavals in Egypt. Monstrosity had long been associated with political uprisings, as portrayed in depictions of the mob as a "many-headed monster," a relationship that has been revived in conservative iconography of the monstrous revolutionary crowd (Psalm, 74.13). Ahmed Khaled Tawfik has masterfully constructed the creatures created by Peter Frankenstein to represent the suppressed youth in Egypt. The creatures' rebellion against the creator reminds us of the

Egyptians' rebellion against the autocratic regime. Frankenstein's first two creatures did not show any opposition to their creator. Since Frankenstein is the one in power, the two first creatures believed that Frankenstein owed them certain rights and privileges. However, Frankenstein chooses to kill both of them, claiming that the first creature "was a deformed creature" and the second one an "afflicted with a kind of dementia, and he did not stop screaming until he turned our lives into hell and was about to reveal our secret" (Tawfik, 2000, p. 84, my translation). As for his third creature, he chose to flee from and desert his creator as soon as his creator started teaching him about the world. "He disappeared... he totally vanished" (Tawfik, 2000, p.122, my translation).

Tawfik's three creatures show a gradual move toward rebellion with every new creature that Frankenstein has created. This gradual rebellion signals the gradual rebellion of the Egyptian youth. The first creature was dissolved in acid before any act of rebellion. Similarly, young people may not find political action appealing, especially under authoritarian regimes like in Egypt, where the public sphere is open for some debate but there are few, if any, free, fair, and regular elections and political action is severely restricted. However, the second creature was furious to the extent that he would not stop screaming. He could not be silenced until his master stopped his life. Moreover, the third creature chose to flee from his creator and not to obey him. The second and third creatures showed more rebellious acts. Likewise, young Egyptians created and led by protest movements long before the outright rebellion against the dictator, e.g., Kifaya movement. The loss of the mother (Egypt), in the sense of safe home, and the disparaging father (dictators) brought about rebellious youth with quite uncanny aspects for the rebellious act, e.g. street dances, collective chanting, burning police vehicles, etc.

The "uncanny" has its disruptive force of all familiar spaces. Freud (1919, p.35) explains that the uncanny was once familiar and known although its presence frightens

us. This is to say that when something or someone we once knew well like a family member or friend comes back but in a disturbing way like in a form of a monster or a ghost. This is when the ‘what was once known’ becomes unknown. Freud further suggests that the unheimlich is in a way or another part of the heimlich. (Freud, 1919, p.226) The familiar image of Egyptian silent, and obedient youth becomes disturbed as young Egyptians are filled with anger in a way that the Egyptian masters were shaken by it. Between 2011 and 2013, they brought the Egyptian masses out onto the streets on numerous occasions in one of the most significant upswings of class and power struggle ever witnessed. According to a report in *The Economist* “the lot of young Arabs is worsening; it has become harder to find a job and easier to end up in a cell. Their options are typically poverty, emigration or, for a minority, jihad. Astonishingly, in Egypt’s broken system university graduates are more likely to be jobless than the country’s near-illiterate”. (*The Economist*, August 2016). Their demons unleashed; they flooded the streets of Cairo to dethrone their masters. The moment Peter’s monster is described in terms of uncertainty:

He was stunned and confused, staring at the world with completely empty eyes, his mouth was open and drooling, and all his limbs were slouched, while the smell of demons rose from him and choked me... (Tawfik, 2000, p. 107, my translation)

The master entertains the idea that the monster is too weak to act subversively: “I don't think... He's closer to a newborn child who did not learn to hurt yet... He will scream and howl, but he won't hurt” (Tawfik, 2000, p. 107, my translation). Egyptians who organized in large numbers in early 2011 actively participated in fighting against the government by burning their building and singing their needs out loud such as ‘bread, freedom, justice’ (Asef, 2017, p.9). Thus, the cry became prevalent and iconic to the revolution until today and to its music. The word ‘bread’ derives from the word that has a similar Arabic meaning as the word ‘life’, which symbolizes the economic crisis that offers an instability to the Egyptian diet. This also served as a source of the

upheaval. Worryingly, some young people have begun to resort to violence in response to police repression, including the use of live ammunition. Refaat Ismail similarly worries from approaching Peter's creature saying, "is it safe to approach him? What if he was the monster in the movies?" (Tawfik, 2000, p. 107, my translation) Later, Ismail describes the monster's initial acts of rebellion, saying:

'AHHHHH!!!'The creature's horrible shriek resounded, and his arm flew into the air to throw me in turn a meter in the air, and then he kicked Frankenstein in the chin, and he howled in a heart-rending way like a wounded animal, and it was three minutes before he regained his composure and calmness. (Tawfik, 2000, p.108, my translation)

Such aggressive actions, the horrible shriek, the arm flying the air, and the howling like animals, portray the monster's rebellious character. However, these actions originated from the monster's creator.

Frankenstein had turned into a rabid wolf that never stopped panting, bellowing, and rapidly inhaling... His mouth is open, his hands are shaking, saliva is hanging from his mouth, and he keeps repeating phrases that I do not understand in an inaudible voice... Our eyes met for a moment, but he did not see me. (Tawfik, 2000, p.108, my translation)

Ismail describes Peter while he was busy doing his experiment as turning into a rabid wolf. This transformation resembles the Egyptian youth who also transformed into powerful wolves who are bellowing their needs. They themselves were surprised by their uncanny transformation. This is portrayed in Peter's open mouth as well as the repeated phrases which remind us of the repetition of phrases in protests done by the Egyptian youth. Also, the idea that they didn't see anyone but their needs and goals that they are aiming to achieve.

3.4 Conclusion

The acts perceived as monstrous by the master or creator such as screams, shrieks and physical violence are acts that force the father to reexamine its relationship with the subjects or creatures. This uncanny transformation of the creature threatens the master control. This creature/creator relationship exemplifies the relationship between Egyptian youth and the Mubarak regime in Egypt. The creation of the three monsters portrays the gradual rebellion of the youth on this regime. Their identity negation is what led to their aggressive actions, just like the creature's identity negation that is caused by them being nameless or motherless. In this world of masters and monsters, physical and psychological control cannot be maintained. Therefore, this gradual growth of rebellion leads to the upheaval in Egypt. This was not possible when the Egyptian youth were the familiar innocent creatures but only possible when they gradually became the unfamiliar disobedient monsters.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This thesis makes important contributions to the emerging literature on the postmodern Gothic writing in the Arab world. In this work, the researcher analyzes the worries of the contemporary Egyptian youth in the setting of Egypt and also monitors the uncanny features presented in the novel through the characters Ismail, Peter, and the monstrous creature. It also investigates the forms of appropriation of the classic Gothic inside Tawfik's own work and reveals the thematic and formalistic tactics utilized to locate this classic work in contemporary Egypt. In light of this analysis, the researcher underlines Tawfik's contributions to the formation of the Arab gothic as a new genre in the Arab world, probing generic conventions from other genres and adding a relatable character from their culture when appropriating, made this text more relevant to the readers. As the contemporary Egyptian youth are already experiencing original horror happening in Egypt, Tawfik is expected to provide them with a relief from the pain, anxiety, and uncertainty that they are already steeped in through his Gothic stories.

Chapter two uses Bakhtin's Carnavalesque theory as well as the concept of mediocrity which are interwoven to structure Tawfik's novel. On one level, Tawfik's hero, Refaat Ismail, embodies the youthful energy invested in transforming his difficult daily life. Ismail is the exact opposite of the hero we've always imagined. Unlike other heroes of Arabic literature, Ismail reflects many of the flaws and paradoxes of contemporary Egyptian society. He is the quintessential Gothic postmodernist antihero. He was trapped in a terrifying void of surrealist and non-identity, driven by postmodern culture, a mixture of prescription and non-prescription drugs, megalomania, and oppression. Political leaders, religious figures, and educators promote tolerance for mediocrity as the nation's greatest virtue. The protagonist of Tawfik presents a mundane model for Egyptian youth. His irony

appeals to young audiences who hear voices every day preaching humility rather than rebellion. Carnavalesque represents a rebellion against institutions and groups that claim absolute traditional authority. Even if a revolutionary influence like Carnavalesque lasts only for a short time, it still serves as an explanation for the political, social, and emotional instability of the people. The square ridicules existing social and political discourses. When presenting the carnival elements of the novel, we relate them to the political context of Mubarak's oppression in which this novel was written. The freedom that Tawfik shows in his novel is exactly the same freedom that the World Youth Forum promised to Egyptian youth. This instability led Tawfik to write about horror in hopes that readers would find what he found in Gothic.

Chapter three shows the parallelism the Freudian uncanny aspects and monstrous existence. The presence of uncanny figures allows us to express our silenced needs and hidden fears. This is very evident in the presence of the alter ego in Tawfik's novel. Both the double and the doubled are exemplified in Tawfik's novel as the creator and the creature. The creature being unnamed, motherless, formless, and mute is a terrifying form of monstrosity that proves the loss of his identity. A loss that is quite evident in the case of the young Egyptians, whose identity is in crisis. This identity loss and the worsening of the lot of the Egyptian youth triggered their rebellion against the regime which led to the upheaval in Egypt. Likewise, Tawfik's creatures reflect a gradual rebellion and this evident with every creature Peter creates.

Therefore, Gothicism mimics the fears, anxiety, and mother lessness of the Egyptian youth, fitting perfectly in contemporary Egyptian context. It further fits as a Carnavalesque Gothic for it is full of mediocracy which can be escaped through the carnival laughter and the chaotic uncanny, increasing its relevance to contemporary Egyptian scene.

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قدمت هذه الرسالة استكمالاً لمتطلبات الحصول على درجة الماجستير في الأدب المقارن، من كلية الدراسات العليا، في جامعة النجاح الوطنية، نابلس - فلسطين.

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة محاكاة رواية فرانكشتاين القوطية الكلاسيكية لماري شيلي من قبل الروائي المصري المعاصر أحمد توفيق والتي تحمل عنوان "أسطورة فرانكشتاين". يسلط الضوء على السمات الرئيسية لهذا النوع المتطور في سياق مصر ما بعد الحداثة. من خلال عرض كل من الخالق والمخلوق في المشهد المصري المعاصر، يدير توفيق في كتابه "أسطورة فرانكشتاين" لإنشاء أدوار جديدة للنوع القوطي تجسد هموم الشباب المصري المعاصر. وبذلك، يمكن القول إن توفيق قد شجب الأرتونكسية للأنواع السائدة الحالية وتغلغل في النظام التعددي للأنواع المصرية. نجح توفيق في إنشاء تخصيص فريد من نوعه، ونشر أسلوبه الخاص ورسم بطل مسلسلته بألوان مصر المعاصرة. في هذه المحاكاة للقوطية الكلاسيكية، يحافظ المؤلف على الملامح الرئيسية لخط حبكة القصة الأصلية، فقط لنقله إلى مصر ما بعد الحداثة، وبالتالي الكشف عن جوانب مهمة من السامي وإيجاد وجهات نظر جديدة تتناسب مع ثقافة الشباب العربي المعاصر. يتم تحييد المكون الخارق للطبيعة، وبالتالي، سوف يشرح البحث كيف ولماذا يحدث هذا التعطيل للخارق للطبيعة. في ضوء ذلك، تسلط الباحثة الضوء على التعديل الذي تم إدخاله من خلال تخصيص توفيق لرواية ماري شيلي، وبذلك، سترسم الملامح الرئيسية للأدب القوطي العربي المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب العربي ما بعد الحداثي؛ القوطية ما بعد الحداثة؛ الكرنفال القوطي؛ ثقافة الشباب المصري ما بعد الحداثة الميديوقراطية؛ الذات البديلة؛ الوحشية.