

# The Egyptian Revolutions Between Reflection and Prediction

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## Abstract

The concept of revolution is not new to the Egyptian nation; a nation known for its long struggle for freedom and democracy throughout ages. This nation witnessed the ancient civilization in the world as well as the first revolutions and political upheavals on Earth. The aim of this research, accordingly, is to shed the light on the most important revolutions known by the Egyptians, especially during the modern and contemporary times, embodied in the 1919 Revolution, 23 July Revolution in 1952 (or the Free Officers Revolution), and finally 25 January Revolution in 2011. It also attempts to investigate how these revolutions were presented in fiction and the role of the writers in depicting the various forms of power and class struggle within the Egyptian society. In addition, how these writers felt their responsibility towards their country to the extent that they not only reflect the revolutions but, some of them, predict the revolution before it occurred. The selected novels for such purposes are Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace Walk*, Yusuf Al- Sibai's *Rudda Qalbi (Give Back My Heart)*, and Mohamed Salmawy's *Butterfly Wings*. These selected works are to be critically analyzed in the light of Lukács's *Reflection Theory* and Foucault's *Concept of Power*.

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**Keywords:** Lukács, Foucault, *Palace Walk*, *Rudda Qalbi*, *Butterfly Wings*.

## Introduction

The Egyptian civilization is regarded as one of the most ancient civilizations in human history. That civilization, which dazzled the world and still raises its curiosity to discover its hidden secrets and miracles, justifies why this land (i.e. Egypt) crushes any tyrant, even if one of its sons. Since ancient times the Egyptian land is "a tomb for invaders" and its sea witnessed the drowning of the most famous tyrant known by humanity, the Pharaoh of Egypt, as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. The Quranic miracle becomes clear

here that the real name of this pharaoh is unknown to remain a symbol and a lesson for every tyrant until the Day of Resurrection: "So this day We shall deliver your (dead) body (out from the sea) that you may be a sign to those who come after you!" (*The Nobel Quran* 11: 92).

The concept of revolution is not, therefore, new to the Egyptian nation; a nation known for its long struggle for freedom and democracy throughout ages. Thus, if Egypt witnessed the ancient civilization in the world, it also witnessed the first revolutions and political upheavals on Earth. The aim of this research, accordingly, is to shed the light on the most important revolutions known by the Egyptians, especially during the modern and contemporary times, embodied in the 1919 Revolution, 23 July Revolution in 1952 (or the Free Officers Revolution), and finally 25 January Revolution in 2011. The current study attempts to investigate how these revolutions were presented in the creative works of fiction and the role of the writers in depicting the various forms of power and class struggle within the Egyptian society. The selected novels for such purposes are Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace Walk*, Yūsuf Al- Sibā'i's *Rudda Qalbi* (*Give Back My Heart*), and Mohamed Salmawy's *Butterfly Wings*. These selected works are to be critically analyzed in the light of Lukács's *Reflection Theory* and Foucault's *Concept of Power*.

### **Lukács's *Reflection Theory* and Foucault's *Concept of Power*:**

The reason of selecting these two critical approaches is that each critic was interested in some political issues, a matter that enriched their experience concerning freedom and the importance of resisting all forms of oppression and injustice to enable an individual's self-realization in modern societies which are dominated by capitalism and its related consequences as reification and alienation. If social phenomena are the main interest of the Hungarian philosopher Georg Lukács (1885-1971), social practices within the social institutions (e.g. schools, universities, army, hospitals, asylums, etc.), are the basis upon which the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984) built his concept of power. Another point of similarity between Lukács and Foucault is their participation in political issues. Georg Lukács, for example, was one of the prominent and active Hungarian politicians during the 1919 and 1956 Hungarian revolution. Concerning Foucault, he was a participant in many anti-racist campaigns and human rights movements, and devoted much of his life to protests against the unfair trials and all forms of abuses and violations committed globally by governments against human rights. In addition, both Lukács and Foucault were Marxists and their works added a lot to it.

Another reason for selecting Lukács and Foucault's approaches for this study is that their ideas seem complementary; they are completing each other. Lukács is interested in social reality and, for this reason, he postulated his

*Theory of Reflection.* Reflection for Lukács does not mean presenting a photographic image of reality, it is, however, a process based entirely on the writer's consciousness and world-view. It is not spontaneous nor photographic, but deliberate and conscious. In this process, the writer plays the role of the mediator between literature and the society. A true writer has, thus, to portray his characters and their struggle for self-realization objectively without imposing his political orientation. Objectivity for Lukács means totality, but not as perceived in natural sciences. Unlike the scientist who observes details of the phenomenon in order to find solutions, the realist writer is concerned with the essence of the phenomenon regardless its constituting details because literature has its own independent world. Through his typical characters and situations (the type in Lukács's view means representative), the writer brings the reality in front of his readers' eyes so as to enable them to confront their troubles and think of change.

As self-recognition is the target behind Lukács's *Reflection*, it is also the same aim for which Foucault postulated his ideas on *Power*. Lukács's reality includes relationships between individuals themselves and between them and the social institution. These relations also formulated what Foucault referred to as power relations. Foucault tried through his intellectual production to resist the sovereign type of power that controlled bodies and minds for centuries. For this reason, his model of power is a bottom-up model as it focuses on the dominated and the marginalized rather than the dominant. Moreover, power for Foucault is not a property owned by a certain individual or a group and it is not a tool that the dominant uses to oppress the dominated. Power is rather productive and it encompasses the whole fabric of the social structure. In fact, Foucault tries through his writings on power to produce a self-regulating individual marked by his free will to defy any form of coercion or oppression that threatens his freedom. That is why power for him has an inseparable relationship with resistance as well as knowledge.

### **Origin of Revolutions in the Egyptian History:**

The first Egyptian revolution dates back to the Sixth Pharaonic Dynasty. It was organized by the ancient Egyptians against Pepi II Neferkare, who ruled Egypt since he was a boy of six years old until he became one-hundred years old, which means that he ruled the ancient Egyptian kingdom for nearly ninety-four years. Due to the king's senility, chaos, injustice, hunger and poverty spread in the country and the state men as well as the priests dominated everything. This, in turn, ignited the revolution against the king and his men until "the scales were reversed [...] and the former masters became slaves to their former slaves" ( Al Miniawy 11-12; translation mine).

If the revolution against Pepi II is considered the first revolution against a ruler, the revolution led by King Ahmose I, the founder of the 18th

Dynasty, was "the first and oldest revolution against an occupier in history" (15). It was organized against the Hyksos. This revolution resulted in expulsion of Hyksos, establishment of the principles of the New Kingdom, and prosperity in all fields of life. Centuries passed and the Egyptian society witnessed many crises that periodically ignited the revolutionary fire, whether against a tyrant ruler or against an occupier. However, the modern and contemporary era abounds with the most prominent revolutions through which the Egyptians managed to change the reality and impose their free will. These revolutions are the 1919 Revolution led by Saad Zaghloul, the Revolution of 23 July 1952 led by the Free Officers, and lately the Revolution led by the people themselves on January 25, 2011.

### **Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* and the 1919 Revolution**

In his article, "The Egyptian Revolution of 1919," Robert L. Tignor states that "[a]s most political histories of Egypt indicate, the revolution of 1919 constituted an important turning point, if not a watershed, in Egyptian political development" (41). The importance of this revolution lies in the fact that it "marked a peak period in the growth of Egyptian nationalism" (41). It was a national revolution against the British occupation of Egypt and Sudan. Rejecting the British Protectorate, which was imposed over Egypt and Sudan due to Britain's involvement in the First World War, political activists and nationalists, led by Saad Zaghlul (1859 – 1927), called for the independence of Egypt and Sudan.

Before World War I, Britain promised to be responsible for all burdens of the war, but the Egyptians later discovered that it was a false promise as many Egyptians were largely involved in the war and the country's crops and goods were exploited to serve the army; a matter that burdened the Egyptian economy and strengthened the British sovereignty over Egypt. When the war ended, the Egyptian nationalists, led by Saad Zaghlul, formed a delegation and wandered across villages and districts to collect people's signatures to legitimize their role as representatives of the Egyptian people to request Egyptian and Sudanese independence from the British Protectorate. Feeling that Saad Zaghlul and the members of the Wafd Party were threatening their existence, the British occupier decided in 1919 to exile Zaghlul, and his Wafdist companions, to Malta and later to the Seychelles. As a result, the whole country became in turmoil and upheavals spread like wildfire. The demonstrations were not restricted to Cairo, but they were countrywide. All classes participated in this revolution and it was the first time for the Egyptian women to participate in a revolution beside men. This national resistance against the power of the occupier continued and many innocent civilians fell dead, but these sincere efforts led to the British recognition of Egyptian independence in 1922; even it was a partial independence.

A seven-year old child, Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) was a witness of the 1919 revolution; the memory that influenced him personally and literary, as he himself stated in one of his later interviews:

I was about seven when the 1919 revolution took place. I became more and more affected by it and more and more enthusiastic about the cause. Everyone I knew was for the Wafd Party and freedom from colonization. Later I became much more involved in political life as an outspoken follower of Saad Pasha Zaghlul. I still consider that involvement one of the most important things I have done in my life. (qtd. In El Shabrawy)

The Egyptian Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006) was a novelist and short- story writer. He was the sole Arab writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1988). According to Mahmoud Atshan, "[Mahfouz] gained [this] award simply because he was a great novelist with a deep and extensive experience. He has encapsulated within his writings the trajectory of novel writing, which has extended over a good part of two centuries" (115). "The Arab world's most prolific writer", in Aida A. Bamia's words, started writing fiction in the thirties by writing some stories that were published in Salama Musa's *The New Periodical (Al- Majalla Al- Jadida)*; the talent that enriched the art of fiction with more than thirty novels and more than one hundred short stories (117). Throughout his novels, he attempted to aestheticize the radical transformations witnessed by the Egyptian society during the twentieth century at the political, social, and moral levels. Thus, he is described as "the most prolific chronicler of social transformation in modern Egyptian history" and his life is perceived as "a mirror of Egypt's journey, its quest for modernity—and its frustrations" (Greenberg 24; Ajami).

Mahfouz was marked by his deep belief in the significant role of the novel in treating social injuries: "[it] treats the injury as a skilled surgeon does; it delves into the injury and casts an illuminating light on its various dimensions and explores its multiple details" (Mahfouz and Sultan 47). For this reason, Mahfouz's fiction belongs to this type of fiction known as the "socially committed fiction" (Dimeo); and, perhaps, his *Trilogy* is the best example of such type of fiction to the extent that it is described as Mahfouz's "*magnum opus*" (El-Enany 187).

*Palace Walk* or *Bayn Al Qasryan* (1956) is the first part in this three-part novel *Cairo Trilogy* that tells the story of al-Sayyid Ahmad Abd al-Jawad's family between the two world wars, starting from 1917 to the outbreak of the nationalist revolution in 1919. It is described by Sarah Zakzouk as "[a] novel that lends itself beautifully to the complex history of Egypt" ('A portrait of 'other' Egyptian Revolution'). The novel depicts the chaos that dominated Egypt due to the British Occupation and exile of Saad Zaghlul through the story of a tyrannical husband and father, al Sayyid Ahmad Abd Al- Jawad, whose power over his family members is absolute and whose orders are

unquestionable. This family comprises of a submissive wife, Amina, three sons, Yasin, Fahmy and Kamal, and two daughters, Khadija and Aisha.

Ahmad Abd Al Jawad is a man of many contrasts. At home and with his family he is like a commander in the army who orders and does not accept discussion because, for him, it means challenging of his authority. Thus, he is always serious, someone who never allows any of his family member to misbehave. The life of Ahmad's family is, therefore, controlled by strict principles and traditions. On the contrary is his behaviour outside home where he is very liberal and joke-teller. He spends his time every night in entertainment with his friends, drinks wine and conducts obscene relationships with women and dancers. Every night he returns to his home after mid-night but none of his family dares to discuss him or protests against such misbehaviour.

A Luckácsian and Foucauldian analysis of *Palace Walk* shows that Mahfouz brilliantly managed to give a detailed realist description of the Egyptian society through the daily routine and interaction of one of its middle-class families. Besides, he depicts through the story of this family the various forms of power that dominated the Egyptian society before the outbreak of the 1919 Revolution: the patriarchal power, exercised by Al Sayyid Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad over his wife and his children, parallel to the political and military power exercised by the British colonizers over all Egyptians. Mahfouz's embrace of Luckácsian realism is obviously reflected in this novel to the extent that he is considered a perfect example of the true writer that Lukács refers to in his *Studies in European Realism*: "A great realist such as Balzac, if the intrinsic artistic development of situations and characters he has created comes into conflict with his most sacred convictions, will, without an instant's hesitation, set aside these in his own prejudices and convictions and describe what he really sees, not what we would prefer to see" (11).

A great realist writer, in Lukács's point of view, should not impose his own beliefs or views, he has to be objective and bring the reality in front of the readers' eyes and let them decide the solution. This is exactly what Mahfouz used to do in all his works due to his belief that "one of the great advantages of art is that the artist can criticize and oppose and say whatever he wants indirectly" (Sagiv 201). In *Palace Walk*, for example, he indirectly criticizes the patriarchal system that dominated the Egyptian society due to the inherited traditions that assert males' hegemony over females. In addition, he makes the tyranny of the patriarchal example, Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad, parallel to the tyranny of the British colonization. Both of them deprive individuals of freedom and self-recognition. In this novel, as in his other works, Mahfouz seems completely conscious of Lukács's idea of totality in the sense that his novel gives "a comprehensive, dialectic treatment of life in all its dimensions

... present[ing] a totalizing view of the social system, as experienced by credible, sympathetic characters" (Dimeo).

Another quality of a great realist writer that Lukács asserts through his theory of reflection is that he has to present typical characters who represent ordinary people within the society, and this is also an undeniable quality in Naguib Mahfouz's personality as a writer. Mahfouz's characters, always Cairene people, are representatives of ordinary people. The family members in *Palace Walk*, for example, are representatives of all types of Egyptian people: the liberal (i.e. the father and his elder son Yasin), the activist (i.e. Fahmy), the oppressed women (i.e. Amina and the two daughter Khadija and Aisha), and the promising intellectual and modern generation (i.e. Kamal). This urged George Kearns to observe that in *Palace Walk* "Mahfouz is so absorbed in each scene, so effortlessly able to assume with the great storytellers that the tale he is telling is the only tale worth hearing at the moment, that the reader, as it were, must become a member of the family" (492). It is this deep realistic portrayal of his characters that let other critics to describe such portrayal as "so complete and so faithful ... to an extent that *you feel* you knew them personally" Atshan 113; italics added). His characters are characterized by their "deep human expressions *that reflect its own culture*" (Boullata 420; italics added). In the same context, Rasheed El-Enany hailed such artistic correlation between Mahfouz's characters and their reality that "While characters are individually portrayed and their private agonies and pleasures brought to life before us, the sociopolitical panorama of Egypt under the British occupation is equally vividly portrayed" (188).

Another important quality of Mahfouz as a distinguished social realist is that his themes apparently seem related to the Egyptian society, but they have, in fact, universal implications. He was a writer with a great ability to "br[ing] the 'micro' – the neighbourhood – out of the 'macro' – the universe"; an ability that granted him such titles as the Egyptian Dickens or Balzac and "the foremost Arab writer of modern times" (Sagiv 202; Peters 395). Mahfouz in *Palace Walk* plays the role of the mediator that Lukács explains through his theory of reflection. As a social realist, Mahfouz is a mediator between literature (i.e. his novel) and the political and social reality of his society. He raises his readers' consciousness towards the ugly face of the patriarchal system and its danger over one's free will; the system and traditions that are as dangerous as the British colonization. For this reason, he depicts Ahmad's family as a micro world of the macro world (i.e. Egypt).

On the other hand, a Foucauldian reading of *Palace Walk* shows that the relationship between Al- Sayyid Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad and his family members as well as the relationship between the Egyptian people and the British colonization is based on power. Both are negative forms of power that prevent freedom and self-recognition. Both, accordingly, have to be resisted.

These two forms of sovereign power, that Foucault firmly rejects and attacks in his writings, are alternatively exercised throughout the novel. Ahmad's power as a patriarch dominates the incidents through the daily routine of the family. However, with the emergence of the British colonization through the reference to the 1919 uprisings, Ahmad's power is weakened and gradually vanishes.

Thus, Naguib Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* presents a form of various forms of Foucauldian power, namely the familial/sovereign power as embodied in the character of the sovereign father. A father in the Arab world "has authority and responsibility. The wife joins his kin group ... and the children take his surname ... . The father expects respect and unquestioning compliance with his instructions. Position at the top of the pyramid of authority is based on the traditional division of labor, which has assigned him the role of breadwinner or provider" (Barakat 100- 101). Thus, by traditions and the patriarchal system that dominate the Arab world in general and the Egyptian society in specific, as well as the blood-right (as his blood runs in his children's veins), Ahmad is individuated and located at the top within his family and has all authorities to control and discipline his wife, Amina, and his children: "the father, as bearer of the name, and insofar as he exercises power in his name, is the most intense pole of individualization, much more intense than the wife or children. So in the family you have individualization at the top, which recalls and is of the very same type as the power of sovereignty, the complete opposite of disciplinary power" (*Foucault, Psychiatric Power* 80). It is traditions and norms that grant Ahmad such sovereignty, and this is what Foucault refers to as *Power/Knowledge* relationship. Ahmad cannot exercise his power without the support of the established patriarchal system (i.e. knowledge) in the Egyptian society, which grants men respect as husbands and fathers.

Accordingly, Ahmad enjoys a type of absolute power that gives him the right to enjoy his life to the full and, at the same time, prevent his family members from entertainment and pleasures. He is a tyrant with an absolute power over his family. He is the only person who has the right to return his home after midnight and his wife, Amina, has to welcome his late arrival and take off his shoes. She has become familiar with such submissive duty to the extent that it has become a habit to "[wake] up at midnight to await her husband's return from his evening's entertainment. Then she would serve him until he went to sleep" (*Palace Walk* 1). Once, at the very beginning of their marriage, she expressed her resentment of his repeated late returns, but he harshly hold her ear and "tell her peremptorily in a loud voice, 'I'm a man. I'm the one who commands and forbids. I will not accept any criticism of my behaviour. All I ask of you is to obey me. Don't force me to discipline you'" (4). Since that moment Amina learned to, submissively, obey all his rules and accept his harsh temper because "she became convinced that true manliness,

tyranny, and staying out till after midnight were common characteristics of a single entity" (5).

This submission is also imposed over the two daughters, Khadija and Aisha, "who were as totally ignorant of the outside world as *their mother*" (13). Unlike their brothers, Khadija and Aisha were not allowed to complete their learning based on the dominant tradition that girls should be kept at home for house chores until they get a proposal for marriage. However, it should be mentioned here that Ahmad's power is absolute and has the same impact on the sons the same as on the girls. Like daughters, the sons are not allowed to violate their father's rules or dare to argue with him. For example, Yasin, Ahmad's elder son out of his first marriage, can be described as a passive and corrupted product of patriarchy and sovereign power. "Like father, like son" is a typical proverb that can describe Yasin's character. Like his father, Yasin is interested in his appearance and pleasures. He spends his money on alcohol and prostitutes the same as his father does. Observing the ill manner of his son after attacking their old maid because he was drunk, the father decides to let Yasin marry Zaynab, the daughter of one of his friends. Unlike Yasin, Fahmy has the desire for change and he will later resist such power when he participates in the demonstrations in spite of his father's refusal.

Thus, Amina and her children at the beginning of the novel "were accustomed to nothing but prudence, dignity, and gravity from him" (*PW* 7). The only solace for these children is the time that they sit with their mother to drink coffee afternoon while their father is at his shop. At that time, they enjoy a pleasant feeling of freedom "like a prisoner's satisfaction on hearing the clatter of chains being unfastened from his hands and feet" (23). They talk, argue, and enjoy such feeling of freedom of which they are deprived at their father's presence. This sense of freedom is ultimately felt by the children when their father travels to Port Said. They "all respond eagerly to the freedom and the peaceful, relaxed atmosphere the father's departure from Cairo had unexpectedly created" (164). This departure provides the family members with a rare sense of liberty "which had become after this a revolution, a certainty [and] the day [he left] turned into a more joyous festival than they had experienced" (165).

If Foucault frequently asserts throughout his writings on power that it is not a property to be owned by a person or a group, it can be said that Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's power has to be resisted and his departure for Port Said initiates the revolution against his sovereign power. It comes out of Yasin's idea that their mother, Amina, can go to visit the shrine of Al Husayn; a visit that she dreams of for a long time. This idea is supported by all children and her younger son Kamal decides to accompany her. Unfortunately, on their way back to the home she will be stuck by an automobile. When her husband returns, Amina cannot hide what happened and tells him the truth. As a result,

he sends her to her mother's house and will only bring her back due to the arrangements for Aisha's wedding. It seems that Mahfouz depicts this incidents this way and not to let it pass peacefully to direct a strong attack against Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's power.

As the relationship between power and knowledge is inseparable, the relationship between Foucauldian power and resistance is inseparable too: "where there is power, there is resistance" (*HS, Vol. I, 95*). If there is no such resistance, power is not productive then. Another feature of Foucauldian revolution or resistance is that it has to be total and comprehensive, and this is what Mahfouz did in his novel. He let all Al Sayyid Ahmad's children to "participate, unwittingly, in the revolution against their absent father's will" (165). Mahfouz wants the whole characters to be active participants in such net of power relations, not to be mere passive recipients of it. Another attack against the sovereign power of the patriarch Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's occurs when his son Yasin catches his father while being immersed in his night world of alcohol and female dancers. Power here is reversed as the image of the patriarch is destroyed in this scene. In addition, when Fahmy insists on participation in the political demonstrations against the British occupiers, in spite of his father's rejection, until he is shot and killed by the British soldiers, this is also another attempt of resistance and defying the power of the patriarch.

As Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad's power was an obstacle on freedom and self-recognition of his family members, the British colonization is, equally, a hinder on all Egyptians' quest for liberty and modernity. Thus, this power of the colonizer has to be resisted. At the time that all family members were involved, even unintentionally, in the revolution against the patriarch, the whole Egyptians were involved in the revolution against the British colonization in 1919 revolution. Fahmy, a representative of liberty and dignity, resisted both forms of power first when he rejected to promise his father to stop participating with activists in the demonstrations, and, second, when he challenged the power of the colonizers and called for his country independence till the last moment in his life. It seems that Mahfouz wants to say that you cannot call for your country's liberty until you are a man with a free will. Changes, self-realization, and independence cannot be realized until the negative form of power, whether familial or political, is resisted.

As a socially committed and realist writer, Mahfouz felt that "persistence of patriarchy in the Arab world [...] is an obstacle for women, families, and states," and that he is responsible to bring out the social ills of his society in order to enable his readers to face such reality and be aware of the importance of transformation (Joseph 14). He was not against traditions and norms if they ensure prosperity and self-recognition of individuals. What Mahfouz was against is the false and hypocrite representatives of such

traditions such as this example of Al Sayyid Ahmad Abd Al-Jawad. Mahfouz was, in fact, a writer with a profound belief that "writers must express local issues because indulging in such matters is the only guarantor of keeping the reader," and that it is such interest in the local novel that "will guarantee its survival in the competition" with the international novel, as "[it] is associated with the reader's position and better expresses basic human needs" (Mahfouz and Sultan 47). It is such belief in the role of the novel in expressing human needs and sufferings that steered Al- Sibai to write his masterpiece *Rudda Qalbi* (*Give Back My Heart*) in an attempt to reflect the bitter reality and all forms of power conflict that the Egyptian people suffered before the 1952 Revolution.

### **Al-Sibai's *Rudda Qalbi* and the 1952 Revolution**

Like Naguib Mahfouz, Yusuf Al-Sibai believed that fiction is written not only to entertain but also to record the crucial moments and circumstances of its producing nation or the epoch in which it is written. If Naguib Mahfouz's memories of the 1919 Revolution fueled his imagination to record its events in a social and political context through his masterpiece *Palace Walk*, Yusuf Al- Sibai's *Rudda Qalbi* (1954) (or *Give Back My Heart*) echoes his feeling of responsibility as a writer that ranked him as the novelist of the 1952 Revolution epoch. In a forward to one of his novels, *Nadia* (1987), Al-Sibai expresses such belief in the great responsibility and commitment of a writer towards his society saying, "Once again, I feel my responsibility as a writer living in a period full of transformational events that change the course of history [...] I do not think a writer can isolate himself from such surrounding events [...] Art is a process of receiving and sending .. or absorption and production .. the artist is inspired by the reality of his society and, in turn, influences such reality" (7; translation mine).

Yusuf Al- Sibai (1917-1978) was a prominent Egyptian politician, writer, novelist, and minister. Graduated at the Military Academy and held various prestigious military positions, but this did not prevent his literary talent. He enriched Arabic literature with sixteen novels (most of them were adapted for the screen), short stories, and plays. Beside seriousness that he gained from the military life, Al-Sibai was also known for his sensitivity and romanticism. Thus, he is regarded "to be a leading figure in the Arabic romantic genre" (Ramsay 1). On the other hand, Lucy Yacqub believes that it is unfair to restrict Al-Sibai's literary work only to romanticism, as he was a realist writer as well:

A lot of people think, as I myself once thought before studying and analyzing Al-Sibai's literary work, that Al-Sibai is a romantic writer ... due to the intermingle between his unique personal traits ... and characters of his romantic novels ... but those people have forgotten or pretend to forget how

this fantasy is intermingled with reality, and how Al-Sibai adopts fantasy to address the reality ... they may also forgot how he addressed the national issues suffered by his country ... and how he penetrated, through his works, into the structure of his society to reflect its problems, contributing to their solution. (9)

Al-Sibai's novels can be, accordingly, divided into four categories: romantic novels, Fantasy, historical and realistic. Due to his interest in recording the historical events witnessed by his country, especially the Egyptian revolution of 1952, Al-Sibai was described as the novelist of the revolution epoch.

The years after World War II and before the Revolution of 1952 witnessed severe deterioration at all levels in Egypt. This Pre-revolution period was plagued by corruption, inhuman emphasis on class differences, poverty, hypocrisy, as well as exploitation of the country's resources, at all levels, by the British Protectorate. Resisting the power of the foreign occupier and corruption of the institutions governing the society, a group of soldiers called themselves the Free Officers, led by Mohamed Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser, organized a coup against King Farouq and forced him to leave the country on 23 July 1952; an event that is historically known as the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. The 23 July 1952 Revolution came to put an end to the sufferings of the Egyptians under the feudal system and the monarchy. It resulted in abdication and exile of King Farouq, a step that ended the regime of Muhamed Ali Dynasty in Egypt and Sudan; abolition of all civil titles, like Bey and Pasha, that used to strengthen class differences between Egyptians for the favor of the rich; Independence from the British Protectorate, declaring Egypt as a republic; abolition of the feudal system and initiating agrarian and industrial reforms; and equality between all citizens.

Yusuf al-Sibai was not an ordinary writer who recorded the history of his country through literature, but he himself was a member in the Movement of the Free Officers. "In this way", in Hasan Muhassib's words, "al-Sibai participated in liberating Egypt from its foreign bonds, the corrupt rule of the monarchy and in the forming of the republic not only in theory, but also in practice by wielding his pen in support of the Revolution" (qtd.in Ramsay 43). This patriotic sense is clearly shown through his two-volume novel *Rudda Qalbi (Give Back My Heart)* about which Al-Sibai said, "I considered writing it the most important thing in my life ... due to my conviction that it is necessary to record the crucial events that took place in our contemporary history ... and my sense of the feelings that led to the occurrence of these events that changed the course of history in Egypt" (*Rudda Qalbi* 8; translation mine). Accordingly, the novel depicts the pre-Revolution period through the love story between two characters from two different social classes, Ali and Engy. Ali belongs to a low-class, as he is the son of a gardener, Abdel Wahid.

Indeed they are a humble family, but they are hard-working and honest. Abdel Wahid is the head of a family consists of two sons, Ali and Hussein, and his wife. He works as a gardener for one of the aristocratic princes, Prince Ismail, who has a son, Ala', and a daughter, Engy.

Al-Sibai masterly adopts such contrast between the two families to address one of the major social ills within the Egyptian society before the revolution, namely class differences. These differences are asserted even through Al-Sibai's description of the body features of his characters. The reader meets Prince Ismail, or the *Amir/ Afandina*, as "a majestic tall man [with] a long red fez ... his foreign accent that intermingles with his Arabic statements, as well as the Turkish and French sentences that he uses from time to time. A typical example of aristocracy and dignified origin based on the prevailing standards at that time "(*Rudda Qalbi* 9-10; translation mine). Prince Ismail (or *Afandina* as his employees and servants used to call) and his family can be described, based on Lukács's theory of reflection, as types or typical representatives of the elite class and the feudal system that perceive poor farmers as slaves and stocks created only to increase their capital and ensure their welfare.

In contrast, Abdel Wahid (or *Alraiss* Abdel Wahid as people used to call) and his family are representatives of the low and humble class within the social strata. His appearance is, of course, the opposite of Prince Ismail: "[a man] with a long, loose robe and a turban with a yellow shawl wrapped around it... typical clothes for such category ... [and] his black face ... nothing extraordinary distinguishes him from his peers or those who belong to his social class" (10; translation mine). However, he is a man who challenges his reality and strives for better life through sending his two sons, Ali and Hussein, to schools to ensure better future for them. He sacrifices his dignity due to the humiliating treatment of Prince Ismail and all his savings to realize his dream through his sons. He dreams that both of them will be officers; the position that is restricted only to high classes or those who enjoys favoritism.

The relationship between the two families is a micro image of the relationship between the monarchy and the people; it is based on the absolute power of an individual or a certain group. Through different scenes the reader views the oppressive and humiliating treatment of the Prince Ismail and his son Ala' with their employees and servants. Al-Sibai describes the power relation between this prince and his poor employees as " a mirror that reflects the absolute power and tyranny of the ruler and the inherited traditions of supremacy of masters over the slaves. Such traditions taught those masters that they are the owners of everything, wealth and lands, and that they are the origin of creatures, and that all other creatures such as horses, dogs, and farmers were created to enable them enjoy their life. (30; translation mine).

For this reason, Al-Sibai uses this love story between Ali and Engy to resist and revolutionize against such inherited traditions.

Indeed he belongs to the poor, but he (i.e. Ali) is depicted as a noble character who risked his life to save the little princess, Engy, who was about to lose her life because of the rush of the garden unfastened trolley towards her. Although this accident happened while they were children, Engy has never forgotten that and their love grew with the passage of years. However, the class differences between them and the inherited traditions indicate that marriage is impossible for those two lovers. Ali was conscious of such difference as well as his "inferiority *comparing to Engy's class*; the inferiority which had been imposed by the inescapable reality" (12; translation mine; italics added). This reality can be escaped and resisted only through dreams. He once imagined "if there would a revolution by the poor against their masters and rulers, and he himself was the leader of such revolution and he rescued her from the hands of the angry revolutionists to sit her beside him at the chair of ruling" (Rudda *Qalbi* 14; translation mine).

In reality, Ali tries hard to resist these depraved standards that make the distance between him and Engy as the distance between the sky and the earth. He applied for the Military Academy in an attempt to fulfill his father's dream and decrease such distance between him and his beloved, and, fortunately, Engy hardly managed to let her father recommend his name to one of the admission board and he was finally accepted. However, for a member of lower classes to join the Military Academy is not enough to give the right for such category to enjoy equality and descent standards of living. The reality is stronger and therefore it needs a revolution. Al-Sibai depicts how the situation was getting worse before the revolution. Media and all resources of the country were used to "glorify the king ... surrounding him by a false aura of heroism ... and false love wrapped by glamorous covers of lies ... deceitful propaganda ... and how the success any business was measured by the King's satisfaction" (600; translation mine).

That corruption that prevailed the country and strengthened the absolute power of the individual beside existence of the English occupier increased people's anger and "the gap between the King and the people increased ... and these feelings of resentment increased among the officers at the army as same as among the people" (601; translation mine). This resentment is represented through the revolutionary character of Soliman, Ali's friend at the Academy and then a member at the Free Officers' Movement. Soliman believes that "there is no hope for any reformation unless those people with red faces (i.e. the English soldiers) leave the country" (241; translation mine). He is an example of Foucault's positive power which depends on freedom of the individuals. He rejects the humiliating and oppressive conditions suffered by the Egyptians under the monarchy and

occupation. He believes that "this status has to come to an end ... people for long time have been trampled and die of hunger?!" (613; translation mine). Perceiving Ali as a victim of such oppressive power, Soliman convinces him to join the Movement to enjoy his rights of equality and better life as a human being and enable the whole country to enjoy the same rights.

Thus, the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 came as the remedy for all bleeding injuries caused by inequality, injustice, social differences, and tyranny. Egypt was declared a republic, realized its independence, and all traces of injustice were demolished. Ali reunited with Engy after her brother died and her father escaped for Istanbul. The 23 July Revolution was like the tornado that reversed all balances and the direction of power. Power was reversed from up (i.e the King) to down (the people) and became the down-up Foucauldian model of power which is based on free will of individuals, equality, and descent standards of living; the same demands for which 25 January Revolution broke out in 2011.

### **Salmawy's *Butterfly Wings* and January 25 Revolution**

Like 1919 and 1952 Revolutions, the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution was an indication of the growth of Egyptian nationalism. It was, as Lila Abu-Lughod describes, "a revolution of all Egyptians and it had to happen" (21). The prompt and unexpected success of January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution has captured the researchers' interest and attention to trace the reasons that led to such "dazzling success", as Farha Ghannam describes (32). Injustices, unemployment, and poverty resulted from the political and economic corruption of Mubarak's regime are believed to be the main reasons behind the outbreak of this revolution. Others attribute it to the Tunisian Revolution that erupted on December 17, 2010, in solidarity with Mohammad Bouazizi, a young man who set his body on fire in protest of the confiscation of his wares by a female police officer. This accident inflamed raging riots not only in Tunisia, but also in many Arab countries, resulting in what is known as the *Arab Spring*. Another undeniable element that spurred and inspired demonstrators was the social media (e.g. *Facebook* and *Twitter*).

On Tuesday, January 25 (2011), thousands of enraged demonstrators rushed into Tahrir Square to put an end to Mubarak's corrupted regime. It seems that they symbolically chose Tahrir Square for being the center of the capital city, Cairo. However, these uprisings were not confined to Cairo as there was nationwide unrest. Representatives from all classes and segments that structure the Egyptian society participated: young men, activists, intellectuals, and poor and middle classes. They all raised the slogan of "Bread, freedom and social injustice." Another prominent feature of this revolution was its peacefulness. From the first day of the revolution until Mubarak's step down on February 11, protesters chanted "silmiyya, silmiyya"

(an Arabic word that means, "peaceful, peaceful"). However, this peacefulness did not preclude brutality of police apparatus who commanded two battles against protestors using thugs ("*baltagiyya*") and plainclothes police officers, driving hundreds of unarmed and innocent demonstrators into death. In addition, brutality of the police apparatus and its hired thugs was not the only battle that protestors confronted during their occupation of Tahrir Square, there was a more brutal and vicious battle with the national media.

At the time that all international TV channels and news broadcasts were interested in news of the rebels and ongoing events in Tahrir Square, Egyptian national TV and pro-government satellite channels struggled desperately to falsify the reality and create a state of uncertainty among the citizens. In an attempt to obscure facts, the national media broadcasted entertainment programs and photos of quiet streets and squares and began to doubt the rebels' identity that they were not Egyptians and that they were hired by external powers. This contradiction between the international media and the national media, or what Reem Bassiouney terms "a media war", managed to create confusion and raised questions like, "who represents the 'real Egyptians' and what does s/he want? Does the real Egyptian want to change the regime, or are the couple of million in Tahrir Square no more than a couple of million who do not truly represent the majority of the 85 million Egyptians?" (107).

However, murdering of hundreds of the protestors at the hands of the police and the thugs came to end such state of confusion in favor of the rebels. The blood of those murdered innocents not only ignited enthusiasm of the protestors, but also of those who were not in Tahrir. People, accordingly, decided to continue their struggle to demise "the long standing autocrat" Hosni Mubarak, and their dream was finally realized on February 11 when Omar Soliman, the vice-president, announced Mubarak's abdication (Sallam 248). The people now managed to topple Mubarak's regime. In fact, January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution had revived the Egyptians' dream for political and social change, and in such process of reviving dreams, the Egyptians literature and the written word played an undeniable role. Writers throughout Egyptian political history and crucial periods have such belief that they are committed to raise the awareness of their people to achieve such dream of change for better life and dignity. Mohamed Salmawy (1945- ) belongs to this category of the socially committed writers to the extent that his work *Butterfly Wings* (2011) depicted the revolution before it happened.

Although it was published immediately before the outburst of January 25 Revolution, there is a surprising congruence between the incidents of *Butterfly Wings* and the real events of the Revolution. This urges some critics and readers to describe it as a "prophetic novel", or "the novel that predicted the Revolution" (Cohen). Other critics argue that Salmawy in his *Butterfly*

*Wings* "broke into new worlds never known before in the Egyptian novels, whether on the political level or the minute details of human relationships" (Alhamamsi; translation mine). Another prominent critic, namely Dr. Salah Fadl, describes it as a "type of elite literature with supreme literary structure, music, and depiction of public life as well as unique ability in iconography, depiction of intensified feelings, and keeping track of human relationships and the changes taking place in the society" (qtd. in Ramadan; translation mine).

Salmawy's brilliant choice of the title of his novel symbolizes the conflict between power, represented by members of the ruling National Democratic Party, and resistance and revolution against representatives of this power. Liberation realized by Doha al-Kenani, a successful fashion designer, from power and authority of her husband Medhat al-Safti, nephew of the secretary general of the ruling party and one of the important members in this party and political life in general, represents liberation of the whole country in 2011 from the corrupt power of the longtime regime of Hosni Mubarak. It seems that Salmawy selected the butterfly to represent different stages faced by Egypt under the regime of Hosni Mubarak until the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution. Each butterfly "has more than one life. It transforms from a caterpillar trapped inside a chrysalis to a beautiful butterfly with wings to fly through the air and sip nectar from flowers. [...] the butterfly is a symbol of rebirth" (*Butterfly Wings* 49). Likewise, Egypt was trapped in injustice and poverty for years and the revolution has been the hope for such rebirth.

Mohamed Salmawy, in fact, can be described as a typical example of Luckácsian true realist writer and his novel is also a typical model of the Foucauldian power. He plays the role of the mediator between literature and the reality of his society with all its sufferings, class struggle, and oppressive power. Notably, Salmawy plays such role neutrally without imposing his views or his political orientation on his readers. Objectively, Salmawy brought this bitter reality in front of the Egyptian readers in an attempt to raise their consciousness and let them freely decide the importance of radical transformation to solve their problems and change the direction of power from an up-down type to the down-up type that Foucault frequently called for in all his critique upon power. As Foucault claimed that power is not possessed by an individual or a certain group of people; it is productive not repressive.

Salmawy also tried through his work to enable the Egyptian people to overcome such feeling of alienation that they suffered under the corruptive regime of Hosni Mubarak, a regime that was mainly based on favoritism and absolute power of the ruling class. It is such phenomenon of alienation that Marxist critics as Lukács, through his theory of reflection, and Foucault, through his concept of power, denounced as a social dilemma produced by the capitalist system in modern societies which made individuals deprived of belongingness to their societies. Like Lukács and Foucault, Salmawy wants to

free his individuals from any shackles that prevent their free will or hinder their quest for self-recognition.

A Luckácsian and Foucauldian analysis of Salmawy's *Butterfly Wings* shows that he masterly presents a rich variety of what Lukács refers to as the "Type" or typical characters. *Butterfly Wings* includes such typical characters that represent various classes, opinions and trends within the Egyptian society, and "the story moves between *them* in fairly quick succession" (Orthofer; italics added). They all share the same journey to find their identity. For example, the heroine, Doha al-Kenani, belongs to the elite class dominated by members of the National Party. This class represents power and sovereignty in the Egyptian political, social and economic life. Through this character, Salmawy brings in front of his readers' eyes all social ills that plagued the Egyptian society for decades and have worsened the Egyptians' conditions at all levels. One of these social ills is favoritism. He opens the novel describing how Doha and her driver, while she was on her way to the airport, were kept by the police due to the demonstrations and she was about to miss her flight. However, when she angrily called her husband, Medhat Bey al-Safti, and let him talk to the officer in-charge, all forms of power and police control faded away and turned into complete obedience: "As [the officer] listened to her husband's instructions, he repeated nothing more than 'Of course, sir,' until the call ended. [...] He barked at the policemen, the cordon eased, and he waved the driver through", and after her car passed, he ordered his men to "rebuilt the impenetrable wall that had opened and closed at his commands as if by magic" (*Butterfly Wings* 4). Everyone who represents such power has such 'magic' stick by which all dreams are realized and all troubles are solved.

This power-dominated environment was not, in fact, new to Doha as she was brought up in a similar environment as her mother, Aleya Hanem Hifzi, was a daughter of a former minister. Doha's mother can be described as a symbol of familial power: "[s]he was a formidable woman whose word was law. She made the decisions in all things related to the family" (30). She convinced Doha to marry Medhat al-Safti in spite of all her trials of resistance. After marriage, Doha found herself moving from the familial power of her mother to the power of her husband. Although she was treated like a queen and all her demands are replied, Doha never felt happy with her husband. With him, she leads a type of marital life "in which emotions played no part" and with the passage of days "the wall that had gone up between them grew thicker and higher" (*Butterfly Wings* 71). Searching for any sense of happiness and self-recognition, Doha indulges herself in the world of fashion designing: "like a caterpillar, she spun a chrysalis of fashion around herself but there was no hope of her one day emerging from the chrysalis as a butterfly with wings to soar" (72). However, this day of freedom and self-realization starts at the moment that she meets Dr. Ashraf at the plane.

Dr. Ashraf is the opposite of Doha's husband in everything. He is an opposition rival for the ruling party and the corruptive regime. He believes in the importance of democracy and freedom. If Medhat al-Safti is a representative of the negative form of power which is based on oppression and absolute power of an individual, Dr. Ashraf is a representative of Foucault's productive power which is based on individuals' free will and self-recognition. Since he was a student leader and then a professor and a founder of a movement called New Horizon, Dr. Ashraf never guides the students and youth toward deconstructive actions. On the contrary, he "always worked to guide [them] toward constructive action by joining grassroots organizations demanding change, rather than wasting their energies by boycotting classes or satisfying themselves with going to demonstrations" (29). Unlike Doha who grew up in a family controlled by her mother's absolute power, Dr. Ashraf's mother "had raised him to love his country and work for the people" (29). If Doha at the very beginning of the novel is a pessimistic character who finds no meaning or hope in her life, Dr. Ashraf believes in what he does and is entirely obsessed with the hope for change and social reform. He is a resistant of the "ruling parties' monopolization of political life in the third world" and believes that there should be "political reform [through] establishing the rotation of power ... and [through] amending the constitution, which had been written by the ruling party to ensure its sole control of political life in the country" (*Butterfly Wings* 109).

Talking to him and listening to his opinions, Doha feels that this man is different from all politicians and, personally, he "had brought back to life something inside her that she had not believed still existed" (28). He has enabled her to discover the hidden treasure inside herself that is of how to love herself and to have an identity. It was the appearance of Dr. Ashraf in Doha's life that provided her with hope and ignited her desire for resistance against such power which deprived her of all meanings of life throughout the years that she spent first with her mother and then with her husband. Now she is able to get out of her cocoon to fly into the sky of freedom. From now on, power will be derived from within and not imposed over her. It is self-power which resulted from self-recognition.

Another character who was involved in such journey for self-recognition was Ayman. Ayman's search for his real mother was a symbol of the search of all Egyptian for their mother country, and at the time that Ayman finds his real mother, it is the same time that the country itself recognizes freedom from the power of the ruling party and realizes its identity. Ayman was a victim of his father's power and was totally overwhelmed by his authority. Although he is already a member in a family, but this family lacks the love he yearns for, his mother's love. The reality imposed on him a stepmother, a woman that his father married after the death of his first wife (as

he falsely used to tell his sons Ayman and Abdel Samad). Ayman grew up believing that the woman at home was his mother, a reality imposed by his father's power. Indeed that woman "was not callous and did not mistreat him", but he missed her deep love and care that she gave to his younger sister, Nesma, to the extent that he longed to be a little girl like her (*Butterfly Wings* 12).

For this reason, Ayman found the real image of maternal love through the cat that he used to watch while it was feeding its kittens in the stairwell. He "often threw their mother a few pieces of bread to help her produce the warm milk without which her young would die of hunger" (13). Even this only solace for love was destroyed when the old lady who lived on the ground floor threw the kittens onto the street while their mother was absent. Resisting the damage of this image that embodied his dream, he "searched for the kittens in all the streets around the house, but could find not a trace of them" (13). Of course "they're not part of the family", as his brother Abdel Samad angrily told him to give up his search, but they represented the family that he had longed for (13). Thus, when he discovered that his real mother was alive and not dead as his father told, he resisted his father's power and searched for his mother until he found her and realized his dream. Throughout this journey for self-recognition, Salwa al-Eleimi "was the tender soul who eased the cares of Ayman's life, a life devoid of emotion and tenderness" (*Butterfly Wings* 40). For this reason, he saw her as a white butterfly, a symbol of innocence and chastity. He believed that it was Salwa who "spun the silk in his life, and that without her the chrysalis he lived inside would turn into a gloomy prison" (40). It can be said then that it was this positive power that supported Ayman's search for self-realization and identity.

In fact, Salmawy brilliantly presented various categories within the Egyptian society through his characters, and he therefore reflected the reasons that urged all social sectors to collaborate in an attempt to change this reality. For this reason the 25 January Revolution is always described as the people's revolution, as it was led by all people and not by an individual or a certain party. At the time that the characters realized their identity and resisted their reality, it was the same time that the country realized its freedom. Thus, *Butterfly Wings* represents a journey of salvation of the whole society from the constraints that impede its progress and prevent its individuals of freedom, a matter that encouraged a lot to believe that it really deserves to be described as "the novel that predicted the revolution".

## Conclusion

The critical and literary analysis of the aforementioned works: *Place Walk* by Naguib Mahfouz, *Rudda Qalbi (Give My Heart Back)* by Yusuf Al-Sibai and *Butterfly Wings* by Mohamed Salmawy, it becomes clear that

although each writer recorded a different historical epoch through his work, all of them shared the same belief in the great responsibility of writers and literature in the history of any nation. A great writer does not live in an ivory tower or just reflect the problems of his society. In contrast, he reflects the social ills and raise awareness of individuals to face such reality and change it. Those writers also believe that progress of any country cannot be realized under tyranny, oppression, or negative forms of power. Progress requires free individuals who believe in their potentialities and importance of freedom. Indeed Egypt is a country that strived throughout its complex and long history for freedom whether from an occupier or a tyrant, but Mahfouz, Al-Sibai and Salmawy managed to revive such history through their novels and their lively characters, who represent all social classes within the Egyptian society. Moreover, it is the belief in the important role of the written word that let a writer like Mohamed Salmawy to imagine and depict events before they take place because he is entirely immersed in his reality. Thus, for a writer to be a great writer, he has to be aware that he writes not only to entertain, but also to reflect and affect his reality. "The author", in Al-Sibai's words, "must be free except from his responsibility to his conscience. Literature or art cannot exist in a purely general sense, without a purpose" (qtd.in Ramsay 18). The three writers shared such feeling of responsibility and their novels were like sincere calls for freedom and self-recognition.

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