

**Colliding Utopian and Dystopian Worlds:
Revising Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Ahmed K. Towfik's
*Utopia***

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Abstract: *The article discusses two symptomatic texts that are imbricated within the utopian/dystopian ambience: Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury and Utopia by Ahmed Khaled Towfik. The style and structure of the selected novels are revealed at the level of the chronotope and aimed at clarifying the correlation of genre-forming components within the triad of a 'person – civilisation – society'. This paper tests a hypothesis that the discursive representation of these components in a narrative structure is realised through colliding utopian and dystopian worlds. Problematizing this idea in fiction reveals how the tension between the diametrically opposed worlds promotes critical scrutiny of both to draw attention to the most pressing social problems facing humanity: the role of ordinary people in society, impact of mass media on public opinion, dissolution of morals, social disparity, drug addiction, etc. The study primarily follows a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach to exploring the theoretical and practical aspects of utopian/dystopian worldviews in the literary dimension. The dichotomy of utopia/dystopia manifests in the novels through the overt conflict of different patterns of life, mentalities, and cultures. Analysing the ways of a literary embodiment of this conflict in Bradbury's and Towfik's books explicates how creating a new reality from utopian/dystopian perspectives alters consciousness and promotes a completely different paradigm of existence.*

Keywords: anti(utopia), chronotope, collision, culture, existence, social pattern

1. Introduction

Social disturbances, crises, and collapses actualise the concept of a utopian/dystopian worldview. The idea of utopia/dystopia has long been among the most significant philosophical concerns. Despite the different times, cultures, and changes in societies, this topic is time and again covered in the literature; it can be considered both “an old and new thought” which has haunted the human mind at times of necessity (Nazemian 2019:251). The twentieth century was “an epoch in which the brutality of mankind erupted and flowed more expansively than ever before” (Kressel 2020:27), which encouraged authors to comprehend the new model of society. Analysis of certain negative aspects of society and human existence in it is rapidly getting important, being intertwined with utopia, but at the same time, it receives autonomy, exploiting its own value

characteristics, gaining specific features of genre poetics, being transformed into dystopia.

It is notable that dystopia, denying utopia, develops on the basis of the genre principles of utopia. While utopian literature portrays ideal worlds, dystopian literature depicts the flaws and failures of imaginative societies (Booker 1994:6). At the same time, according to the laws of dialectics, dystopia becomes the starting point for the development of utopia, followed by an anfractuous change of its nature, but on the basis of a new utopia, or what is referred to as “the transformative utopian impulse” (Moylan 2020:164). That is to say, dystopia remains with utopia in the relationship of dialogue, which determines the specifics of the genre and highlights the most characteristic features of their interaction. That is why utopia and dystopia “might be twins, the progeny of the same parents” (Claeys 2017:7). Ferns has characterised utopian fiction as “a matter of exploring possibilities” (1999:x). Even the etymological definition of *dystopia* or *bad utopia* is *a utopia* that has failed or gone horribly wrong (dys-) (Wise 2019:10). According to Baccolini and Moylan, dystopian imagination serves “as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia’s underside” (2003:2).

A kind of line between utopia and dystopia is the model of human civilisation created in modern times. The development of mathematical science and related methods has changed the nature of production; the industrialisation of civilisation has destroyed the traditional relations between people, transforming the individual, according to Ortega y Gasset, into the *mass-man* (Donoso 1990:166); the growth of violence has led to the collapse of traditional ideals, has made illusory even the very possibility of building a society of justice. The crisis of an average person, devaluation, and degradation of culture appear to be the distinctive traits of the new, post-ideological democracy, or audience democracy (Simeoni 2014:92).

The mentioned model of civilisation gains expressive literary forms in fiction through colliding dystopian and utopian worlds. Of great interest is the analysis of the approaches to depicting this collapse by writers with different cultural orientations – Western and Eastern. This comparison highlights the most contradictory aspects of the two cultures and at the same time shows their closeness. It is worth mentioning that so-called local narratives offer a vast array of possibilities and potentials for multiplicity and diversity (Resheq and Majdoubeh 2019:178), but different culture codes in the author’s worldview modify the artistic adaption of reality (Bezrukov and Bohovyk 2021b:274). The best examples for our analysis are the most influential works of the two recognised authors – *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) by Ray Douglas Bradbury (1920–2012) and *Utopia* (2008) by Ahmed Khaled Towfik (1962–2018). The former centres on the lives of people in a totalitarian society where books are outlawed, citizens have lost touch with the intellectual heritage of mankind, shaping the identity (Sriastuti 2020:160). The latter, one of the most distinguished in “Towfik’s literary

universe” (Greenberg 2018:169), the hit of Egyptian literature, translated into English and republished three times in Arabic, focuses on the future of Egypt (2023), divided into two castes, and appears to be a literary study of the most pressing social problems of the country. Towfik makes use of a literary device that is untraditional in Arabic literary canon, *the dystopia* (Karoui 2013:para 3). It is thought that these are the non-Western narratives that have articulated utopian thinking about how the world might change and people should live and act if they want a better world (Papastephanou 2009:44). But it should be stressed that Arabic literature very seldom uses dystopias as “a form of social or political criticism, as authors have opted for realism for this purpose” (Allen 1995:65).

Despite the fact that the novels appeared fifty-five years apart, among the key topics that arise in their pages are social disparity and divide, cruelty as a reflection of instinctive manifestations of man in challenging situations, the conditions and causes of personal degradation in a consumer society, and the collision of different worlds. The authors of the article suggest that *Fahrenheit 451* inspired Towfik to create *Utopia*, since he was the first who introduced Bradbury’s novel to the Arab readers, translating it into his native language. *Fahrenheit 451* is a kind of microcosm of contemporary societies wherein no one is immune to the surfeit of technology to control people (Abootalebi 2017:13), but a dystopian world gradually gives its place to prospective utopian one to be established (Atasoy 2015:412). In Towfik’s book, despite separateness of the “conflicting worlds” (Nazemian 2019:256), utopian and dystopian, they are connected by violence, “a symbol of their dehumanisation” (Karoui 2013:para 6). Up to the present, Arab writers preferred to adopt different notions for utopian/dystopian fiction in Modern Standard Arabic. Arabic literature presents really detailed designations for this genre: to describe corrupted cities, the term *adab al-madīna al-fāsida* is used; to define virtuous cities, the term *adab al-madīna al-fāḍila* is used; the antithesis of utopia is called *naqīḍ al-yūtūbīā*; and the world of the bitter reality is named ‘*ālam al-wāqī‘ al-marīr*’ (Barbaro 2013:26-27).

In Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*, unhappiness and dissent are squelched by two means: television rules people’s lives, and books are prohibited (Patai 2013:41). In Towfik’s *Utopia*, a state of utter hopelessness is experienced when people deteriorate morally and psychologically (Mabrouk 2012:86). Two years after the publication of *Utopia*, the evaporation of the middle class, seclusion of intellectuals, sociopathy of the elite, and disorganisation of the masses caused Egypt to overheat during the Arab Spring protests, so much of Towfik’s concerns come to pass in the real world (Campbell 2015:552).

Thus, the correlation of components within the triad of a *person – civilisation – society* in the genre paradigm of the novels can be manifested in the process of the collision of utopian and dystopian worlds. The originality and academic novelty of the research is exploring the ways of colliding and intertwining utopian and dystopian societies explicated in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Towfik’s *Utopia* as symptomatic literary texts. To appreciate the above

purpose, which has not previously been established in the research of this type, the following methodology must be addressed.

2. Methodology

The very dystopia explores the coexistence of man and society by artistic methods to problematise it. This is noted in the classic definition of dystopia by Kwapien who defined it as a literary work that presents in various forms a negative image of the social system, which the author can observe in the trends that exist in real societies (1972:49). It is natural that the main feature of dystopia is the existence of a state with a totalitarian control system. The societies in the selected novels are reconstructed taking into account all the achievements of civilisation. Knowledge, which denies associative and imaginative thinking, serves a single purpose – the unconditional subordination of the minority to the majority and support of this model of the state structure. In its depicting, we suggest, the interweaving of utopias and dystopias occurs.

To explain the dystopian nature of utopia or the confrontation of two genre formations within one work, it is necessary to emphasise the possibility of utopia to be reborn in its opposite, which is embedded within the genre itself, as an element of its poetics. If we analyse the details of utopia, the moment of the author's critical attitude to contemporary reality is key in the novels, since the very attempt to build an ideal society arises from the denial of the real world. This technique with the replacement of the object of criticism is revived in the dystopian dimension. However, a more productive approach in terms of genre development is the ability of utopia to criticise itself.

We emphasise that the notion of historical, collective, and diachronic memory, which is obligatory for utopia, has been removed from the topos of dystopia. A person is deprived of the right to individual memory whereby the characters have no father and mother, the main guides from the past to the future. Cultural artefacts (books) are withdrawn from circulation or hidden (*Fahrenheit 451*). This actualises the idea that “by claiming the end of history, authorities strive to fabricate the past and negate the future in order to boast the supremacy of the present” (Nakamura 2016:5).

Time in the selected novels is one of the main narrative and genre components. The period of events becomes clear from the context. At the same time, the relative present and the time of action are not always explained by the past; ‘predict’ a possible social but not chronological future for the reader and author. Time coordinates are distorted, genetic and historical memory is created according to the laws of a conditional society. But, as Gottlieb asserts, “one of the most typical ‘messages’ of dystopian fiction is that access to the records of the past is vital to the mental health of any society” (2001:12). Dystopia explores not the world in history, but history as an artistic image of the world created as a result of the probable development of the civilisation process, and becomes a kind of reflection of society itself. The closedness of the chronotope of dystopia leads to the emergence of associations; it connects the real and conditional present. Achrony appears in the novels as a special means for the stereoscopic

consideration of pseudo-reality created by the author, which can be perceived from both dystopian and utopian perspectives.

Sometimes the very utopia rises to be the basis of the research method. Though a definition of utopia in terms of desire is analytic rather than descriptive, it generates a method which “repeatedly returns us from existential and aesthetic concerns to the social and structural domain” (Levitas 2013:xiii). In that regard, this study takes primarily a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach to exploring the theoretical and practical aspects of utopian and dystopian worldviews in the literary dimension. But the comprehension of the texts and experiences, although viewed as embodied in culture and society, does not occur exclusively within the closed systems of discourse formations (Weiss 2004:6). It can account for the repatterning of cultures and the possibility of understanding between them, which occur during the exchanges among interrelated components of utopian and dystopian entities.

The phenomenological method in this study involves a descriptive, analytical determination of differences and correlations in representing the idea of utopia/dystopia in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* and Towfik’s *Utopia*, and explaining the phenomena of conscious life in a particular paradigm. The selected novels are studied as the phenomena of the author’s consciousness, expressing how the world appears to it as long as fiction is a subjective phenomenon. The method of hermeneutic interpretation is intended, in particular, to reconstruct the relationship between the historical context and the context of the novels. Understanding this relationship in our case contributes to the interpretation of the author’s intentions through colliding utopian and dystopian worlds. The analysed novels can be considered the symptomatic texts imbricated within the utopian/dystopian ambience and demonstrated all the range of collisions between the corresponding worlds to be arisen from the social divide.

3. Ordinary people in shifting societies

What motivates authors to write utopian works? Writers are always concerned with social problems, and create their own reality in their works. While readers are influenced by creating a narrative world, it is getting more and more important when it becomes realistic (Bezrukov and Bohovyk 2021a:3). That is why, on the one hand, writers can be seen as fantasy authors, and on the other hand, as realist ones, since “the author knows for certain that this place will exist soon” (Towfik 2011:5). However, that is not a pessimistic mood, but a *guide* for readers with thinking outside the box: “If they give you ruled paper, write the other way” (Bradbury 2012:xi), which encourages awareness of one’s own importance and uniqueness in the world. Perceiving reality as a moment of truth, writers subtly feel the slightest change in society. Towfik chooses Bertolt Brecht’s words as a prologue for his *Utopia*: “Indeed I live in the dark ages! A guileless word is an absurdity. A smooth forehead betokens. A hard heart. He who laughs. Has not yet heard. The terrible tidings. Ah, what an age it is...” (Towfik 2011:6).

Perhaps, playing the role of prophets, the authors try to ‘warn’ those who consider themselves only a cog in a global machine and do not affect the history

as well as the political course of a country. The role of an ordinary person is defined as insignificant, he/she can be compared with “a cockroach fleeing on the kitchen wall, or an amoeba sliding under the lens of a microscope” (Towfik 2011:8). A person is worth nothing in the age of the disposable tissue: “Blow your nose on a person, wad them, flush them away, reach for another, blow, wad, flush” (Bradbury 2012:15), and we believe that “we’re not in control, we’re the odd minority crying in the wilderness” (Bradbury 2012:146).

Utopia and *Fahrenheit 451* centre on the lives of two main characters: a sixteen-year-old boy who lives in “Utopia, where death retreats behind barbed wires and becomes nothing but a game that adolescents dream of...” (Towfik 2011:10) and “a minstrel man” Guy Montag (Bradbury 2012:2) who lives in the totalitarian country, in the society that chooses entertainment: an upgraded version of the TV and 3D projector, and, as Captain Beatty ironically points out, comic books and sex magazines: “But the public, knowing what it wanted, spinning happily, let the comic books survive. And the three-dimensional sex magazines, of course” (Bradbury 2012:55). Such a way to live in the utopian world is flashy and careless because staying “a Utopian resident”, you are “softened by a life of luxury and boredom” (Towfik 2011:10). Sometimes the residents can get used to artificial rules and try to live like everyone else: “He knew that when he returned to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked, in the mirror. Later, going to sleep, he would feel the fiery smile still gripped by his face muscles, in the dark” (Bradbury 2012:2). In such a world, egocentrism and indifference to the fate of others prevail: “I’ve heard rumours; the world is starving, but we’re well-fed” (Bradbury 2012:70). Opinions are imposed that life is fleeting and should be lived big, and the motto is: “Empty the theatres save for clowns and furnish the rooms with glass walls and pretty colours running up and down the walls like confetti or blood or sherry or sauterne” (Bradbury 2012:53). Lack of desire to immerse in history and culture gradually leads to the loss of their identity: “You end up unable to tell yourself apart from other people. If it weren’t for the remnants of lust in your veins, you couldn’t tell men from women” (Towfik 2011:10). If people try to make people leave the artificially created so-called comfort bubble, they feel despair and irritation: “He suddenly couldn’t remember if he had known this or not, and it made him quite irritable” (Bradbury 2012:7), or they are similar to each other in their desire to enjoy: “Let’s not talk about names. What’s the value of names when you’re no different from anyone else?” (Towfik 2011:10), or they become similar in appearance: “These men were all mirror-images of himself! Were all firemen picked then for their looks as well as their proclivities?” (Bradbury 2012:30).

The realisation of one’s otherness lies in the challenge to a society ruled by the totalitarian regime, but each has a different goal. The young man from Utopia “began reading as a challenge, because Mourad doesn’t read, and neither does Larine. It’s beautiful to do something they can’t stand doing” (Towfik 2011:11). For many characters, the book becomes a key detail that turns their lives upside down or affects them. For some it is a desire to be distracted: “For some reason, I fell in love with this habit [reading], and found in it magical worlds I could escape

to whenever I wanted” (Towfik 2011:11), for others, books do not play any role: “there’s nothing of interest in those books. I buy them because they make the office look sophisticated, but life is your only teacher” (Towfik 2011:11). These words are a refrain to Beatty’s words: “I’ve had to read a few in my time, to know what I was about, and the books say *nothing!*” (Bradbury 2012:59).

Immersion in the fictional world becomes the prism through which the perception of reality is refracted. The fellow in *Utopia* reads books to be different from his peers, while Gaber, a twenty-year-old guy, who lives in the dystopian place of the Others, called Shubra (Towfik 2011:34), finds in landfills a mound of books and keep them in his hut to read and try to self-actualise, not realising his involvement in any of the worlds: “I’ve read everything. Until the letters dissolved into each other, and until I ended up not belonging to the Others and not belonging to Utopia. In every situation, I am strange, different, peculiar, foolish, uncomfortable and unintegrated” (Towfik 2011:87). The search for self leads to frustration which is expressed in the experiences and discrepancies between reality and the expectations: “He felt his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and a not trembling, the two halves grinding one upon the other” (Bradbury 2012:21).

Towfik contrasts the protagonist with the antagonist Gaber, a guy from the dystopian world, who tries to show life as it really is, which causes mixed feelings of hatred and threat to the protagonist: “I don’t understand him: I think he’s a cultured type in an environment that isn’t his own. The sheep that thinks becomes a danger to itself and others” (Towfik 2011:68). For the most part, antagonists are negative characters, but in *Utopia*, Garber becomes a litmus test that points not only to the material stratification of society but also to different thinking and a different philosophy of life.

An ordinary person becomes the reason to adopt a different philosophy of life, as well as the driving force of revolutions. In *Utopia*, the protagonist becomes the force that leads to mass riots. Raping Safiya and killing her brother Gaber, who “*helped rescue two people from Utopia from the territory of the Others, and kept them under his roof, but they killed him and cut off his arm after they raped his sister, who was a virgin!*” (Towfik 2011:121). The guy started the mechanism of hatred in a dystopian society because everyone has their own limit of what can be endured until the question arises to defend the most important thing he/she has, especially will or freedom of choice, a “all these people believe that one of their sons will change everything” (Towfik 2011:74).

Instead, the first ordinary person who provokes Montag to find something new, and becomes a source of new thoughts, is a seventeen-year-old girl Clarisse McClellan: “He opened his mouth and it was Clarisse McClellan saying, ‘Didn’t firemen *prevent* fires rather than stoke them up and get them going?’” (Bradbury 2012:31). People who are able to resist the regimes are a minority, but they become rays of hope for the best. When some worlds collide with others, the struggle becomes fiercer: “The police went first and adhesive-taped the victim’s mouth and bandaged him off into their glittering beetle cars, so when you arrived you found an empty house” (Towfik 2011:34). An ordinary person may cause the

destruction of the world as well as become the impetus for the emergence of something new on the wreckage of the world.

4. Forthcoming collision of the worlds: We are different but the same

Dystopian and utopian worlds usually drift together, because people, regardless of conditions, place of residence and social divide, remain similar to each other: “It’s weird that the Others are interested in the same movies on their cheap televisions but for different reasons. Here, our love of violence is caused by boredom. Their love of violence is caused by poverty and repressed hatred” (Towfik 2011:27). The only thing that distinguishes them is the reasons that provoke certain actions and consequences.

Mass media play a significant role in society: “We are more and more ‘wired’ to our interfaces. We react to simulations – to the television news rather than the world, to a computer program rather than social interaction, to email rather than vocal communication” (Murphie and Potts 2003:16), and watching television is not our conscious choice but filter bubbles that lull critical thinking, and make it impossible to go out beyond the designated frames, since it is difficult “to break out of the force of the filters” (Holone 2016:299): “The truth is that we have our own special television that only shows us what we want to watch” (Towfik 2011:27). Beatty’s words echo the above-mentioned: “If you don’t want a man unhappy politically, don’t give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one” (Bradbury 2012:58). But when the truth is revealed, everything artificial disappears and the understanding that you wear happiness like a mask comes (Bradbury 2012:9).

In some places, different worlds are getting closer than one can imagine, but the reason is quite prosaic: “So the men of Utopia never give up sex... But the older ones only get their opportunity with the Others, unlike the young guys” (Towfik 2011:31). What makes the Others play the same game? The answer is transparent: “Class has its attractions” (Towfik 2011:32). On the one hand, the sordid intensity, and on the other, the real feelings force fate and life to intertwine: “She was the first person in a good many years I’ve really liked. She was the first person I can remember who looked straight at me as if I counted” (Bradbury 2012:68). The uniting of dystopian and utopian worlds occurs on the physical level, sometimes through tunnels: “From the beginning there were secret tunnels by which we could enter Utopia to steal what we wanted” (Towfik 2011:111).

The inability to achieve certain life benefits and the ability to adapt to circumstances gives birth to two classes of people: one of them considers themselves the world’s masters and others obey the first, but “The mind drinks less and less” (Bradbury 2012:54). Between these classes, there is a layer of those people who are aware of the causal relationship, and therefore seek change: “You stole the past, the present and the future from us, but you hate to let us live our lives” (Towfik 2011:64). They realise their helplessness, but protest, even if it is just “throwing stones”: “People began pelting the helicopter with stones” (Towfik 2011:64). Others try to change society by inheriting the past from their descendants, guided by the postulate: “Everyone must leave something behind

when he dies” (Bradbury 2012:149). Their struggle is without bullets or weapons, but does not go unnoticed, because they are guided by lofty aims: “All we want to do is keep the knowledge we think we will need, intact and safe” (Bradbury 2012:145).

In fact, the boundaries between people are mostly artificial because: “The most important thing is that every moment makes me feel that the points of similarity between us are quite strong” (Towfik 2011:83). No matter what class a person belongs to, you can trace a certain identity in key points: “Here and there, we’re both in love with violence. Here and there, we both love drugs. Here and there, we both avidly watch movies about rape. Here and there, we both talk about religion all the time” (Towfik 2011:84).

Each generation has its chance to change the world, but the problems facing people in utopian worlds are on the moral plane. After all, the relationship between parents and children always worries writers, since “Heredity and environment are funny things” (Bradbury 2012:57). The world is becoming a trap for children deprived of parental attention: “my parents aren’t used to watching me. No one interferes in my life in any way. I have a right to take anything in any quantity and at any price. If I can’t, then they shouldn’t have had me” (Towfik 2011:12).

For totalitarian regimes, dissident families pose a great threat, and therefore all possible means are used to destroy them: “The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school” (Bradbury 2012:57). Parents do not feel close to their offspring, believing that “children are ruinous” (Bradbury 2012:92). Kids take a relaxed approach to life without thinking about the future. Having no pattern of behaviour, they lead an idle existence: “Suzanne ... Katie ... Maya ... Germinal ... But I prefer the last of them for some reason. It isn’t love, of course” (Towfik 2011:12), but preferably without inconvenient consequences: “A one-day operation ends it [pregnancy] quickly – it’s just that the girl is forced into a life without sex for two months” (Towfik 2011:12). Mother is perceived as a certain application you cannot get rid of: “In Utopia, your mum is still your mum. You can’t get rid of her” (Towfik 2011:18), and father is taken in the function of a money pit: “Sometimes I wish he [father] wouldn’t waste his time, and just send us cash from abroad” (Towfik 2011:19).

People share space but become strangers, and they are not important to each other: “He was in someone else’s house, like those other jokes people told of the gentleman, drunk, coming home late at night ... and getting up early and going to work and neither of them the wiser” (Bradbury 2012:39-40). True relatives are replaced by artificial ones, who shout from TV screens and are easy to coexist with because they can simply be switched off, but their obsessive voices will continue to be heard in your head: “And the uncles, the aunts, the cousins, the nieces, the nephews, that lived in those walls, the gibbering pack of tree-apes that said nothing, nothing, nothing and said it loud, loud, loud” (Bradbury 2012:41).

5. Consolidation of a society: Friend-or-foe

As a rule, soldiers who have vowed to protect their people defend totalitarian worlds, but perforce they are on the other side of the barricade. The cohesion of forces is guided by a single rule that can be seen as a justification for any cruelty to the masses: “our civilization is so vast that we can’t have our minorities upset and stirred” (Bradbury 2012:56). In *Utopia*, “these guards were retired Marines” (Towfik 2011:2), “who shot first and asked questions later” (Towfik 2011:116), and in *Fahrenheit 451*, they are frightening firefighters: “So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean. But you’re just a man, after all...” (Bradbury 2012:5). The idea is that ordinary citizens are not able to express their thoughts because “Those people outside the fences are nothing but sheep” (Towfik 2011:24), and the government knows better how ordinary citizens have to live: “Any man’s insane who thinks he can fool the Government and us” (Bradbury 2012:31). It is only necessary to define the border beyond which people are the Others and the actions of those in power “nothing but a show, to let the sheep know who the boss is” (Towfik 2011:23). Sociocultural distance in the dichotomy of a *friend-foe* as a component of the existing frontier allows for killing easily those who are perceived as the Others: “a Marine sitting by helicopter’s open door. He had placed the machine gun between his thighs and began firing bullets indiscriminately at the angry crowd” (Towfik 2011:64-65). It is important to avoid thinking that the Others deserve to exist and to feel. They are merely soulless lights that can be ruthlessly extinguished: “People were more often – he searched for a simile, found one in his work-torches, blazing away until they whiffed out” (Bradbury 2012:8).

Governments exist to defend elite interests, and may forget about the Others: “There was no longer a government, or no longer a government that cared about us” (Towfik 2011:38). The need for control of the population to resist the riots leads to the strengthening of the totalitarian regime: “All of those chemical balances and percentages on all of us here in the house are recorded in the master file downstairs” (Bradbury 2012:24).

Sometimes wars are fought openly, and the goal is noble but during the military action more and more: “We started the war to topple the tyrant, control the oil, and transform that wealthy country into fragments” (Towfik 2011:23).

If something goes wrong in utopia, dystopia appears and turns the lives of citizens into nightmares. Utopian worlds facing dystopian ones are becoming more threatening because the world where “You sleep, you take drugs, you eat until food makes you sick, you vomit until you can recover the enjoyment of eating, you have sex” (Towfik 2011:13), deprives even the slightest level of empathy. It is easy now to take up arms and without any remorse open fire on *living targets* because they are not your world’s inhabitants: “I wrenched the machine gun from the hands of a Marine standing beside me, and aimed it at the mass of humanity advancing on the horizon” (Towfik 2011:124). Young people, living in an ideal artificial world, become witnesses of the Others’ depopulation: “The machine guns burst into life ... this man looked up and it seemed as if he wanted to say something, then he fell to the ground, his face in the sand” (Towfik

2011:8-9). The utopian community makes an attempt to be separated from the Others that creates the illusion of security, but instead, security turns into imprisonment: “Utopia, the isolated colony that the rich created on the North Coast to protect themselves from the sea of angry poverty outside, and that now fences in everything they might want” (Towfik 2011:14). Unable to resist the regimes, people begin to play by the imposed rules, clearly following these: “The fugitive cannot escape if everyone in the next minute looks from his house” (Bradbury 2012:132).

It is easy to keep people in subjection when a threatening picture of an external enemy is formed: “In the past, my people were obsessed by the notion of having to flee to the airport if the Others on the outside revolted – the trip to the airport would be difficult, terrifying and dangerous” (Towfik 2011:15). It is always emphasised that those who live on the other side are different, and therefore their lives are worth nothing, they are beneath notice; “*We are one family ... blah, blah. We’re not like the Others... blah, blah*” (Towfik 2011:16). A crime committed against the system is interpreted as a crime against society: “The search is over, Montag is dead; a crime against society has been avenged” (Bradbury 2012:142).

Another way to restrain those who do not want to assimilate is to make them and the community understand the inferiority of these ‘mutineers’. When Clarisse McClellan says: “I’ve got to go to see my psychiatrist now. They *make* me go” (Bradbury 2012:20), Montag comments: “I’m inclined to believe you need the psychiatrist” (Bradbury 2012:20). The Others cause anxiety and threats to one’s own created world, but despite everything, this world is understandable and comfortable for anyone accustomed to living in such conditions because even “If the Government is inefficient, top-heavy, and tax-mad, better it be all those than that people worry over it” (Bradbury 2012:58).

6. Escape from reality: Searching for life’s purpose and meaning

People live in an arranged world with established laws and rules: “Family court brings prominent people in Utopia together, because this community has carved out its own separate laws and courts” (Towfik 2011:16) but they always try to cross the utopian boundaries, realising that the world is bigger than the one arranged for them. Escaping some people from losses and grief, those who “worn out by running... by hunger... by desperation” (Towfik 2011:8), and desire of the Others to understand “What would a few more moments of living with the Others give you?” (Towfik 2011:8) causes colliding dystopian and utopian worlds. The worlds collide at a time when the desire of the utopian inhabitants for knowing something new comes to mind, and only one question arises: “What can you do in this artificial paradise?” (Towfik 2011:13). There is an awareness that the well-being should remain unchanged but everything new and incomprehensible is rejected: “Guy’s surprise tonight is to read you one sample to show how mixed-up things were, so none of us will ever have to bother our little old heads about that junk again” (Bradbury 2012:95). Everyone takes their own way: “I decided to try hunting for myself” (Towfik 2011:13). After all, the familiar and

experienced world becomes too narrow for those who search for something new: “There’s nothing new to stimulate your curiosity or your enthusiasm in Utopia. Nothing changes. Sometimes it seems to me that we are prisoners, and the people outside are the free ones” (Towfik 2011:14).

Not only intimidation but also “easily available” drugs help to keep people in subjection and though “they [people] lose their excitement” using drugs (Towfik 2011:12), availability leaves no choice. Drugs often help the characters to escape from themselves, to plunge into another world, to give colour to their lives: “I’ve tried all kinds of drugs, even the new phlogistine imported from Denmark, which smells like lemon” (Towfik 2011:11). Drugs become addictive: “You come back to your senses hours later, only to realise you need more” (Towfik 2011:11). Addiction to medication causes the state when to plunge into the kingdom of Morpheus without pills becomes a luxury. The only way to be dropped into a troubled sleep is to dream without dreams: “‘I don’t know anything any more,’ he said, and let a sleep-lozenge dissolve on his tongue” (Bradbury 2012:15). The demand for a larger dose turns people into animals that need “a ton of hashish to feel temporary happiness” (Towfik 2011:43). Addiction forces you to find new ways to enjoy: “I had started experimenting with marijuana – no big deal – and I’ve tried ecstasy and LSD” (Towfik 2011:11). As a result, new drugs appear and their availability leads to excessive uncontrolled consumption: “Phlogistine – the lord of drugs... In Utopia, rivers of phlogistine flowed. They ate and drank it. They sweated it. Women had phlogistine periods and men urinated it” (Towfik 2011:34). Worlds intersect while speaking about addiction, since buying drugs or alcohol does not become the problem even in a dystopian world: “selling alcohol in the street was unimaginable twenty years ago, but morals are corroded by poverty just as metal is by dripping water” (Towfik 2011:34).

The struggle in such societies becomes impossible a priori, after all, “If a revolution ever happened, it wouldn’t be for equality, but to answer the demands of those who had been deprived of their natural right to phlogistine” (Towfik 2011:34). Considering Towfik’s *Utopia* as a kind of critical dystopia, some researchers claim that the novel’s utopian potential resides in open-endedness within the paradigms of postmodernity (Resheq and Majdoubeh 2019:189).

To create a different reality, it is enough to drag the media to the post-truth realm, which will cover events from the ‘right’ perspective: “The truth is that we have our own special television that only shows us what we want to watch” (Towfik 2011:27). Television kills the brains of people who become unable to produce ideas and thoughts, but those who do not succumb to its influence are considered unique: “‘I rarely watch the ‘parlour walls’ or go to races or Fun Parks. So I’ve lots of time for crazy thoughts, I guess’” (Bradbury 2012:7).

7. Conclusion

In the literary discourse, dystopian motives flourish against the utopian background of imaginary well-being that is the sign of radical change in the world society, wherein opposite worlds usually face, thus demonstrating human

confusion and inability to find common ground in a changing world. Two symptomatic texts, Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* and Towfik's *Utopia*, published fifty years apart, most particularly express these changes in the artistic dimension. The authors in their own ways 'warn' of the future, anticipating a serious spiritual crisis of Western civilisation, and the impoverishment of certain stratum of the Arab population, leading to serious social problems.

Utopia presents a rather unusual for Arab culture fusion of Eastern and Western motives. Being a postmodern novel in terms of structure and literary techniques, it focuses on the sharp social satire of the Western European orientation. Towfik shows the gap between the mighty rich, who have walled themselves into the elite enclosed splendour on a small stretch of Egypt's coast, and the masses sunk into a hyper-violent and bestial state of misery and poverty. *Fahrenheit 451*, which inspired the author of *Utopia*, raises the question of the information society when books that make you think are outlawed because a society that is unable to think is easily ruled. The very creation of another reality from utopian/dystopian perspectives appears in both novels as a means by which human consciousness is transformed, traditional ties in society are broken, and a completely different paradigm of existence is promoted.

The character of the literary genre of utopia/dystopia, the discourse of which has a uniquely created chronotope, and aims at clarifying the correlation of the components within the triad of a *person – civilisation – society*, is realised in a balance between society and its moral content to be depicted through colliding utopian and dystopian worlds in a society of the social divide. The genre paradigm of the selected novels is expressed in this process, reflecting the most pressing social problems facing humanity. Attempts by writers to 'warn' society about the possible consequences is one of the important tasks of such literature in both Western and Eastern cultures. In a changing world in times of global crisis, awareness of a person's place frightens and at the same time inspires the creation of new perspectives in understanding the modes of existence of human beings in light of utopian/dystopian challenges.

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