

**Knocking at the Door of Hell: Utopian Dialogism in Hama
Tuma's "The Case of the Illiterate Saboteur"**

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Abstract

In the process of coming to grips with their national identity, post-independent African countries have experienced the traumatic repercussions of a series of civil wars, oppressive regimes and dreadful corruption. The shift from colonialism to independence has paradoxically proved to be distressing to the various African peoples, which continue to suffer from totalitarian systems of government. Such political upheaval could not go unnoticed by African writers, who attempt to record the horrific macabre image of successive corrupt regimes.

In the short story "The Illiterate Saboteur" from the collection entitled *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor* (1993), Hama Tuma depicts the morbid scene of an oppressive political regime and directs sharp criticism towards the political challenges of such a ruthless system. The suggested paper will principally examine the selected text at the intersection of utopian/dystopian fiction, while drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque. The latter unfolds the adopted narrative strategies to interpolate and subvert the harrowing conditions and atrocities suffered by helpless subjects at the hands of their despotic ruler. The grotesque and gruesome realm evidently reflects a Kafkaesque streak, whereby manifestations of tyranny and injustice are dominant, and oppressor and oppressed are inevitably entangled in a nightmarish conflict, reminiscent of an Orwellian dystopia.

Keywords: Africa; Mikhail Bakhtin; carnivalesque; counter-discourse; dialogism; discourse; dystopia; monologism; Hama Tuma; utopia.

Most African countries roughly obtained their independence from their former Western European colonizers during the fifties and sixties of the twentieth-century. At that point, a surge of nationalism swept across the Dark Continent as African peoples gained their independence and looked forward to a better future. However, being spared the devastation of colonialism, they soon found themselves suffering from dictatorships, civil wars and totalitarian regimes. In these budding African nation-states, the violation of basic human rights looms large, where chaos, corruption, torture and terror are dominant.

Such continent-wide oppression could not go unnoticed and rightly inspired African writers to record the tyranny of their respective oppressive regimes in dystopian works of fiction. Ethiopian writer Hama Tuma’s *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor and Other Stories* (1993) is one such case. Hama Tuma (1949 -) is an Ethiopian poet, and a short story writer, who writes in both Amharic and English. He has been mainly living in exile as he has been considered a persona non grata by several consecutive Ethiopian regimes. Tuma’s fictional world does not strictly conform to the dystopian genre, in the sense that his work does not necessarily present a grim futuristic vision, but more of a scathing critique of the state’s so-called “socialist” project, one that develops into political oppression, corruption, and totalitarianism.

This paper examines “The Case of the Illiterate Saboteur”, a representative story from Tuma’s collection, which embodies a gruesome dystopian state of affairs. This is initially introduced by a principal anonymous narrator who acts as a witness to various legal cases, the culprit of which is a different Ethiopian citizen each time. The entire legal situation is subject to the narrator’s gaze, as he notes: “where I could watch the lawyers, the judge and the accused” (8). Thus, the paper explores the court of justice, together with its judiciary body, as an expression of an Ethiopian hegemonic ideology, which carries a unilateral centralized discourse. From within the latter, emerges a carnivalesque rhetoric, which establishes a dialogue with its counterpart. It creates a counter-discursive “utopian space”, which calls for an examination of the selected text in the light of the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival, so as to shed light on the embedded “utopian” aspect of this short story.

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In a dystopian world, human beings are depicted as dehumanized “creatures”. They are mere pawns in a newly emerging ruthless political system. In the present context, a dominant political ideology is instilled in the helpless Ethiopian subjects, whose unintended dissent is eventually aborted and ruthlessly penalized. In his introduction to the collection of stories, the renowned Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, observes that there is a gap between Ethiopia, which exists in the African collective consciousness, that is, “the land of myths” and “biblical times,” on one hand, and present-day Ethiopia, which suffers from regional strife, successive dictatorships and the local struggle for power (ix). In fact, in the “Author’s Note”, Tuma points out that “Ethiopian reality is stranger (and more horrible) than fiction” (vii).

Tuma’s collection of short stories depicts a socialist despotic regime, which draws on the country’s harrowing experience at the hands of Mengistu Haile Mariam, who ruled for fourteen hideous years (1977 – 1991). When he ascended to power, he ordered the execution of many aristocrats and officials, who were loyal to the overthrown royal regime. He is also well known for the “Red Terror Campaign”, involving large-scale bloodshed, which aimed at eliminating his opponents. In the stories’ fictional context, Ethiopia takes on mythical proportions, pertaining to absolute givens, which defy any form of potential dissent. Through his short narratives, Tuma attempts to dismantle the regime’s terrorizing machinations towards its subjects, who are delineated as helpless insignificant beings bearing the brunt of rigorous oppression. The writer conjures up a world in which the human predicament is very much reminiscent of Franz Kafka’s renowned classical novel *The Trial* (1925). The latter portrays the protagonist, Joseph K., as haunted by members of the jury and utterly ignorant of the reason for his arrest. In addition to his subsequent sense of alienation, he is entangled in a nightmare, the sole escape from which is to face the bitter reality that he is “like a dog,” as expressed in his final words, before he dies. Tuma’s story lends itself to comparison with Kafka’s novel, which is equally classified as a work of dystopian fiction. In both texts, their respective protagonists are totally ignorant of their conviction and suffer from a great sense of alienation. Above all, both writers point their accusing fingers at an emerging totalitarian regime, whereby the helpless subjects are inevitably dehumanized and whereby their personal freedom is at stake. In fact, their dehumanization evokes an existentialist perspective, which the French thinker, Jean-Paul Sartre, addresses in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Drawing on

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Hegel, he points out that one cannot be aware of one concept, unless one is aware of its opposite. Hence, he establishes an ambivalent relationship between freedom and nothingness, whereby he argues that reflecting on one's freedom also presupposes conjuring up "nothingness" (37). In this light, and in her discussion of Sartre, Meghan Vicks notes that "man's essential freedom," ironically leads him "to consider and perceive nothingness" (Vicks 25).

It is principally argued that "the word 'utopia' means no place or nowhere", but "has come to refer to a non-existent good place" (Sargent 21). On the other hand, dystopia is basically what is unanimously viewed as a "bad" "no-place" (Clayes and Sargent 1). Despite the fact that a dystopia is an imaginative and imaginary negative "no-place", it is a projection of the writer's apprehension of his present world and his speculation about the corrupt dire condition into which it could possibly develop in the future. Both utopia and dystopia are viewed in association with each other. Currently, and since the turn of the twentieth century, there has been a shift from "utopian optimism to dystopian skepticism" (Booker, *The Dystopian Impulse* 9). One can venture to note that utopia and dystopia constitute the two extremes of a social spectrum: "One might, in fact, see dystopian and utopian visions not as fundamentally opposed but as very much part of the same project" (15). It is deduced that "utopia and dystopia are no longer viewed as two clearly distinct, separate, and opposing genres" (Valentine 10).

Lyman Tower Sargent broadly distinguishes between two types of utopia. One manifests the horn of plenty and a hedonistic kind of existence, as well as "bodily pleasure" (28). It illustrates "the 'world turned upside down'", which places it on the same par as the "tradition" of various types of festivities, among which is the "early versions of Carnival" (30). Such festive manifestations "place the poor and oppressed in positions of power and their supposed superiors under them for a day or a week" (30). The other type is mainly concerned with "social organization". The former is identified as "'the utopia of escape' and 'the body utopia'" (30). The "social organization", however, is an ideal world, which runs amok; hence, developing into a dystopia.

Within such a context, Tom Moylan, a dystopian critic, observes that, in a dystopian world, "the text usually begins directly in the bad new world" (148). As a matter of fact, "it is precisely that capacity for narrative that creates the possibility for social critique and utopian anticipation in the dystopian text"

(147). In addition, Raffaella Baccolini notes: “the focus is frequently on a character who questions” the dystopian social framework (qtd. in Moylan 148). She further observes “that the text is ‘built around the construction of a narrative [of the hegemonic order] and a counter-narrative [of resistance]’” (qtd. in Moylan 148). What is significant is the language put to use, which reflects and marks the encounter between the oppressor and the oppressed, or a discourse and a counter-discourse. In addition, it is worthy of note that “discursive power, exercised in the reproduction of meaning and the interpellation of subjects, is a parallel and necessary force” (Moylan 148-149). In fact, “the official, hegemonic order of most dystopias ... rests, as Antonio Gramsci observes, on both coercion and consensus” (Moylan 148).

Through his thorough and extensive examination of the concept of the carnival, its major proponent, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975), addresses the idea of utopia and its counterpart. He argues that the carnival involves humour, as laughter is its distinguishing feature (Hawthorne 37). It is a “form of popular counter-culture” (Hawthorne 37), which initially began in medieval Europe. People were allowed to free themselves from daily social constraints by holding performances, in which they mocked authority, particularly the state and the church. Despite the brevity of the celebration, the carnival was deemed a subversive act and “contained a utopian urge”, as it “displaced, even inverted, the normal social hierarchies” (During 382).

Bakhtin’s view of human existence is based on an example of representation known as “grotesque realism”, while principally relying on “the central image ... of the grotesque body” (Morris 195). This image comprises, among other manifestations, “exaggerated bodily protuberances,..., the frequent physical abuse in the form of beatings and comic debasements” (195). Bakhtin goes on to point out that the setup of the carnival, “a ritual based on laughter”, created a rift with “the serious official, ...and political cult forms and ceremonials” (Bakhtin 197). This, in turn, established a dual aspect, that is, “a second world and a second life outside officialdom, ...” (Bakhtin 197). In fact, in a footnote, Bakhtin observes that “laughter is no longer ambivalent; it has given way to irony and sarcasm” (Bakhtin 195). Granting significant attention to the body, he addresses what he calls “the material bodily principle, that is, images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life” (Bakhtin 204). Moreover, he argues that the production of laughter is generated

by the fact that “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation” (205). In other words, it is a process of “lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (205).

It is worth noting, however, that, in the present time, carnival, as a festive occasion, no longer exists, but has been metaphorically adopted as a literary form, a narrative structure, as it were, which still preserves its subversive nature. It is necessary to note, however, that, with the advent of the twenty-first century, the digital platforms have granted their users (“netizens”) new territory to tread (Kan 32 - 34), whereby their production of memes on social media can be possibly deemed a contemporary form of carnival discourse (59 - 60). More significantly, the carnival discourse becomes effective by means of a mocking tone, as the narrative usually has a double function. It is both an “interacting and contesting discourse[s]” (Brooker 73). In fact, “Because of their obvious sensuous character and their strong element of play, carnival images closely resemble certain artistic forms, namely the spectacle” (Bakhtin 197). Bakhtin also argues that “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (198). This idea is further endorsed by Julia Kristeva, who observes: “The scene of the carnival, where there is no stage, no ‘theatre’, is thus both stage and life, game and dream, discourse and spectacle” (Kristeva 49). Carnival “breaks through the laws of a language ... and, at the same time, is a social and political protest” (Kristeva 36). In her book, *Narratives of Nothing in 20th-Century Literature* (2015), Meghan Vicks significantly notes vis-à-vis the language of carnival that

carnavalesque language is language cut loose from the rigidity of dominant modes of discourse, ..., and thus allowed to play freely. Because it has been released from official hierarchies and controlling/limiting universal truths, the world of carnival, as well as carnivalesque language, is endlessly at play: ceaselessly inverted and inverting, collapsing oppositions, instigated and nurtured by a nothing – the non-existence of structure and rule. (51)

Thus, the depicted world in Tuma’s story paradoxically oscillates between an allegedly utopian “social organization”, yet hegemonic, hence, dystopian, and the play of a “utopian” counter-discourse. This, in turn, calls for

an examination of the two interacting forces from within the text, namely the centripetal and centrifugal forces, or centralization versus heteroglossia, respectively. In his *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975), Bakhtin notes that he approaches language “as ideologically saturated, language as a world view” (*The Bakhtin Reader* 74). In this light, he indicates centralization, which is “a unitary language”, that “gives expression to forces working toward concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization” (74-5). Such “centripetal forces of the life of language” (75), as he calls it, operate hand in hand with centrifugal forces, or, heteroglossia: “Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work, alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (75). In fact, “The process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance” (75). This validates Hegel’s dialectic, stated above, and which argues that one concept presupposes an opposite “other”.

The stories in the collection bear the respective titles of “The Case of the Illiterate Saboteur,” “The Case of the Valiant Torturer,” “The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor”, “The Case of the Criminal Thought”, “The Case of the Queue-Breaker”, “The Case of the Professor of Insanity”, and so on. The titles of the stories already manifest a dialogical instance, as the language carries two clashing collocations or incongruous voices, where the noun and the adjective appear to be incompatible and strange, which is equally valid for the rest of the stories in the volume.

The depicted world of Hama Tuma’s stories illustrates an Ethiopian regime, which emerges in the wake of a revolution, and establishes a sanctified national program, to which each and everyone is expected to bow. In the name of the Revolution, and by fueling people’s sense of national identity, the ruler, to whom the narrator refers as “the Great chairman”, and his retinue, implement miscellaneous practices of condemning their subjects and labelling them with various accusations. Thus, the state’s discourse is replete with such recurrent words as “Red Terror,” “anarchists,” “fascists,” “guerillas,” “counter-revolutionary”, and “enemy of the people,” among many others.

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Initially, the principal narrator acts as a mediator between the readers/audience and the characters/performers during the trial. He opens the curtains to a spectacle, where each story is presented as a performance, in which the judge, the prosecutor and the defendant's lawyer are common to all the stories. They are depicted as the principal actors in a performance and are raised on a platform to be mocked. The narrator elaborately portrays the "raised platform", which stages the judge, who is faced by the prosecutor and the defense lawyer; while "below the judge", there is a "witness stand" ("The Case of the Illiterate Saboteur" 7). The narrator begins each story by introducing the details of the legal case, which unfolds in the form of a futile tirade between accuser and accused. There is an apparent reluctance to allow people to have access to these trials, an act which they nevertheless resist. The narrator notes at the end of the prologue: "And your own narrator being temporarily unengaged (meaning unemployed), had nothing better to do than to go to the court in his own area to witness this historic event." (6) The so-called "historic event" is actually a staged event, as the various trials unfold as a source of entertainment. The narrator adds: "I was one of the first in line at the door. I managed to get a chair well in front where I could watch the lawyers, the judge and the accused more closely" (8). The tables are turned, whereby the figures of authority are "performing on stage" and become subject to the audience's sharp scrutiny. The set-up of the legal case and the setting of the court is subverted as it is depicted as a mere entertaining show in a popular marketplace or festive occasion. Ironically, the entertaining place, which is, here, a closed space, in fact a utopian "nowhere"/"no place" becomes part and parcel of the gruesome context, whereby the utopian interpolates the dystopian world.

More significantly, the narrator/mediator is a theatrical fool/clown, who "unmasks" the lies of the totalitarian regime in question (Valentine 27). The narrator notes that "the space left for the court audience was small" (7). Nevertheless, every morning, there is a scramble for seats to watch the trial: "The situation was later to lead to a new source of corruption – bribing the court guard to reserve a chair for you" (7). The trial is, thus, transformed into a chaotic circus-like performing context, which mainly functions as a means of entertainment. In each case, a citizen is accused of having violated antiquated laws, which are mere hurdles set by the regime to maintain its subjects in constant subjugation.

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In the prologue, and later in the stories themselves, the narrator is a constituent element of the audience and acts as their mouthpiece, as well as a mouthpiece for the convict. In a sarcastic and predominantly cynical tone, he lays the basis for the "spectacle." As such, the voice of authority is pitted against the voice of the narrator. More significantly, the apparent seriousness of the cases being examined by the judge are at one and the same time subverted by the narrator, who pokes fun at the judiciary body.

The narrator introduces the ruler as the leader of "our All-Knowing Party" (6). Above the judge's chair, a large photograph of the Great Chairman hangs and below the photograph, there are two powerful statements: "Revolutionary Justice is Swift and Firm!" and "No damage to the Revolution is slight and no punishment against offenders can be too severe!" (9). Such terrifying slogans are put into question by the narrator, whereby the seriousness and firmness of the Chairman's slogans are challenged. The narrator introduces him by beginning: "Slogans and portraits you ask? What regime could call itself Socialist without an abundance of these?" (8) The latter implies that such a totalitarian regime is established with all its coercive paraphernalia. The series of rhetorical questions corroborate the theatrical set-up and highlight the rapport between the audience and the narrator/soliloquist. Above all, the questions embody the centrifugal force of dialogism, which is an "other" voice, defying the monologic discourse of authority. In fact, dialogism provides the subordinated with an outlet to dismantle authority (Brooker 73). The interpolating rhetorical questions, matter-of-factly raised by the narrator, highlight the hypocrisy of the regime and foreground its oppressive malpractices.

Initially, the discrepancy between the legal case, the accusations, the verdict and the so-called "committed crime" are subject to the narrator's ridicule, who is the fool of the "play". This is further elaborated by Tuma's carnival rhetoric, which establishes a contrast between the figure of authority and the convict of each case. While the former is ostensibly depicted in prestige and veneration, the accused, on the other hand, is portrayed as a totally annihilated "creature", deliberately decimated by monolithic laws. In fact, "This kind of scapegoating frequently occurs in dystopian fiction, whose governments typically enforce their intolerance of difference through persecution of specified marginal groups" (Booker 11). The contrast is so much exaggerated that it

blows each and every legal case out of proportion and, consequently, defeats the purpose of the conviction. There is constant use of grand words, which are capitalized, to refer to the absence of their content. The regime's monologic discourse reveals a centripetal force, which only acknowledges the power and authority of state institutions and their representatives. Accordingly, the terms which refer to them are capitalized so as to indicate unquestionable absolute givens that foreground the monologic discourse. For instance, the assigned judge is addressed by one of the defendants as "Honourable Judge of Our Fate" (29). Nevertheless, while the judge acquires divine attributes, the so-called "criminal", stands in a "Cage", with a capital "c", which foregrounds his sense of dehumanization. In fact, the language grants the helpless culprit additional weight and, in turn, solicits the reader/audience's sympathy.

The two conflicting discourses rely, on one hand, on an institutional body of state officers (the judge, the prosecutor, the lawyer), who convey a monologic centralized discourse. On the other hand, the fool/narrator juggles with the rigidity of the language and generates a centrifugal discursive force, that partially and indirectly supports the accused/victim. In fact, the narrator is a soliloquist, who appears to be opening the curtain to a spectacle. For example, this is how he portrays the judge:

If you want a speedy trial get yourself a no-nonsense (...) judge. The judge ... was none other than Major Aytenfisu Muchie. The major, a pot-bellied, baby-faced man in his mid-forties, had a Charlie Chaplin-type moustache which somehow brought to mind not the Little Tramp but the cruel man who authored 'Mein Kampf'. ("The Case of the Illiterate Saboteur" 7)

Tuma's physical depiction of the judge focuses on his large frame, which dismantles the supposedly awe-inspiring authoritative position he occupies: "a pot-bellied, baby-faced man", "a Charlie Chaplin-type moustache" and "the cruel man who authored 'Mein Kampf'" (7). In all these examples, there is a contrast between the physical size of the man and the figures to whom the judge is compared. Charlie Chaplin was a famous comedian, who directed his criticism towards the hegemony of an emerging capitalist world. This figure is, then, deliberately juxtaposed to the famous Hitlerian inhumanity.

Similarly, the defense lawyers are perceived by the narrator in the following manner: "the lawyers come with their big bags inside which, people say, you find few documents but many sandwiches" (8). This also applies to the prosecutor, who is equally depicted in a comic light. We are told, he "had never gone to law school though he had been a lawyer for some fifteen years" (9). The portrayal of contrasts, as well as exaggeration, is further elaborated:

The prosecutor, ..., was a short, plump man wearing glasses over his beady eyes. He was dressed in a flashy three-piece woollen suit, a red-blue-green tie which called to mind the curtains of the plush whorehouses frequently visited by African diplomats in our city. Two gold rings on his left hand, made-in-Italy platform shoes: in short, a short man trying to appear tall and to exude style and wealth. If you ask me, a stupid dwarf who flaunts his ill-gotten money (...), (...) (9)

The language carries various discrepancies, as the combination of attributes chosen by the narrator subverts the judge and the prosecutor's alleged prestigious position and power. The supposedly venerated prosecutor assumes an appearance and adopts an attire, which the narrator attributes to "the curtains of the plush whorehouses". Thus, the narrator subverts the assumed authority of the prosecutor by comparing him to an entity which stands in stark contrast to his apparent prestige. Hence, the carnival counter-discourse takes on the form of constant exaggeration of comparisons, which eventually dismantle the centripetal voice of authority. Over and above, the clown/narrator's all-encompassing mocking tone becomes the voice of dissent, which, at one and the same time, interacts and contends with the official voice, so as to eventually dismantle the power of authority.

Furthermore, the depictions of the characters' bodies rely on the carnivalesque (a caricature style), which manifests contrasting physical dimensions between the figures of authority and the culprit; while authority appears in large amplified forms, the culprit, on the other hand, is depicted in minimal size, so that he appears as a persecuted victim, rather than an actual convict or criminal. Initially, in the first legal case, which became known in the official documents as "The Case of the Illiterate Saboteur", the "defendant did no more than urinate unknowingly in a public place" (10). The defendant is accused of having urinated against the wall of a government building. Since he is illiterate, he was unable to read the sign which identifies it as a state property;

and so, he is accused of being a saboteur of public property. The prosecutor continues to point the finger of accusation at the defendant by addressing his "crime", while there is a sign that forbids the act. To that, the prosecutor raises a rhetorical question: "Can we imagine a more anarchistic crime?" (11). As such, overwhelming authority, which appears to loom large throughout the stories, is juxtaposed with helpless individual subjects: "The People's Socialist State versus Yishak Nasser" (10). This is taken a step further, as any offence committed by the accused is an "attack on the image of Mother Africa" (10). In fact, the judiciary body's injustice and oppression is dismantled by the stark contrast between the amplification of the accusation and crime, on one hand, and the culprit's total ignorance. This leads the exaggerated oppressive state discourse to fall on deaf ears and fails to achieve its condemning aim.

The discrepancy between the amount of power invested in the oppressive state, and the almost nullified presence of the accused subject, is highlighted and generates the carnival counter-discourse. In fact, Tuma relies on the use of defamiliarization, which consists of "metaphors and other figures of rhetoric to produce a semantic shift" (Macey 284). This, in turn, "makes the habitual appear strangely unfamiliar" (284). The technique of defamiliarization or *ostranenie* was proposed by the Russian formalist, Viktor Shklovsky, who suggests that "the goal of all imagery – is transferring an object from its usual sphere of experience to a new one, a kind of semantic change" (93). He also argues: "The goal of an image is not to bring its meaning closer to our understanding, but to create a special way of experiencing an object, to make one not "recognize" but "see" it" (88). In light of the concept of defamiliarization, one can perceive the function of dialogism in the story: "The door through which the accused comes into the court leads directly into the Cage. Yes, I was saving this to the last – the dock is built like a cage of birds, bigger, of course, and made of iron bars. ... A policeman armed with an AK-47 rifle stands guard at the door" (8). Accordingly, the narrator conveys the scene of the culprit's incarceration in a manner which highlights its oddity. Furthermore, the use of the interpolating phrase, "Yes, I was saving this to the last" directs the audience, as well as the reader's attention, to the visual dimension of using an actual bird's cage for a prison. The vulnerability and utter helplessness of the accused is further intensified by the armed policeman, who is juxtaposed to the so-called culprit. The narrator's perception of the scene

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ensures the reader's sympathy for the convict, as it veers the reader's attention away from authority and dismantles its evocation of terror.

In addition, the door is a recurrent motif in "The Case of the Illiterate Saboteur," as it underscores the sense of entrapment afflicted upon all subjects. In fact, it highlights their subjugation altogether. The narrator, for instance, rushes to the door to secure himself a seat to watch the "show": "I was one of the first in line at the door" (8). Furthermore, "The judge comes next entering the court from a door behind his chair" (8). The accused is primarily treated as an animal, which has to be cloistered so as not to harm anyone: "The door through which the accused comes into the court leads directly into the Cage ...". Finally, "A policeman armed with an AK-47 rifle stands guard at the door" (8). Thus, the motif of the door emphasizes the closed space within the premises of which the trials take place. It sheds light on the sense of imprisonment suffered at the hands of this ruthless regime. One can venture to note that the culprit's Cage is a microcosm of another larger cage, in which all Ethiopian citizens live. The accused is cloistered in a cage within a cage so as to maximize his persecution altogether. Ironically, the narrator portrays the subjugation of all the subjects, who are all imprisoned within the framework of a hegemonic regime. Therefore, the bird cage becomes an objective correlative of the "other's" voice. It presents an instance of defamiliarization, as the culprit is not seen within the framework of a usual iron-barred cell, but an actual bird cage. The latter, therefore, causes a shift in perception, as it highlights the fact that the convict is deprived of his freedom. In fact, the state's ostensibly exaggerated power confronts nothingness. In his defense, Nasser's lawyer, unaware, argues: "But who has noticed poor Ato Yishak and his trickle of urine. Practically no one! He is a non-entity, harmless in all aspects" (17). The bird cage, therefore, embodies the dialogic dimension, which creates a "utopia" within the dystopian world. The door opens to and is closed on a "no place" where both the dystopian hegemonic ideology and the utopian discourse of the carnival are pitted against each other. Ironically, the government does not have a substantial legal case against Nasser. The narrator's description of the accused in the Cage strikes a contrast with the security measures and the seemingly endless list of accusations. This incompatibility between the two adversaries is particularly underlined in the statement addressed to the reader: "Yes, I was saving this to the last ...". The disruptive voice of the narrator shifts the focus of attention to the accused, who is left to singly confront an overwhelming heavy-handed state

power. He, consequently, vouches for him and causes the reader to equally sympathize with him.

Furthermore, the exaggeration of the culprit's crime is reflected in the long list of allegedly violated laws for which he is condemned. This, in turn, adds to the pettiness of the whole case, as the culprit is illiterate and does not comprehend the accusations. The prosecutor enthusiastically condemns the defendant, using formal rhetoric, to futilely elaborate on the various crimes the accused has committed:

The accused is charged with violating a series of Articles of the Revised Revolutionary Penal Code. He has willfully violated Article 189 which forbids neglecting laws of socialist hygiene; Article 245 which makes it a crime to defile our glorious city; Article 764 which forbids attack of any sort on the image of Mother Africa; Article 79 which prohibits drinking alcohol during the day; Article 345 which makes it a crime to refuse consciously or unconsciously to be liberated from ignorance; and Article 622 which punishes those who do not confess their crimes'. (10)

The prosecutor also reminds him of the following:

His tenacity to cling to his despicable illiteracy is in itself a crime ... During the questioning a lot of electricity was wasted, the professional confession-miners had to spend so much time trying to dig out the truth, a police baton was broken by the defendant's body. In fact we could have added to the crime of refusing to confess, the Article on damaging state property. We refrained from doing so only after considering that all our bodies also belong to the State and there was some confusion as to whether the baton broke itself inadvertently or the body of the accused stiffened itself maliciously to damage the baton'. (14)

In the midst of all this "legal commotion," Nasser is a "nobody," who is unable to grasp the reason for the exaggerated precautions taken by the security forces against him. The exaggeration generates parody, which subverts the representation of authority and their power. The narrator creates a dialogic context, which comments on and dismantles the dominant monologic voice of authority. Furthermore, the poetics of futile physical and verbal amplification do not reflect any actual grandeur or importance on the part of authority, but indicate a mere void which, in turn, yields a sarcastic and humorous effect. It

equally produces a sense of estrangement, which is generated by the act of torture, whereby the culprit is to be penalised for breaking the “baton”, while, in fact, he bears the brunt of the torture inflicted upon his body.

Moreover, the ridicule, which is addressed towards authority, is generated by the discrepancy between the complicated language used in the accusations and, on the other hand, the addressee’s lack of receptivity, due to his illiteracy. The overwhelming tirade of accusations are simply incomprehensible to him, which emphasizes the futility of condemning him. Needless to say, the culprit is merely seen as a physical presence without a mind or soul of his own. During the defense, the lawyer outrightly states that the defendant “is a non-entity, harmless in all aspects” (17).

Thus, an instance of dialogism manifests itself in the existence of two different voices in the narrative. There is, on one hand, the voice of authority, which is illustrated by the rigid slogans and laws, referring to the state institutions and their adopted ideology as absolute givens. It is a centripetal force pointing towards centralization. On the other hand, the narrator’s sarcastic and cynical tone allows him to poke fun at the state’s rigid precepts. He is the culprit’s spokesperson, speaking in the face of such accusations, the list of laws, restrictions and penalties, which await the helpless civilian. The latter’s answer to his inquisition is mere negation; while the narrator sympathizes with him: “I felt sorry for this poor man in the Cage ...” (21). The emphasis on the man’s imprisonment, while assigning to him the attribute of “poor” becomes a different voice, which defies the centralized voice of authority.

Hama Tuma incorporates the discourse of the carnival within the dystopian narrative, which creates a break for leisure and recreation, while equally making of the hegemonic oppressive measures normal practices of everyday life. For instance, towards the end of the story, the verdict commits the accused to “fifteen years of corrective labor in a state farm during which [he] will also be taught to read and write” (21). The reaction of the audience to this unjust sentence is one of relief, as it is considered a relatively lenient type of punishment. At this point, the soliloquist addresses the reader or an imaginary audience beyond the framework of the stage and performance. His cynical tone directs its criticism at the malpractices of the state: “And we in the audience? Leave me out but let me tell you that they sighed in relief” (22). The cynical tone of his voice lies in what he does not say. In other words, together with the

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elimination of the culprit's illiteracy, he implies that the penalty could have gone beyond the fifteen-year sentence of corrective labor. As such, the ruthlessness of such a dystopian world is based on the great contrast between the pettiness of the committed crime and the inflicted punishment, with which it is unjustly incompatible.

Hama Tuma's narrative reveals a dialectic relationship between the two extremes of the utopian spectrum. One can venture to note that the court's enclosed space is in itself a "bad no-place", a larger cage, as it were, within the confines of which two opposite discursive languages unravel; while one insists on a univocal ideology, the opposite language confirms the subversion of the monologic dimension and celebrates dialogism. Thus, the carnivalesque allows the subjugated voice of the narrator, who talks on behalf of the victim, to create a utopian interpolating space, which in turn, temporarily dismantles the terrifying voice of authority. The soliloquist's mocking tone underlines the futility of the trials as they are set against helpless citizens, who are unable to comprehend the accusations addressed to them. The narrator discloses the limitations and proves the failure of the judiciary body. He places the figures of authority on a make-believe stage, which discloses their blind allegiance to coercive rule. On such a metaphorical stage, the figures of authority are perceived acting like puppets, merely parroting absurd laws and regulations. For want of a true equal, they are rendered as Quixotic figures, futilely contending with illusionary adversaries. On the other hand, the persecuted citizen's annihilated plight is represented by his image entering the "cage of birds". It is a cage-within-a-cage. At this specific moment, his "essential freedom" is definitely at stake and embodies an existentialist condition. Yet, he is temporarily spared the stifling impact of his conviction as the carnivalesque makes space for a brief utopian interlude, which intercepts an incumbent dystopian nightmare.

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**KNOCKING AT THE DOOR OF HELL: UTOPIAN DIALOGISM IN HAMA
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طرق أبواب جهنم: خطاب اليوتوبيا في قصة "قضية المُخَرَّب الأُمِّي" لهاما توما

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المستخلص

حصلت العديد من الدول الإفريقية على إستقلالها في منتصف القرن العشرين بعد فترة طويلة من الإستعمار، ولكن سرعان ما وقعت تلك الدول في براثن الحروب الأهلية والنظم الشمولية. ولفتت هذه الظاهرة إنتباه كثير من الكتاب الأفارقة الذين أرادوا توثيق هذا السياق بصورة إبداعية للتعبير عن إستيائهم مما آلت إليه أوطانهم بعد الإستقلال. ونتج عن ذلك النوع الأدبي الروائي المعروف بالديستوبيا والمعنى بتقديم صورة قائمة لنظام سلطوى قمعى.

تصور قصة " قضية المُخَرَّب الأُمِّي" للكاتب الإثيوبى هاما توما ضمن مجموعته القصصية بعنوان قضية الساحر الإشتراكي وقصص أخرى (١٩٩٣) عالماً مظلماً يشوبه الظلم والتسلط والفساد. وتقترح ورقة البحث تحليل النص القصصى في سياق أدب اليوتوبيا والديستوبيا ومن منظور مفهوم الكرنفال كما يقدمه المفكر والناقد الروسى ميخايل باختين. فمن خلال جماليات السرد يكشف النص عن تلاحم أصوات متعددة مع الصوت الأحادى للديستوبيا في محاولة دحض إفتراءات العالم المهيمن على بطل القصة، حيث أن ذلك الأخير يظهر وهو لا حول له ولا قوة. وتلقى ورقة البحث الضوء على جماليات المقاومة واخللة الخطاب المهيمن.

الكلمات المفتاحية: يوتوبيا، ديستوبيا، كارنفال، الخطاب، الخطاب المضاد