

# **Abedurrhman Munif "Sharq Al-Mutawast" and Arthur Koestler's "Darkness at Noon" Comparative Study**

Ahmed Naser Dheab Dr. Nayera El Miniawi  
Al Balqa Applied University

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Preliminary Notes**

Comparative Literature is considered to be one of the most useful literary studies, whose main concern is comparing two or more works. As the act of writing is humanitarian and humans share almost the same needs and desires it is possible to find out similarities and parallel points in literary texts. Regarding novels as one of the most interesting and effective types of literature, it is highly plausible to explore two thematically similar novels even though they belong to different languages, cultures or even religions.

One of the major themes that have kept writers preoccupied for a long time is the urgent need for freedom and the struggle for it. Thus the descriptive image of the struggle could be found in any literary work in many parts of the world. Meditating this fact leads us to choose two works which embody different sets and views in order to see and assess the extent of similarities between them.

Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940) and Abdurrahman Munif's *the East of the Mediterranean* (1977), are two novels that describe two prisoners' dilemmas in two political regions. This clearly drives us to the possibility of finding out some common points between the two novels whether in theme(s) or artistic technique.

In his *Saarq al Mutawasset East of the Mediterranean* as the title is written in Arabic, Munif expresses the struggle of a person who has been taken as a political prisoner; the author describes the image of the prison and the prisoners in an unnamed place somewhere in the east of the Mediterranean. The place is unidentified and it is left to the reader's intuition to decide and guess.

Already Koestler has talked about the same issue in the *Darkness at Noon* where there is a political prisoner and the types of suffering and humiliations he has been subjected to.

Depending on these common central themes, and the terms of imprisonment experienced by the two prisoners, the researcher feels encouraged to study the two novels from a comparative view point.

Arthur Koestler was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1905 in Budapest and died on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1983 in London. He was a Hungarian-British author and journalist. His education was in Austria. In 1931 he joined the Communist party of Germany and he resigned in 1938. In 1940 he published his novel *Darkness at noon* which gained him international fame.

Over the next 43 years from his residence in Great Britain, Koestler espoused many political causes and wrote novels, memoirs, biographies, and numerous essays. In 1968, he was awarded the prestigious Sonning Prize "for outstanding contribution to European culture" and, in 1972, he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire. In 1976, Koestler was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and, in 1979, with terminal leukemia. In 1983 he and his wife committed suicide at home in London (Wikipedia).

Abdurrahman Munif was born in Jordan in 1933 for a family of Saudi Arabian origin. His Saudi Citizenship was stripped out from him for political reasons. He studied law at Baghdad and Cairo universities and he got a PHD in oil economics at the University of Belgrade. During his oil industry career he served as director of crude oil marketing. In Baghdad he edited a monthly periodical, *al-Naft wa al-Tanmiyya*, Oil and Development. He later became a full-time writer and spent the rest of his life in Syria. He died on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2004 (al-bab).

The author of fifteen novels, his masterwork is *The cities of Salt* (1984) quintet that followed the evolution of the Arabian Peninsula as its traditional Bedouin culture is transformed by the oil boom. The novels create an entire history of a board region, evoking comparisons to William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. The quintet begins with *Al-tih* (1984, *cities of Salt*) in the desert oasis of Wadi al-Uyoun that is disrupted by the arrival of western oilmen in an image similar to that of the disrupted village of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. As Achebe described the effects on a traditional African village of the arrival of powerful missionaries, so Munif chronicles the economic, social, and psychological effects of the promise of immeasurable wealth drawn from the deserts of nomad and oasis communities. The quintet continues with *Al-ukhdud* (1985, *the trench*), *Taqasim al-layl wa-al-nahar* (1989, *Variations on Night and Day*), *Al-munbatt* (1989, *the Uprooted*), and *Badiyat al Zulumat* (1989, *the desert of Darkness*). Daniel Burt, in his novel 100, ranked the quintet as the 71<sup>st</sup> greatest novel of all time. The last novel in the series has not been translated into English (Wikipedia).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The problem in specific tries to investigate the similarities and parallel of themes in the two novels.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

- This study aims at discussing the central themes of two novels, *Sharq al Mutawasset* by Abdurrahman Munif, and *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler and to find any similarities between them.
- The two main characters are going to be the centre of the study, Rajab in Munif's novel and Rabushove in Koestler's novel. Their pain and torture during their detention will be highlighted.
- The ideological school which the two writers adopt will be taken into consideration as a factor of the two works. Finally, the literature of imprisonment will appear in this study as a genre that has its own particular characteristics and traits.

### 1.4 Questions of the Study

To accomplish the objectives of the current study, the researcher will answer the following questions:

1. What are the similarities as far as themes are concerned?
2. How does the ideological school of writers affect their works and their perspectives of life and existence?
3. How does the idea of imprisonment reflect many universal sides and echoes?

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The researcher expects that this study would be significant in one way or another as it fills a gap in the literature of comparative studies, especially that imprisonment literature is rarely investigated. It also sheds light on one of the most remarkable and valuable writers in the contemporary Arab literature, i.e., Abdurrahman Munif, the writer who sacrificed everything for the sake of his own beliefs and attitudes, the historical study that the researcher is going to provide will shed some light on his life, works and art. It is expected that the present study will provide the incentive for other researchers to pursue and develop his/her findings.

Arthur Koestler's work is also valuable to this study as long as it provides a note about him, his works and his persistent struggle. Moreover, the comparative study itself an important way to show the significance of two works of two different cultures.

#### 1.6 Limitations of the Study

The time of the study is limited to the time that Munif and Koestler wrote the two novels. The place of the study is limited to the places selected by the two writers.

The results of the study are limited to Abdurrahman Munif's *Sharq al Mutawasset* and to Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Therefore, they cannot be generalized to other works by the two writers or other works by other writers.

#### 1.7 Definition of Terms

East of the Mediterranean:

East of the Mediterranean or *Sharq Al Mutawasset* (1977) is a 1975 novel by Abdurrahman Munif. The novel deals with powerful themes of freedom, based around the central hero Rajab Ismail who is subject to eleven years of extreme torture and is eventually made blind during the horrific ordeal. The novel marked the beginning of Munif's exploration of the Arab wilderness in his novels with Munif's venture into the desert. (Wikipedia).

### Darkness at Noon

*Darkness at Noon* (1940) is a novel by the Hungarian – born British novelist Arthur Koestler, first published in 1940. His best known work, it tells the tale of Rubashov, an Old Bolshevik who is cast out, imprisoned, and tried for treason against the government whose rise he once helped to create.

The novel is set in 1938 during the Stalinist purges and Moscow show trials. It reflects the author's personal disillusionment with Communism; Koestler knew some of the defendants at Moscow trial (Wikipedia).

Section two: Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 Arabic Studies

Al-abbadi (1989) studied Munif as a novelist by following his life, understanding of life in his novels and by giving a critical and analytical study to *Alam Bedoun Kharat* – A World without Maps – which has been written by Munif and Jebra (1982).

Damrah (1989) studied a book by Al-Hamidee, the epic hero on Munif's novel where Damrah provided a critical reading to Al-Hamidee's book in which he described and assessed Munif's heroes through his novels and epic heroic acts.

Al-Allim (1992) gave close reading of *Sharq Al-Mutawasset* and *Al'an Houna* – Here and now – he entitled his study as *Min and Assqout Ela Nahno Al Tahadde WA Attghyeer* – From Me, the Falling, to US. The challenge and the change – Where he studied those two novels from a political point of view.

Munif (1992) presented his own perspective about Suppression during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and he provided evidence about this widespread phenomenon in the Arab World.

Al-Mahadeen (1999) pointed out the narrative techniques in Munif's novels where he studied these narratives in a way to fine out Munif's narrative technique by taking into consideration others factors like time and place and their effect on the technique.

Al-Freejat (2000) presented the political imprisonment in Munif's novels where he studied the importance of this theme to Munif and effect of prison on the main character. The emphasis here is on politics, while, the present study pays much attention to the human rights and various feelings and reactions.

Rababa's and Zughoul (2008) analyzed Munif's *sharq Al-Mutawasset* through studying the fundamental elements of the novel to point out its artistic level. They provided an analytical summary of it.

## 2.2 English Studies

Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia (1996) commented on the novel *Darkness at Noon* where the author portrayed the psyche and structure of the prison state. Such readings will be of a great importance for the researcher in his dealing with this challenging topic.

Rhynes (2003) discussed the places in the novel *Darkness at Noon* and related their importance to the analysis of the novel.

Bloom (2004) presented an analysis of the novel *Darkness at Noon*. Recognizing the distinguishing features of the novel and its writer, the critic hailed this work exemplifying the graphic description of people's sufferings under certain circumstances.

Sutherland and Bloom (2004) discussed the role of eternity in the two novels; Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* and Boethius's *Consolation of philosophy*.

Henry and Albert (2004) introduced a series of articles critiquing the novel *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler and how it represented a special case in the author's achievement.

Levene and Bloom (2004) presented a thematic analysis of the novel *Darkness at Noon*. This sort of study is not new as many critical reviews and judgments dealt with this issue in this study provided a thematic analysis while the present study will investigate the theme(s) and comparing it to the theme(s) that presented by Munif.

Merrill and Bloom (2004) considered the novel *Darkness at Noon* as the crystallization of the political novel genre. There are many novels written in this way. Perhaps, the most famous one is George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1984).

Pietz and Bloom (2004) analyzed several ideas and theories concerning the legitimacy of cold war discourse. They concluded that the idea of totalitarianism is the theoretical foundation of cold war discourse, which is an examination of four of the most important contributors to the intellectual legitimacy of cold war thinking – George Kennan, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler, and Hannah Arendt.

Rees and Bloom (2004) presented a critical analysis of the novel *Darkness at Noon*. They concluded that it is both a historical novel and a spiritual and intellectual biography.

Berkowitz (2008) presented a reading of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* by developing the importance of the infinite in politics. The author stressed the precarious nature of politics and harsh circumstances of its victims.

Berkowitz (2009) looked at the aspects of dignity in the novel *Darkness at Noon* by Arthur Koestler. He pointed out that the novel explored Koestler's view point on human decency in the novel and provided an analysis of the novel's philosophical and the political theme. Accordingly, he claimed that the novel expressed a deep reflection on the importance of dignity.

It is obvious that these different readings and analysis of Koestler's and Munif's fiction stem from different stand points. The present reading is essentially concerned with the humanistic side of these two works. It concentrates on the different reactions of human beings when they are put in such harsh circumstances.

## References

- Abadi, I. (1989) Abdul Rahman Munif novelist, *Yarmouk research: a series of literature and linguistics*. 2 (2) pp.137 to 138
- Al-Alem, M. (1992) Reading for two novels "east of the Eastern Mediterranean" and "now here" for Abdul Rahman Munif: from I am the fall to I, we are the challenge and change. *Magazine Cairo seasons*. 11 (1) pp.149 to 158
- Alfrejat, A. (2000). Political imprisonment in the novels of Abdul Rahman Munif. *literary magazine position* 29 (346), pp. 26-43.

- Benet. (1996). *Darkness at Noon*. In *Benet's Readers' Encyclopedia*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). HarperCollins: USA.
- Berkowitz, R. (2008). The political Actrivity of Dignity: Some Reflections on Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. (Electornic Version). American Political Science Association: Annual Meeting, pl.27, 27p.
- Berkowitz, R. (2009). *Approaching Infinity: Dignity in Arthur Koestler's Darkness at Noon*. *Philosophy & Literature*. 33(2), 296-314.
- Bloom, H. (2004). *Eternity in "Darkness at Noon" and the "Consolation of Philosophy: Modern Critical Interpretations*. (Ed). Chelsea House: Philadelphia.
- Damra, J. (1989) Epic hero in the novels of Abdul Rahman Munif. *Magazine ideas* pp. 92.98 to 101
- Levene, M. and Bloom, H. (2004). *The Mind on Trial: Darkness at Noon*. (Electronic Version). Retrieved September, 2011 from the Literary Reference center, Ipswich.
- Mahadeen, A. (1999) *Narrative techniques in the novels of Abdul Rahman Munif*, the Arab Association for Studies and Publishing: Beirut.
- Merrill, R. and Bloom, H. (2004). *Darkness at Noon and the Political novel*. (Electronic Version). Retrieved December, 2011 from the Literary Reference Center, Ipswich
- Munif, A. (1992) *Opinion and testimony about repression, the magazine of Cairo seasons*, pp.181 to 188.
- Pietz, W. and Bloom, H. (204). *The post-Colonialism of Cold War Discourse*. (Electronic Version). Retrieved December, 2011 from the Literary Reference Center, Ipswich
- Rababa'a, B. & Zghoul, M. (2005) *Concerns and confessions: an analytical study of the novel "the Eastern Mediterranean"*, *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Literature*, 5 (1) pp.183 to 197
- Rees, G. and Bloom, H. (2004). *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Darkness at Noon*. (Electronic Version). Retrieved December, 2011 from the Literary Reference Center, Ipswich
- Rhynes, M. (2003). *Darkness at Noon*. *Cyclopedia of Literary place*. (Electronic Version). Retrieved November, 2011 from the Literary Reference Center, Ipswich
- Sutherland, and Bloom, (2004). *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Darkness at Noon*. (Electronic Version). Retrieved December, 2011 from the Literary Reference Center Ipswich