

Tewfik Al-Hakim's Fate of a Cockroach: A Psychoanalytical Diagnosis

TIAMIYU Abiola Jamiu, PhD

Department of English

University of Abuja

tiamiyu.abiola@uniabuja.edu.ng

08071730911

&

IBRAHIM Hassan Taiye

Department of English

University of Abuja

hassanzone4all@gmail.com

08039270866

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Abstract

This paper x-rays Al-Hakim's Fate of a Cockroach as a symbolic representation of the political and social climate of Egypt during the Gamal Nasser regime. As a social construct, Fate of a Cockroach satirizes the regime of President Gamal Nasser as well as the feminist uprising in Egypt during the period, which provides meaningful insights and underscores the psychological themes explored in the text. The paper employs a **qualitative research design based on psychoanalytic literary criticism** approach. **Primary data** is derived from the text, while **secondary sources** include scholarly articles and books on psychoanalytic literary criticism. Findings reveal that **Adil's identification with the cockroach** is a form of psychological projection, where he sees his own struggles reflected in the insect. His **powerlessness in his marriage**, dominated by Samia, mirrors the cockroach's helplessness. Also, Adil's refusal to save the struggling cockroach, despite sympathizing with it, underscores the **indifference of fate**, reinforcing an absurdist and psychoanalytic interpretation of human suffering.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Ego, Psyche, Absurdism, Existentialism, Human existence

1. Introduction

Tewfik al-Hakim's Fate of a Cockroach is a symbolist and absurdist play that depicts the human world through the symbol of the cockroach. The Cockroach serves as a mirror reflecting human flaws, fears, and aspirations. It is a profound allegorical play that explores existential struggles, societal hierarchies, and psychological conflicts through a unique blend of realism and absurdism. As one of the pioneers of modern Arabic drama, Al-Hakim employs symbolism to depict the tension between individual agency and external forces. The play's protagonist, a cockroach, serves as a metaphor for human existence, grappling with fate and powerlessness in an indifferent world. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the narrative reflects deep-seated anxieties, unconscious desires, and the psychological mechanisms individuals use to navigate their realities (Freud, 1923). By analyzing the play through Freudian and Lacanian theories, this study aims to uncover the underlying psychological dimensions that shape its characters and themes. In other words, this paper seeks to diagnose Fate of a Cockroach through psychoanalytic theories, exploring how repression, the unconscious, and symbolic representations influence the play's structure and meaning.

2. Statement of the Problem

Although Fate of a Cockroach has been widely examined through philosophical, existential, and sociopolitical approaches, there remains a significant gap in analyzing the play as a psychological exploration of existential anxiety, fear, paranoia, and identity crisis. Previous studies have focused on its absurdist themes and allegorical representations of authority and societal structures but have not sufficiently addressed the depth of its psychological dimensions. This research fills this gap by offering a psychoanalytic diagnosis of the play, illustrating how the protagonist's internal conflicts, existential dread, and unconscious motivations shape the narrative.

3. Objectives

The study seeks to

- i. **analyse the existential and psychological struggles of the characters in Fate of a Cockroach**
- ii. **examine the themes of fear, paranoia, identity crisis, and alienation using psychoanalytic theory**

4. Methodology

The paper employs a **qualitative research design** with a **psychoanalytic literary criticism** approach. Using **textual analysis**, the research examines how existential anxiety, absurdity, identity crisis, fear, and paranoia manifest in the characters' interactions and behaviour. Drawing on **Freudian psychoanalysis** (the id, ego, and superego) and **Lacanian theory** (subjectivity and the symbolic order), the study explores how psychological conflicts shape the play's themes. **Primary data** is derived from the text, while **secondary sources** include scholarly articles and books on psychoanalytic literary criticism. A **close reading technique** is applied to analyze symbolic representations, character motivations, and their unconscious psychological struggles.

5. Theoretical Clarification

The psychoanalytic literary criticism framework, rooted in **Freudian and Lacanian theories** is adopted for the analysis. Freud's theory of the *id, ego, and superego* is particularly relevant in understanding *Adil's* internal conflict and projection of his struggles onto the cockroach. His repressed emotions (*id*), social expectations (*superego*), and conscious rationalization (*ego*) manifest in his identification with the insect, illustrating his existential crisis. Similarly, **Lacan's mirror stage theory** explains how *Adil* sees himself in the cockroach, leading to a psychological identification that fuels his existential struggle. This framework is suitable for the study as it helps deconstruct the psychological dimensions of the play, particularly in relation to themes of *identity, repression, and unconscious motivations* (Freud, 1923; Lacan, 1977).

In addition, the **existentialist and absurdist theoretical perspectives** of **Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus** further justify the study's approach. The cockroach's futile attempts to escape the bathtub parallel Sartre's notion of **existential despair**, while *Adil's* passive observation aligns with Camus' idea of **the absurd**—a struggle to find meaning in a meaningless world. By integrating **psychoanalysis and existentialism**, the theoretical framework effectively captures the psychological and philosophical underpinnings of *Fate of a Cockroach*, making it the most appropriate approach for understanding the play's deeper allegorical and psychological themes (Sartre, 1943; Camus, 1942).

6. Empirical Studies

This review highlights some previous studies that have analyzed the play from different angles and justifies the necessity of a psychoanalytic interpretation to expand the scope of literary criticism on Al-Hakim's work.

A study by Asika (2013) analyzed *Fate of a Cockroach* from an existentialist perspective, comparing it to the works of Sartre and Camus. The research focused on the absurdist elements in the play, particularly the cockroach's futile struggle for survival and *Adil's* realization of existential despair. While the study effectively discusses themes of absurdity and fate, it does not explore the psychological dimensions of the characters, such as *Adil's* identification with the cockroach or his subconscious conflicts. Similarly, Ifejirika and Obumsele (2015) examined the play's sociopolitical allegories, arguing that the conflict between the cockroaches and ants represents Egypt's political struggles under Nasser's regime. Their study interprets the insect realm as a metaphor for power dynamics in Egypt but does not consider how repression, fear, and unconscious desires shape character behavior. While these studies contribute valuable insights into the philosophical and political dimensions, they overlook the potential for a psychoanalytic diagnosis of the protagonist's internal struggles.

Ahmed (2018) explored *Fate of a Cockroach* as an allegory for gender dynamics, particularly the reversal of traditional gender roles in the human realm. The study focuses on how Samia dominates *Adil*, highlighting feminist themes and the emasculation of men in modern society. However, it does not analyze *Adil's* psychological response to his oppression or his projection of helplessness onto the cockroach. Also, Karim (2020) conducted a structuralist analysis, emphasizing the binary oppositions in the play-human vs. insect, male vs. female, power vs. helplessness but failed to examine the unconscious forces driving these conflicts. The absence of Freudian and Lacanian perspectives in these studies leaves a gap in understanding how psychological repression, the *id-ego-superego* struggle, and symbolic representations of conflict influence the play's deeper meaning. Given these

gaps in the literature, the present study seeks to fill the void by employing psychoanalytic literary criticism to examine the play's psychological dimensions.

7. Tewfik al-Hakim and the play Fate of a Cockroach (1966)

Born on October 9, 1898, Al-Hakim was a prominent Egyptian writer and a pioneer of modern Arabic drama and literature. His works significantly influenced the development of theatre in Egypt, particularly with his innovative use of symbolism and allegory. One of his most notable plays, Fate of a Cockroach is a compelling piece of **Theatre of the Absurd**. The play cleverly juxtaposes the lives of humans and cockroaches, using allegory to critique power struggles, existential dilemmas, and societal hierarchies. Through this work, Al-Hakim explores deep philosophical and psychological themes, making it a landmark in Arab dramatic literature.

The play unfolds in two parallel realms—the **insect world and the human world** which serve as metaphors for power dynamics and existential struggles. In the **insect kingdom**, King Cockroach faces a crisis as his realm is constantly threatened by the **militant ants**, yet he and his ineffective cabinet are unable to mobilize a defense. His legitimacy as king is questioned, particularly by Queen Cockroach, highlighting themes of **authority and incompetence**. His escapism leads him to a mysterious lake, where he falls and becomes trapped. The second part of the play shifts to the **human world**, where **Adil and his wife, Samia**, engage in a power struggle, reflecting gender conflicts. Adil, upon discovering the trapped cockroach in their **bathtub**, becomes fascinated by its relentless attempts to escape, seeing parallels between its struggle and his own marital oppression. This obsession leads to **conflict with his wife and psychological distress**, culminating in the arrival of a doctor. However, in an ironic twist, the cook, **Umm Attiya**, unknowingly wipes the cockroach away, symbolizing **the futility of struggle and the indifference of fate**.

8. Analysis

8.1 Deconstructing Fate of a Cockroach as a Psychological Play

Tewfik al-Hakim's Fate of a Cockroach is a compelling psychological play that explores complex themes of existentialism, absurdity, identity crisis, fear and paranoia, and the human condition. These psychological themes are explored through its characters, their interactions and behaviour. Below is detailed analysis and ample evidence demonstrating how the play functions as a psychological exploration.

8.2 Existentialism and the Search for Meaning

The play revolves around the cockroach and human characters' realization of their mortality and the futility of existence. This existential theme reflects the psychological struggle of the characters, particularly the Cockroach and the Human. The play opens with the cockroach's reflections on life and death in its search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. These musings reflect a deep existential crisis, similar to those depicted in the works of existentialist philosophers like Sartre and Camus (Asika, 2013). The Cockroach questions why it exists and what purpose its life serves, expressing despair over its fate. This reveals the character's internal conflict and emotional turmoil, representing a broader human experience of seeking purpose.

The 'ant' problem, a grave existential problem in the Cockroach realm, is presented by King Cockroach to be *as old as time* (p. 7). This is symbolic and, in many ways, represents the fate of human beings. Irrespective of our power, wealth, gender, age, or fame, diseases, natural disasters,

accidents, and several other agents represent danger and death to us at any given time and place. As we pity the fate of the cockroaches in the hands of ants, our sympathies are raised to our own fate and helplessness in our human world.

As the play progresses, we are soon introduced to a typical manifestation of the fate of the cockroaches in the hands of the ants as the Minister's son became a victim. The Minister soon reports in the death of his son, who is carried away by the ants. His foot slipped and he fell to the ground on his back and is unable to turn on his front and get to his feet. And then the ants spot him, surround him, smother him, and carry him off to their towns and villages. It is pronounced '*a great catastrophe, a national catastrophe ...*' (p.7). All the king could do in his helplessness is to declare a public mourning for the late son of the Minister. Inferably, the Minister's son is symbolic of us, our parents, children, friends, relatives and anybody we know in the face of various challenges and threats of life. Despite our exalted positions as "Kings" and "Ministers" we are helpless to save one of our own in the face of an ordained and inevitable tragedy. As expected, the cockroaches rallied together to debate a solution. The playwright captures them in their helplessness:

King: And why do these natural phenomena only occur when several cockroaches are assembled?

Savant: Science has not yet arrived at an explanation.

King: And what is the true nature of these moving mountains and this annihilating, choking rain?

Queen: These moving mountains and this choking rain, are they intended to destroy us?

Savant: These are all questions, which cannot be answered scientifically.

Queen: Then why do these catastrophes only occur when we are assembled together?

Savant: I don't know, your majesty. All that science can do is to record these phenomena, to link upon the connection between them and deduce a scientific law... (p.13).

The symbolic implication of the above in human existence is encapsulated in the plethora of problems that grip our world. The solution to one problem seems to aggravate several others as arguably designed by fate. The above scene is also akin to sheer mockery of the fate of man in our attempt to solve the many problems of our world. Even science does not hold the answer to our numerous problems and often time, it ushers in more problems than solutions it tends to proffer (Asika, 2013). In sheer defeat and helplessness, the cockroaches turned to the priest for solution and the priest could only suggest prayers and sacrifices to the gods as the only solution to the problems of the ants. This grave threat creates a heightened sense of fear, anxiety, helplessness and despair in the world of the cockroach.

Another striking example of existential threat happens towards the end of the scene. The king is lured by the Savant to go and watch the spectacle of a lake which is dry at night and flooded in the morning. The lake is formed from the water from the bath tub in the bathroom which is flooded when humans, Adil and Samia take their bath. The king and the Savant have gone to watch this lake and make observations when unfortunately, but as it is the will of fate, the king slips and falls into the bath and that is when his journey and fate become more pronounced and the title of the play more significant- *Fate of a Cockroach*. The cockroach is now abandoned to his fate. All the priest can do is to recommend prayers.

The second Act opens in the human world where Samia first encounters the cockroach trapped inside their bathtub which turns out to be the supposedly empty mysterious lake. She calls the attention of the husband and unknown to them that was the king of all cockroaches, powerful in his kingdom but now helpless and doomed in the mortal world. This again, reveals the fate of human in his alien world. However highly placed, at the appointed time, one faces one's fate and like the helpless king of the cockroach we become helpless in the face of death or greater threat to life. Adil sees the cockroach

and the first instinct is to kill it but he hesitates, and it did not take long before he notices the cockroach untiring struggle to escape its doomed fate and the choice to live has been removed from it. It is now at the mercy of the irritable Adil. Yet it struggles to be free, to escape and live again.

The cockroach's struggle practically demonstrates our daily struggles, toils, fears and aspirations. Many times, we strive; many times, we fail, because 'the walls of the bath are slippery.' (p. 37) But we never give up, we continue. Therefore, the physical walls of the bath tub symbolically represent the walls of life which are slippery. Adil and Samia become gods to the cockroach and can save or mar its life. This is the summary of our journey in our alien environment, the sum total of our struggle, strength and weaknesses at the mercy of fate and incomprehensible elements and occurrences far beyond our control. This is the reason Adil identifies himself with the cockroach's struggle to survive and live again.

The climatic part of the play, and quite ironic and symbolic too, is Adil's hesitation to kill the cockroach or help it to find its escape route out of the bathtub. It explains one thing: the elements, forces, gods and supernatural are indifferent to our plights. They are neither interested in saving us nor maiming us from an absurdist viewpoint. We all are bound together in this level of existential loneliness. This Adil dramatizes out in the scene below:

Samia: We've got to put an end to it.

Adil: And how do we put an end to it? This is something which is not in our hands.

Samia: In whose hands, then?

Adil: (Pointing to the cockroach). In his hands, it's still climbing.

Samia: And also still falling... (p.37).

The ant problem is the problem of security, which plagued Nasser's government. There were security threats posed by the well-organized Israeli army as well as the security threats posed by the more militant Moslem Brotherhood. The ants may be seen as the Israeli army. Interestingly, they are relatively smaller in size compared to the Egyptian army, but able to oppress and decimate the larger Egyptian army without any stiff resistance. The massive Egyptian army fell on its back like the cockroach and was routed by the smaller-sized Israeli army. Egypt lost part of its territory as a result of this humiliating defeat. Also, the security threat of the militant Moslem Brotherhood is another dimension to the ant problem. In spite of the small size of the group, they are still able to wreck a lot of havoc on the generality of Egyptians who are depicted as cockroaches. This shows the helplessness of the state in tackling the scourge of the ants (Ifejirika and Obumsele, 2015).

King cockroach laments: *'We grew up; our fathers and our grandfathers, and grandfathers' grandfathers grew up, with the problems of the ants there.'* (p.7) King Cockroach also wonders why he should be made to solve the problem of the ants, which has been there for long. He says cockroaches are not able to defend themselves against ants because they are not united and disciplined. This is an allusion to the nature of the Egyptian State during the time of Nasser. Egypt was divided and thus became vulnerable to enemy attacks. This shows the innate weakness of Nasser and his inability to solve the security problems of his country.

These existential problems and crises in both the Cockroach and Human realm create a constant state of anxiety, helplessness and fear as the characters know that their lives could be cut short at any time by insurmountable forces and the cold hands of fate.

8.3 The Absurdity of Life

The absurdist elements in the play reveal the psychological struggle of coming to terms with a world devoid of clear meaning. The Cockroach's struggles highlight the disconnect between beings and the inherent chaos of life, aligning with absurdist literature. This perspective emphasizes the play's

absurdist themes, portraying the Cockroach's life as a series of random events without deeper significance, paralleling human frustrations with the unpredictability of life.

Fate of a Cockroach is a good example of a play that evinces absurdism. The uniqueness of the play regarding absurdism is in the seeming comparison with the lives of human beings and that of the cockroaches. Through the use of allegory and highly symbolic elements, the playwright juxtaposed human beings with the cockroaches and as the play progresses, the reader easily identifies that the lives and fate of the cockroaches are in many ways symbolic of our lives and fate as humans in our lonely world (Asika, 2013).

At another level of comparison, the cockroaches, just like humans, are bothered with a plethora of problems just like humans in their world. The cockroaches are bothered with the problems of food, security, kingship, politics, health, religion, and quest for survival manifested in their continual struggle with the ants. In all these problems, the one that poses the greatest threat as exemplified in the play is their insecurity with the ants. Though they are far bigger in sizes than the ants, nevertheless, the cockroaches are helpless before them and this is not far from the fate of human beings in our absurd existence. The symbolic implication of this in connection with the fate of the cockroaches and our human world is in the vivid observation and realization of the helplessness of humans in the face of little things that they cannot conquer or change, little things we have come to embrace as our fate and inevitable part of our existence in an absurd world. This absurd fate is expressed in Cockroach Queen's speech in reference to the ants as thus: *"Their being a continual threat to us. A queen like me in my position and with my beauty, elegance, and pomp, can't take a step without trembling for fear that I might slip and fall on my back- and woe to me should I fall on my back, for I would quickly become a prey to the armies of ants."* The King Cockroach resignedly responds: *"Be careful therefore, that you do not fall on your back"*. (p.4)

The height of absurdity, and a deeply troubling state of psychological trauma, is Adil's thrilling fascination with the cockroach's struggle for survival, yet he is unwilling to save it from its fatalistic end. He locks the bathroom to protect the cockroach from his wife and spends several hours observing it with no intentions to help it but only to thrill himself with its unending struggle to live. His explanation is simple: *'because I've been watching it since early morning, following its every moment. It amazes me the amount of strength that's stored up in it- quite remarkable strength* (p.59). He vows to protect the cockroach as if protecting it recreates his protecting his lives from forces that neither care nor intervene. In short, he recreates human beings' true but unseen scenario and struggle in life. The playwright further depicts Adil identifying himself with the Cockroach and pointlessly urging it in its tireless struggle to escape his fate: *... what a shame! You slipped, you rolled over and fell down as you do each time... you want to have another go. Once again, you're starting to climb. Why don't you rest a while? Rest for a moment, brother! Give yourself a breather? But what's the point (shouting). There is no point!* (p.40). In the above scenario, the absurdity of life is enshrined and dramatized. Adil identifies himself as the cockroach. He sees himself as the cockroach in his own daily struggle to survive under the whims and caprices of a careless fate. He even calls it 'brother', urging it to take rest and continue. In the end, he accepts that there is no point in the cockroach taking a rest, or continuing, or struggling to live, there is no point because no matter what, it is doomed to its fate. Just like the cockroach, we all are doomed too in our alien world as portrayed by the playwright.

Samia, feeling her husband has gone insane, invites a doctor. The doctor is able to identify a psychological issue that has propelled Adil to project himself into the cockroach, which necessitated a great dose of sympathy and connection. Part of it is the subjugation and domination from his wife and his sheer daily struggle to survive. The wife is compelled by the doctor to play along with him and make him to get rid of the idea of identifying and comparing himself as the cockroach. But Adil is not relenting but rather urges the doctor to see himself in the cockroach:

Adil: *Listen doctor, the essence of the matter can be put into a few words. Put yourself in the same position.*

Doctor: *Your position?*

Adil: *The position of the cockroach ... (p.53).*

Unexpectedly, the doctor soon gets caught in the absurdist web. This is the point the play gets more complicated as Adil joins forces with the doctor to protect the cockroach, not to save it from the bathtub but to allow it to continue with its struggle well protected from the bitterness and menaces of Samia. Even when Samia concurs and plays along with him just to break the bond between him and the cockroach, Adil still cannot be persuaded or convinced otherwise as he sees the cockroach as an idol, a model deserving all respect and admiration for its zealousness and doggedness. Though doomed and fated to die, its heroism and relentlessness stir a passion that is so strong in the heart of Adil and later spreads to the doctor. The duo is full of praise for the poor creature. The playwright captures the doctor thus: “*By no means- I see repeating its attempt dozens of times*” and Adil, “*even hundreds. Since early morning I’ve been occupied in counting up the numbers of times.*”

Another psychological dimension steeped in absurdity is the inability of Adil’s identification with the cockroach to elicit sufficient pathos in him to want to save the poor creature from its impending doom. Rather he displays a strange desire to protect it at any cost only for his own obsessive, thrilling fascination with the creature, which appears sadistic. This speaks volume about his psychological state due to piling and endless societal pressures and marital oppression and exploitation he suffers from his wife Samia. Consequently, both the doctor and his wife are shocked to learn that despite his sympathy for the cockroach he does not intend to save it but only to protect it in order to watch its endless struggle to get out of the bathtub when he could just simply save it and everyone from a great deal of worry and time wastage. This is captured as thus:

Doctor: *(Continuing to watch it) what hope has it of escaping?*

Adil: *No hope of course.*

Doctor: *Unless you were to intervene and save it.*

Adil: *And I shall not intervene.*

Doctor: *Why not, seeing that you admire it?*

Adil: *I must leave it to its fate... (68).*

Another dimension to the theme of absurdity is the shared fate of the cockroach and the ants too. As expected, the ants came and carried the cockroach away. Later, the cook, Umm Attiya, wipe both the ants and cockroach away from the surface of existence. The play ends with the enduring lessons that Adil learnt, all rooted in his sheer fate as a mortal tied to the fate of an innocent cockroach caught up in a bath tub on a fateful morning. In the end, when his wife’s constant demands on him continue to pile up, he wishes that the cook would wash him away from the surface of the earth, like she did the cockroach and just like the cockroach; he could take lasting rest and find peace away from the world of endless toils, struggles and sheer quest for survival.

8.4 Identity and Self-Perception

Evidence, which attests to the psychological nature of the text, is the theme of identity and self-perception. Both the cockroach and the human subjects are depicted to struggle with their identity, which is central to the play. This internal conflict can be interpreted as moments of psychological introspection as individuals grapple with their self-worth in a society that often devalues them.

For instance, the cockroach’s struggle for identify continuously revolves around seeing itself as a mere pest and a creature deserving of respect. The Cockroach often reflects on how it sees itself versus how others perceive it. Its attempts to assert its identity leads to it grappling with the

psychological feelings of shame or insignificance. The cockroach's struggle with its identity mirrors the human quest for self-understanding, acceptance and the psychological need for identity affirmation.

The author explores inferiority complex which is mostly exhibited by Adil's wife. This is a psychological issue that affects many without being aware of it. For instance, Samia manifests hers through her obsessive controlling behaviour coupled with a twisted understanding of her rights over her husband, Adil, which represents a misguided concept of feminism. She oppresses him, turns him into her servant and engages him in frequent quarrels over flimsy things as to who will take their shower first. This obsessive, abusive behaviour can best be explained as her attempt to cover up for her feelings of inferiority under the guise of feminism. As a result, she and her husband suffer a lot and are locked in an endless gender war. This results in a psychiatric condition that involves the doctor. Samia seems to triumph over her husband who has become unbearably frustrated to the extent he made a profound call to Umm Attiya at the end of the play: *"bring the bucket and rag and wipe me out of existence (p. 76)* so that he can share the same fate of the cockroach and the ants as his will to live has been drained out.

Furthermore, Adil in his search for identity realizes a shared fate with the cockroach. He therefore instinctively decides to leave the cockroach to its fate, same way humans are abandoned to their own fate in their unending struggle for survival and meaningful existence. The doctor later identifies and sees himself too in the cockroach and arouses his sympathy for the cockroach. But like Adil, no one is going to help it, no one will save it, it will only save itself. The doctor explains to Adil's wife thus: *You want to do away with the cockroach and he wants to save it from your hand? Yes, in his inner consciousness he has identified himself with the cockroach, and this is the secret of his concern and affection for it (55)*. The doctor devastates Samia further when he is set to leave with this revelation: *'...However, madam, your husband is in the right about everything and I completely endorse his behaviour. There being nothing at all untoward about it... I myself hope that I could become like the cockroach ...' (90)*

In addition, both Adil and the doctor learnt enduring life lessons in their psychological search for their identity and meaning. They both identified with the cockroach and wish to possess the tenacity, strength and agility of the cockroach, to find the constant drive to cope, struggle and be full of hope for survival, never to give up even in the face of all impossibilities as that seem to be the only reasonable way out in their trapped world.

The cockroach leaves much to be admired in its sheer struggle in the face of the greatest obstacle. It refuses to give up, to accept that it is doomed, rather it bears its circumstance heroically and nobly till the very end. Sadly, its fate is at last decided by the cook, just the moment Adil steps out to ease off for some moments. The cook, unaware of the events and symbolic implication of the cockroach's presence, its unending struggle in the bath tub, pours water and washes it away, dead, never to be seen or saved again. The moment the doctor and Adil realize what the cook has done, it is too late to help the cockroach. The cockroach is already dead and gone but leaves behind lessons that will last the characters for a lifetime. The duo lament sadly thus:

Adil: *The important thing was its struggle for life.*

Doctor: *Yes, and that is what will remain fixed in my memory. Goodbye, everyone (75).*

8.5 Isolation and Alienation

Al-Hakim uses the Cockroach's perspective to critique societal norms and human behavior. The cockroach's alienation from the human world mirrors the feelings of isolation that individuals often experience in society.

For example, the Cockroach feels disconnected from the human world, emphasizing its status as an outsider. The Cockroach's sense of alienation is profound. It exists in a world where humans fear and

despise it, highlighting a deep psychological theme of isolation. This alienation can be seen as a metaphor for the psychological states of individuals who feel marginalized or oppressed in their societies. Therefore, the Cockroach's plight is a reflection of human experiences of loneliness and societal rejection.

Tewfik portrays this in his play through the evident isolation of the Cockroach King from the people he is ruling. Although the Cockroach King is king yet he does not have much control over his subjects. In fact, he enthrones himself as king because he feels he has the longest whiskers amongst all cockroaches. This weakness is revealed by the queen:

*Your authority? Your authority
Over whom? Not over me at any rate- you are in no way
better than me. You don't provide me with food or drink
Have you ever fed me? I feed myself just as you feed
yourself. Do you deny it? (3)*

King Cockroach lacks control over his subjects because he does not provide for them. He seems to acknowledge this fact so he tells the queen: *'in the whole of the cockroach kingdom, there is no one who feeds another. Every cockroach strives for his own bread'. (p.3)* This is an indirect criticism of the failure of the Nasser regime to adequately take care of Egyptians. It is this seeming weakness of King Cockroach that forces the Savant to declare: *'If the king cannot order ten cockroaches to assemble together then what authority has the king got?' (p.11)*

Tewfik al Hakim uses King Cockroach to show the inherent weakness of the Nasser regime. Apart from being weak and unable to control the people, Tewfik al Hakim also takes a swipe at the composition of Nasser's cabinet. This cabinet is just like King Cockroach's kitchen cabinet. The members lack the competence to handle delicate posts assigned to them (Ifejirika and Obumelu, 2015). Just like King Cockroach that became king based on the length of his whiskers, members of the cabinet are assigned different posts because of equally stupid reasons. Thus, the minister is assigned his portfolio because he always brings unpleasant news. The priest's credentials are the incomprehensible things he says and the learned Savant credentials are the strange information he has about things that have no existence other than in his own head.

King Cockroach makes them his closest allies because he is in dire need of companions. Nasser's cabinet, to Tewfik, is not different from King Cockroach's cabinet. Apart from the fact that these characters do not merit their positions, they are also unable to proffer solution to the ant problem, which is a major problem faced by the state. In the human realm, Adil also feels isolated and alienated in his marriage relationship with his wife Samia. He feels unhappy, alone and oppressed, which explains why he was quick to identify his isolation and alienation with that of the trapped cockroach in their bathtub.

8.6 Fear and Paranoia

There is a constant and dominant influence of fear and paranoia guiding the behaviour of both the cockroach and the human characters in the play. This highlights the themes of fear and paranoia. The human reaction to the cockroach illustrates a deep-seated fear of the unknown and the irrationality that often accompanies such fears. This exaggerated reaction also reflects anxiety and a desire to control the situation, showcasing the psychological response to perceived threats. This can be viewed as a critique of how humans often fear what they do not understand.

On sighting the cockroach, Samia screams and runs out of the bathtub which triggers a psychological response of fear in the wife and paranoia in the husband Adil. The wife hysterically calls on him to *"Kill it! Kill it! It's disgusting!"* This frantic call to eradicate the Cockroach exposes a psychological

response driven by fear and the instinct to eliminate perceived threats. This highlights the irrational nature of human behavior when confronted with the unknown.

Secondly, and most importantly, the ensuing drama and event that occur between Samia and Adil lasting several hours and necessitating the presence of a doctor is a vivid testament of the psychological state of fear and paranoia caused by the presence of an ordinary insect in the bathtub. The entire day was almost wasted because of this. Symbolically, it is important to state here that the cockroach is a representation of the Egyptian military, which is larger than the ant, a representation of the Israeli military. Yet, the cockroaches are unable to defeat the ants and are being killed and thrown into a psychological state of fear at the mention and sighting of the ants. For instance, the Minister's son falls on his back and is killed and dismembered by the ants. All the King Cockroach and his cabinet could do is to mourn his passing and express their own fear of falling into a similar fate.

8.7 Conflict and Ethical Dilemmas

The psychological conflict in the Cockroach and the Human world represents broader human conflicts, such as the struggle between survival instincts and moral considerations. The climax of the play, where the humans must decide how to deal with the Cockroach, symbolizes the internal battle between compassion and the instinct to eliminate threats, reflecting complex human emotions and ethical dilemmas.

The most dominant and compelling dramatic tussle in the play is propelled by feminism. It manifests itself as a 'gender war' from the onset of the play to its end. As the play opens in the cockroach world, we find the king and his queen locked in a battle of words revolving around the issue of feminism as the queen asserts her independence and equal rights as the king as thus: "*I'm a queen! Don't forget I'm the queen, I'm exactly the same as you- there's no difference between us at all*". (p. 3). The argument goes on and on among the two cockroaches in the manner similar to our ever-ensuing war of sexes.

The implication of this struggle and war of words in defense of one's sex between the king and queen is later to be made manifest when we encountered Adil and Samia, the two major human characters in the play. It is seen that the couple were on their own gender war but in sharp contrast to what we witnessed in the cockroach world where the king, the male seems to have upper hand, the reverse is clearly the case in the human world. Adil, the husband of Samia is under "*threat from several impositions of the wife who constructed the tenet of feminism in an entirely different order*" (Ifejirika and Obumsele, 2015). In her view, men are meant to be loyal, submissive and caring to their wives, a situation Samia fully exploits to the disadvantage of her husband.

It is worthy of note that it is part of the psychological effects of this situation that makes it easier for Adil to identify his fate with the fate of the cockroach struggling to escape from his bathtub. As the play progresses, he begins to see the similarity between the way the cockroach struggles to escape from the bathtub where it is trapped and the endless way he struggles to survive in his marital relationship and free himself from the tyranny of his wife. This reflects the situation in Egypt where the feminist movement has sparked off gender conflict (Ifejirika and Obumsele, 2015).

The Feminist movement seems to have strengthened the Egyptian woman and made her more powerful than the man. The woman becomes the boss at home and challenges her husband. Adil is turned into a houseboy by his wife. She orders him around like a houseboy:

Listen Adil, you've got the day off today. You should know that I want you to spend this day usefully. Do you hear? There are my clothes and dresses all crumpled up in the wardrobe- get down to sorting them out and hang them up at your leisure one by one so that when I come back from work, I'll find everything nicely sorted and organized. Understood? (p.75)

Samia goes further to warn Adil to carry out her orders. Adil becomes so much frustrated that he begs Umm Attiya to fetch her bucket and rag and wipe him out of existence.

Tewfik Al Hakim seems to be critical of the feminist movement in Egypt that has so much empowered the Egyptian woman and turned her into a tyrant. The Egyptian man is no longer comfortable with his new role and prefers death to the inhuman treatment meted to him, at home, by the woman. Adil wants to be wiped out of existence just like the Cockroach King. It is interesting to note that it is a woman (Ummu Atiya) that decides the fate of the cockroach king, which presents a situational irony as a king is the one expected to decide the fate of others. Similarly, Adil, a master, wants his fate to be decided by the servant woman also since she has assumed the role of a king that decides one's fate. Feminism, which has brought about the reversal of roles in the family, to Tewfik Al-Hakim, is nothing but an absurd ideology. This absurdity in the real society is what the playwright captures in the play. In other words, the conflict between King Cockroach and the Queen as well as Adil and Samia is the conflict between men and women in Egypt during Tewfik's period.

9. Major Findings

i. Existential Anxiety and Absurdity

The play portrays a **crisis of existence** in both the cockroach and human worlds. The cockroach's **endless struggle** to escape the bathtub mirrors human efforts to find meaning in a chaotic and indifferent universe. Al-Hakim employs **absurdist elements** to depict life as an **incessant, futile battle**, where fate dictates existence without rational justification. This aligns with existentialist perspectives, revealing how individuals, much like the cockroach, remain trapped in cycles of **struggle, failure, and inevitable doom**.

ii. Identity Crisis and Psychological Projection

Findings reveal that **Adil's identification with the cockroach** is a form of psychological projection, where he sees his own struggles reflected in the insect. His **powerlessness in his marriage**, dominated by Samia, mirrors the cockroach's helplessness. This supports Freudian ideas of **repressed emotions and unconscious identification**, demonstrating how personal frustrations can lead to irrational attachments and self-alienation. The play critiques **social power imbalances**, exposing how psychological suppression affects personal identity.

iii. Fear, Paranoia, and the Indifference of Fate

The human characters' **irrational fear** of the cockroach and the cockroach kingdom's **paranoia about ants** symbolize **deep-seated human anxieties** over survival and control. Samia's immediate reaction to **eliminate** the cockroach reflects a psychological response to **perceived threats**, highlighting the **fragility of human rationality** when faced with the unknown. Additionally, Adil's refusal to save the struggling cockroach, despite sympathizing

with it, underscores the **indifference of fate**, reinforcing an absurdist and psychoanalytic interpretation of human suffering.

10. Conclusion

Tewfik al-Hakim's Fate of a Cockroach offers a rich psychological landscape that delves into the complexities of identity, existence, and human emotions. Through the Cockroach's existential crisis, its struggle for identity, the themes of alienation and fear, and the absurdity of life, the play invites the audience to reflect on their psychological experiences and the nature of existence. The characters' internal conflicts and moral dilemmas not only elevate the cockroach to a symbol of the human condition but also serve as a poignant critique of societal attitudes. The Cockroach serves as a mirror reflecting human flaws, fears, and aspirations. Through its symbolic existence, the audience can see their own vulnerabilities and the psychological battles they face in daily life. Overall, al-Hakim masterfully uses the Cockroach's plight to explore profound psychological themes, making it a significant psychological play.

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