RECONCILIATIONS: A STUDY OF INTER-CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS IN TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM'S PLAYS

A thesis submitted during 2011 to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the award of a Ph. D. Degree in Comparative Literature

BY

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Reconciliations: A Study of Inter-Cultural Negotiations in Tawfiq al-Hakim's Plays**" submitted by Mr. Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Ghaleb bearing Reg. No. 08HCPH03 in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Ghaleb hereby declare that this thesis entitled "**Reconciliations: A Study of Inter-Cultural Negotiations in Tawfiq al-Hakim's Plays**" submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. M. T. Ansari, is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date: Name: Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Ghaleb

Signature of the Student:

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DEDICATION

To

My Dear Parents

Lovely Wife & Cute Kids

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is a pleasure to convey my utmost appreciation to the many people without whom I could have never completed this work. First and foremost, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Dr. M. T. Ansari for his information, advice, constructive criticism, backing and encouragement that have been crucial for this study. I am more moved than I can say at the great amounts of time he spent on my work, which was often presented to him when it was at a very primitive level. I was very fortune to work with the guidance of such an accomplished and great scholar.

I would also like to express my warm and sincere thanks to my doctoral committee members; Prof. Tutun Mukherjee and Prof. Ananthakrishnan, for their understanding, encouragement and personal guidance which have provided a good basis for the present thesis. Their wide knowledge and their logical way of thinking have been of great value for me. Throughout my thesis-writing period, they provided sound advice, good teaching and lots of good ideas. Thanks are also due to faculty (Dr. Bheemaiah and Dr. Sowmya), staff (Mr. Bala Raju, Mrs. Rajani and Srisailam), and colleagues in the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Hyderabad for their kind assistance and friendship

I owe big gratitude to a number of classmates and friends: Abdullah Aziz for proofreading the entire thesis and Mansour al-Gabali, Yasir al-Hutami, Saleh A’gha and Ali al-Nuzaili for providing me with critical materials and sources in Arabic as well as in English. I am indebted to my friends Adel al-Oshari, Amr al-Ariqi, Nasr al-Masani, Bassam al-Aghbari, Zaher Sadeq and Ahmed Muharram for their sincere friendship and for providing a stimulating and fun environment. This acknowledgement would be incomplete without special recognition of Ehab al-

Nuzaili, Helmi al-Khateeb, Naji al-Hubaishi and Abdulrahman al-Hubaishi for their sincere friendship and support.

My utmost appreciation goes to my teachers, colleagues and friends in Ibb University for their support and encouragement at various stages. I would like to thank Prof. Abdelshafi Siddiq, Prof. Rafiq al-Shamiry, Prof. Mahmuod al-Maktari and Prof. Yehiya al-Sohbani for their inspiration, kind assistance and trust. I appreciate Dr. Abdulkareem al-Warafi's enormous support and encouragement. Mr Adel al-Sodaqi, Mr. Yehiya Ghalib and Mr. Abdullah al-Bughaiti deserve special recognition for being always ready to offer advice and encouragement when in need.

I owe my most sincere gratitude to my dear parents for their care, love, support and unending prayers throughout my life. The constant inspiration and guidance of my father kept me focused and motivated and the unconditional love of my mother has been my greatest strength. I sincerely appreciate the constant love and moral support of my brothers and sisters. I am also grateful to Mr. Mohammed Yaseen, my father-in-law, who offered support and encouragement while being in India.

To my beloved wife, I owe more than words could ever express. I could not have completed this thesis without her love, patience, understanding and willingness to sacrifice. My three children Ala'a, Hala'a and Husam provided inspiration through their unconditional love and patience.

The financial support from Ibb University is greatly acknowledged. Without their financial support, my ambition to study abroad could have not been realised.

Finally, my greatest regards to the Almighty for bestowing upon me the courage to face the complexities of life and complete this thesis successfully.

ABSTRACT

Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987) is recognised as Egypt's best-known playwright. He has occupied a central place in the Arab literary scene since 1930s. He is known primarily as the writer who introduced the theatre into modern Arabic writing. He has produced an output of some seventy plays, and one of Cairo's theatres has been named after him. The main argument of this study is that al-Hakim's plays are construed within "a liminal space" (Bhabha, *Location* 5) that is thoroughly "hybrid" or what Homi Bhabha terms the "Third Space" (*Location* 54). It is a space that is located between East and West, Self and Other, past and present as well as tradition and modernity. The result of this rewriting process is a production of a new kind of dramatic writing that is irreducibly different. This study particularly attempts to explore and evaluate the hybridity of al-Hakim's plays and the ways in which al-Hakim interweaves the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) tradition with the Western tradition(s).

In al-Hakim's plays, hybridity can be examined at three different levels: textual (or intertextual), stylistic and linguistic. Aware of the fact that drama as a literary genre is new to the Arabic literary tradition, and also of its significance and impact on the lives of the masses as a tool of change and amelioration, al-Hakim has successfully manipulated such aspects of hybridity to bring about improvement in Egyptian and Arabic drama. He dexterously welds Western forms with Arabic-Islamic issues in order to orient his views, criticism and ideas indirectly on the one hand, and to lend an invaluable hand to the growth of the much needed dramatic genre in Arabic literature on the other.

Generally, the study aims at examining the historical and cultural developments of modern Arabic drama. It evaluates al-Hakim as a major pioneer figure of a dramatic tradition in modern Arabic literature. By exploring the hybrid nature of al-Hakim's plays, the study aims at not only "undermining" the bipolar opposites: East and West, Self and Other, past and present and tradition and modernity, but also bringing them together. Thus the study attempts to offer an approach that avoids the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and develops inclusionary, not exclusionary, and multi-faceted, not dualistic, patterns of cultural exchange and maturation.

This study is divided into six chapters including introduction and conclusion. Following a general introduction, the first chapter throws light on the historical, political and socio-cultural changes that brought about significant developments in Arabic literature. The second chapter attempts to survey, albeit briefly, the history of Arabic drama in general and Egyptian drama in particular. The third chapter explores al-Hakim's life in order to determine the social, political and intellectual milieu that shaped his intellect and informed his thought. It also attempts to introduce the reader to a large output of al-Hakim's dramatic writings, providing synopses and general assessments of al-Hakim's major plays. The fourth chapter attempts to explore the hybridity of al-Hakim's plays and the ways in which al-Hakim mingles Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) tradition with Western dramaturgy. Finally, a conclusion sums up the major points of the study, demonstrates the findings, and suggests topics for further research.

CONTENTS

Introduction

The cultural encounter between the East and the West has brought about significant impacts on modern Arabic literature. Modern Arabic drama, one of the major genres of modern Arabic literature, has been greatly influenced by Western dramaturgy and theatre. After the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798, Western theatre was represented to the Arabs with strong aura of authority, and Western plays were performed to the Arabic audience for the first time. A whole apparatus of translation and reproduction of the Western theatrical canons flourished in the Arab world. As a result, many Arab dramatists appropriated the Western models leaving behind their indigenous dramatic forms and literary heritage that could have been dynamised from within. However, a few dramatists such as Tawfiq al-Hakim were so skilful that they interweaved the Western dramatic canon with the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) tradition and produced a new form of dramatic writing that can be characterised as 'hybrid.'

The study attempts to focus on the Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987) as the major pioneering figure of the dramatic tradition in modern Arabic literature. Though he had gone to Paris in 1925 to complete a doctorate in law, al-Hakim chose instead to steep himself in Western culture. Imbibing the sense of the role and power of the dramatic medium in its Western form, he determined to replicate it in the context of Arabic-Islamic society. The three years he spent in Paris as an impressionable young man in his twenties were crucial in forming his consciousness as a young artist. The encounter with the Western culture was to lead to a process of unending probing of the Self and the Other in his professional writings that started in the 1930s. The main argument of this thesis is that al-Hakim's plays, in the dynamics of rewriting and rethinking colonial

historiography, are construed within “a liminal space” that is thoroughly “hybrid” or what Homi Bhabha terms “the Third Space” (Bhabha, *Location* 54). It is a space that is located between East and West, Self and Other, past and present, as well as tradition and modernity. The result of this rewriting process is a production of a new kind of dramatic writing and performance. Thus, this study mainly attempts to explore the hybrid nature of al-Hakim’s plays and the ways in which his plays waver between two different discourses: the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) discourse and the Western discourse.

The choice of this topic was motivated by different reasons. Firstly, drama has been an important facet of contemporary Arabic culture especially since 1950s. It has attracted more attention than any other artistic genre with the possible exception of cinema (Whittingham 13). More importantly, Arabic drama has become integrated into the Arabic national identity and has an important role to play in the socio-political life. Secondly, Tawfiq al-Hakim is recognised as the first playwright to give Arabic theatre a quantum leap, contributing a significant body of plays to a serious dramatic literature in the Arab world. Before al-Hakim, the plays produced were until recently either heavy melodramas adapted into cliché-ridden classical Arabic from the French and Italian or domestic farces, often with political overtones, written in the colloquial language (al-Hakim, *Fate* viii). With his natural artistic talent and hybrid techniques to mix the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) literary tradition and heritage with the Western dramatic tradition, al-Hakim gave to the Arabic theatre the foundations of respectability and seriousness it most needed. In other words, it was Tawfiq al-Hakim who brought about the introduction of drama (in its Western sense) into the literary canon. Thirdly, this topic is new and interesting in relation to hybridity, especially since all cultures in a way are hybrid and

often interact with and borrow from one another. It is highly impossible to draw a line to demarcate one's own indigenous culture. Eventually, hybridity has become the salient feature of modern world cultures.

A fundamental goal of this study is to bridge cultural, intellectual and social gaps between modern Arabic drama and Western drama under investigation by comparatively bringing them as close to each other as possible. By exploring the hybrid nature of al-Hakim's plays, the study offers an approach that avoids the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and develops inclusionary, not exclusionary, and multi-faceted, not dualistic, patterns of cultural exchange and maturation. Moreover, the study endeavours and asserts the significant position of modern Arabic drama among world dramas. Modern Arabic drama is a recent development in Arabic literature. Particularly since the nineteenth century, it has achieved maturity and has also attracted many Western critics and translators. Though modern Arabic drama has been influenced by Western drama, it has its own distinctive features and remarkable dramatists whose main objective is to reflect the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) culture and identity.

The study employs a descriptive, analytic and comparative methodology as the most appropriate for examining literary phenomenon or a writer. Al-Hakim's plays will be critically analysed and compared to each other, or their Western models. Therefore, the scope of this study will be limited to the major published texts of the plays. In theorising the texts under study, I draw on various approaches of different disciplines according to the applicability of such approaches to the contexts of the plays. In focusing on the major themes as reflected in the texts under study, the analysis of the texts utilises thematic and cultural approaches alongside the historical and socio-political contexts of

the texts. Inspired by Homi K. Bhabha's notions of 'hybridity' and 'Third Space' to refer to the multiplicity of identity and intercultural location, this dissertation emphasises the necessity to question the representation of Arabic drama and culture so as to extricate it fully from the lingering effects of a long history of the Western monolithic and essentialist representation that has obliterated their diverse experiences, histories and cultures. James Hastings, in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, made the most biased statement about Arabic drama: 'Even today there is no Arabic drama; there is only drama in Arabic languages … for all plays that have appeared in the language of Mohammed during the last fifty years are nothing but translations, or at best, imitations of European works' (872). Clearly, Hastings's statement manifests a Eurocentric claim of origin and mastery of drama as a genre. Al-Hakim's hybrid plays question the modes and patterns of domination that operate and negotiate the various hegemonic and traditional constructions. They are a threat to colonial and cultural authority as they subvert the concepts of pure origins or identity of dominant authority through the ambivalence created by denial, unsetting, repetition and displacement (Kuortti and Nyman 9). Al-Hakim's hybridity can also be seen in its ability to question what appears natural and complete, to problematise natural boundaries (East and West, Self and Other and tradition and modernity).

The study is divided into four chapters. Chapter I is titled "Modern Arabic Literature: A Historical, Political and Cultural Background." This chapter attempts to explore the historical, political and socio-cultural changes that brought about significant developments in Arabic literature. The period (from mid-nineteen century till the end of the World War I) witnessed profound changes in the very concept of literature. The

renaissance (*al-Nahdah*), which was the basis of the spurt in Arabic literature, was in fact a product of fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition and the imported Western forms. Moreover, Mohammed Ali's drive for modernisation in Egypt early in the nineteenth century began a process of westernisation which gathered momentum, eventually spreading from Egypt and Syria to the rest of the Arab World, aided by the disintegration of Ottoman Empire. More importantly, the spread of secular education and the birth of printing and journalism were potent factors not only of modern Arabic literature but also of modern Arabic thought, society, and politics. A significant translation movement resulted in the borrowing of Western ideas as well as of literary forms: the drama, the novel, and the short story. Against this background, the traditional concept of literature as a display of verbal skill was replaced by the view that literature should reflect and indeed change the social and political reality.

Chapter II is titled "Arabic Drama." This chapter attempts to survey, albeit briefly, the history of Arabic drama in general and Egyptian drama in particular. In fact, drama (in the Western sense) was characterised by its absence from Arabic literature. Nevertheless, some traditional dramatic forms, such as *pharaonic drama*, *maqama*, *ta'ziya plays* and *shadow plays*, existed in early Arabic drama. Therefore, this chapter will explore such indigenous dramatic tradition. This chapter, moreover, attempts to investigate the reasons behind the absence of drama from Arabic literature, and why these traditional dramatic forms have not been developed by Arabic dramatists. This chapter also traces the development of modern Arabic drama and investigates how Western drama influenced Arabic drama and what are the cultural and political factors that lead to such influences. Generally, Arabic drama appeared firstly in Syria in 1840s via the pen of

Marun al-Naqqash and secondly in Egypt in 1870s via the pen of Yaqub Sannu. These early Arab literary scholars introduced Western drama and theatre into the Arab World by means of translation, adaptation and arabicisation. However, modern dramatists such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, who tended to be eclectic and experimented with many forms and techniques of Western drama, wrote original dramatic pieces.

Chapter III is titled "Tawfiq al-Hakim's Contributions to Modern Arabic Drama." The chapter attempts to briefly explore al-Hakim's life in order to determine the social, political and intellectual environment that made up 'the greater proportion' of al-Hakim's mind. It also attempts to introduce the reader to a large output of al-Hakim's dramatic writings, providing synopses and general assessments of al-Hakim's major plays. Having written over seventy plays, al-Hakim has contributed a significant body of plays to modern Arabic drama. In this chapter, al-Hakim's major plays are classified chronologically and thematically into different categories. The first category includes plays of his early experimentation with drama; it includes plays such as *al-Dayf al-Thaqil* (The Unwelcome Guest) and *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The Modern Woman, 1923). The second category, Theatre of Variety, deals with comedy of manners and themes from society. It includes plays such as *al-Khuruj min al-Janna* (Expulsion from Paradise, 1928) and *Hayat Tahattamat* (A Wrecked Life, 1930). The third category, Theatre of the Mind or Intellectual Theatre, deals with abstract ideas such as struggle between man and time as in *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1933) or between man and space as in *Shahrazad* (1934). The fourth category, Theatre of Society, deals with plays on social and political issues. It includes plays such as *al-Rajul alladhi Samad* (The Man who Withstood the Current, 1950) and *Ughniyyat al-Mawt* (Song of Death, 1950). The fifth

category contains plays dealing with issues related to the 1952 Revolution in Egypt. It includes *al-Safqah* (The Deal, 1956) and *al-Aydi al-Na'imah* (Soft Hands, 1959). The last category, Theatre of the Absurd, includes plays such as *Ya Tali' al-Shajarah* (The Tree Climber, 1962) and *Rihlat Qitar* (A Train Journey, 1964), unmistakably reflecting the impact of Shaw and Brecht among others.

Chapter IV is titled "Hybridity of al-Hakim's Plays." This chapter attempts to investigate the hybridity of al-Hakim's plays and the ways in which al-Hakim interweaves the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) literary tradition with the Western dramatic tradition. In al-Hakim's plays, hybridity can be examined at three different levels: textual (or intertextual), stylistic and linguistic. Textual hybridity can be seen as the appropriation of a text or theme from the Western tradition and reshaping it into the Arabic-Islamic context, for instance *al-Malik Odib* (Oedipus the King, 1949) and *Praxa aw Mushkilat al-Hukm* (Praxa or the Problem of the Government, 1939). Textual hybridity is also related to intertextuality and how a text can lead or refer to some other texts. For al-Hakim, the past and the present are inseparable. He adopts the literary works of the past writers to reflect on the contemporary life. Stylistic hybridity involves the employment of an Arabic or Islamic text or theme in a Western form or style as in *al-Sultan al-Ha'ir* (The Sultan's Dilemma, 1960) and *Ya Tal'i al-Shajara* (Tree Climber, 1962). Linguistic hybridity shows al-Hakim's artistic and linguistic talent in employing what is called "third language": a combination of the standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect. *Al-Sqfqah* (The Deal, 1956) and *al-Wartah* (The Dead Trouble, 1966) are interesting examples of the use of the "third language."

Though there are previous studies both in Arabic and English on al-Hakim's plays, none of them deals with the topic the way it is proposed here. Ahmed al-Haggi's *Myth in Contemporary Egyptian Theatre*, in Arabic, examines a number of plays which deal with myths by various Egyptian playwrights including al-Hakim. Fuad Dawara's *The Theatre of Tawfiq al-Hakim: The Political Plays* is a thematic study in Arabic ignoring the theatrical dimensions of the plays. Al-Alem's *Tawfiq al-Hakim: A Thinker and an Artist* throws light on al-Hakim's theory of balancing dualities through his novels and plays. He explores themes of conflicts of opposite forces such as heart and mind, art and reality and wisdom and power. In English, M. M. Badawi's *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* discusses nineteenth Egyptian playwrights. In al-Hakim's case, he presents a thematic discussion and general classification of plays ranging from minor to major works written before and after the 1952 Revolution in Egypt. Richard Long's *Tawfiq al-Hakim: Playwright of Egypt* is a chronological description of al-Hakim's life and works. It provides synopses and general comments of some thirty-two plays. Long classifies the plays thematically pointing briefly to the similarities and differences of the various plays dealing with the same issue. W. M. Hutchin's *The Theatre of the Mind* and Aleya Abdel Salam's "An Analysis of Form and Style in the Plays of Tawfiq al-Hakim" explore the plays in terms of form and style. Thus this study is the first to deal with the hybridity of al-Hakim's plays utilising Homi Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of hybridity and 'Third Space.' On one hand, it is an attempt to bridge the cultural and intellectual gaps between Arabic drama and Western drama, and it also relates to the problems of contemporary Egyptian and Arabic society, on the other.

Chapter One

Modern Arabic Literature: A Historical, Political and Cultural Background

This chapter attempts to explore the historical, political and socio-cultural changes that brought about significant developments in Arabic literature. The period (from mid-nineteenth century till the end of the World War I) witnessed profound changes in the very concept of literature. The renaissance (*al-Nahdah*), which was the basis of the spurt in Arabic literature, was in fact a product of fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition and the imported Western forms. Moreover, Mohammed Ali's drive for modernisation in Egypt early in the nineteenth century initiated a process of Westernisation which gathered momentum, eventually spreading from Egypt and Syria to the rest of the Arab World, aided by the disintegration of Ottoman Empire. More importantly, the spread of secular education and the birth of printing and journalism were potent factors not only of modern Arabic literature but also of modern Arabic thought, society, and politics. A significant translation movement resulted in the borrowing of Western ideas as well as of literary forms: the drama, the novel, and the short story. Against this background, the traditional concept of literature as a display of verbal skill was replaced by the view that literature should reflect and indeed change the social and political reality.

1.1 Important Historical Events

Geography and history combine to make the Arabic speaking world one of the most fascinating areas of the globe. Generally, it was the influence of Islam that was responsible for the meteoric rise of the Arabs starting in the seventh century. Emerging

from the narrow confines of the peninsula, Arabs spread over the Fertile Crescent[1] and extended their sway over all territories between the Atlantic and the Arabian Gulf,[2] as Gamal Abd al-Nasser[3] remarked, "From the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf we are Arabs" (qtd in Allen 11). Till the middle of the thirteenth century they remained a world power, asserting their political, linguistic and cultural ascendance. It was not only an empire that the Arabs built, but a culture as well. Heirs of the ancient civilisations that flourished on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, in the land of the Nile and on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, they likewise absorbed and assimilated the main features of the Greco-Roman culture, and consequently acted as a medium for transmitting to medieval Europe many of those intellectual influences which ultimately resulted in the awakening of the Western world and in setting it on the road towards its modern renaissance (Hitti, *History* 4). No people in the Middle Ages contributed to human progress so much as did the Arabs and the Arabic-speaking people (4).

With the passage of time there set in a regression from the forward tempo of the Islamic spirit followed by a series of negative developments. Around the 1200 A.D. this led to a complete domination of scholasticism over radical and scientific enquiry leading to absolute stagnation. In historical terms, Hulagu's sack of Baghdad in 1258 A.D. marks the beginning of the decline of the Arab power. This was followed by other Mongol invasions. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the Turks had occupied all Arab territories. After the destruction of Baghdad at the hands of the Mongols, the power of the

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[1] Greater Syria and Iraq.
[2] "From the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf" is not only a territorial description of the Arab lands but the expression also symbolises their prowess and unity.
[3] A former president of Egypt (1956-70) who became a controversial leader of the Arab world. He created the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958-61).

Mamelukes[4] in Egypt and Syria became the main bastion against the Mongols. It was only then that Cairo as the capital of one of the most powerful states in the Islamic world became the cultural centre of the Arab world. However, the rule of the Mamelukes was to become a heavy burden to Egypt in the following centuries. The Mameluke beys governed the country in a military fashion and in isolation from the population, with whom they had no ties whatsoever. Probably due to this poor government, the late flowering of the literature in Egypt came to an end in the fifteenth century (Brugman, *Introduction* 2).

When in 1517 the Ottoman Turks conquered Egypt, the situation did not improve. The Turks entered into a compromise with the Mamelukes. The compromise resulted in a delicate balance which procured for the Sultans in Istanbul the advantage that any dynastic aspirations would want, i.e. governing the land and its people. To Egypt, however, it represented one of the worst imaginable forms of government. To quote Heyworth-Dunne:

> The Turkish pasha representing the central government … lived in perpetual terror of his own garrison, while the (Mameluke) Amirs, who had formed themselves into parties … fought and intrigued with one another for power. At the time the anarchy was unbearable, but street fighting seems to have been of such common occurrences that the tradesmen sometimes did not even bother to shut their shops while it was going on. (675)

[4] Mamelukes are soldiers of slave origin. They appeared in the 9th century A.D. and became a powerful military caste in various Muslim societies particularly Egypt and Syria. They held political and military power and in some cases they attained the rank of sultan, while in others they held regional power as amirs or beys.

Of all the colonial power in history, the Turks had the least to impart to the nations they subjugated. These were not only kept down-trodden but segregated themselves from the currents of the world affairs bypassing them completely. While great upheavals were taking place in Europe and the Americas, the Arabs hibernated in the backwaters (Mahdi 2). Although some of the contacts between the Arabs and the outside world were maintained in the Levant from the sixteenth century onwards in the form of scholarly exchanges with the Church of Rome, it was only a clash of arms that finally broke down the insulation of the Arab world. In 1798 Egypt was conquered by Napoleon Bonaparte.

After defeating Napoleon's army, Mohammed Ali, a young officer in the Turkish army, emerged as the ruler of Egypt. In fact, Mohammed Ali's reign marks the beginning of the Arab awakening. He modernised Egypt's army and navy and extended his rule over the Arabian Peninsula and Sudan, and even endeavoured the annexation of Syria through forces under the command of his son, Ibrahim Pasha. Mohammed Ali's grandson, Isma'il, was a progressive and imaginative ruler. The Suez Canal, which was inaugurated in his reign, re-routed the shipping pattern of the Old World. Egyptian economy boomed out but this was short-lived. Subsequent developments weakened Egypt hold over the Suez Canal and led to political interference by both Britain and France in the region. At the instance of Western pressure, Isma'il was deposed by the Turkish Sultan I in 1879 (2).

The reign of the next ruler Khedive Tawfiq witnessed a reaction against the deteriorating conditions and manifested itself in the first armed revolt of modern Egyptian history. The Orabi movement started as a result of discontent among the soldiers, and against the discrimination meted out to them by the Turks. The intelligentsia

and the peasants joined the movement, fanning it into a social revolt demanding constitutional rights and an end to tyranny. The Orabi revolt (1882) was foiled by many conspiracies and ended with the British occupation of Egypt, which nonetheless remained under the nominal sovereignty of the Ottoman rulers. However, national consciousness, which had already taken root, became a force to reckon with in Egypt (Haykal 51). Political parties appeared also in 1907 and three were formed in Egypt advocating an end to the British rule. They represented two divergent schools of thought: whereas *Hizb al-Islah al-Dasturi* (The Constitutional Reform Party) of Ali Yusuf, and *al-Hizb al-Watani* (The National Party) of Mustafa Kamil, strove for pan-Islamic rule and wanted Egypt to remain in the framework of the Ottoman Empire; *Hizb al-Umma* (The People's Party) of Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid was secular and believed in the total independence of Egypt and the demand of Egypt for the Egyptians. In the course of time the second school was to gain wider appeal.

Ottoman Empire started to decline during World War I and Ottoman suzerainty over Egypt ended and it was made a British protectorate. Anti-British feelings were embittered further by the presence of British troops in large numbers and conscription of peasants to form the Labour Corps for the British armies (Mahdi 3). When the war ended in 1918, Sa'ad Zaghlul led a delegation (*wafd*) of national leaders to the British High Commissioner demanding the independence of Egypt. Underestimating the strength of the nationalists, the British exiled the delegates to Malta. The result was the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution 1919. This was the first in the series of revolutions that were to shake Arab politics for over half a century. Sa'ad Zaghlul was allowed to return and in

1922 Egypt became a constitutional monarchy with the British retaining some rights, including the presence of their troops on the Egyptian soil and the control of the Sudan.

Like Egypt, the Levant was the scene of great instability and unrest in the nineteenth century till the other colonial power, France, finally edged itself into a position of strength. However, the conquest of Syria by Ibrahim Pasha in 1830, and his reign lasting a decade, brought peace and prosperity to the region. In 1983, Ibrahim Pasha proclaimed equality before the law of members of all religious denominations. His new liberal policy and public security attracted Western educational institutions to extend their influence and activity as never before (Hitti, *History* 747). When the Egyptian army was forced to retreat from Greater Syria at the instance of Western pressure, conditions in the Levant deteriorated. Corruption and suspicions culminated in chaos and the riots between the Christians and the Druzes in 1860, in which thousands of people were killed. Consequently, France found an excuse to intervene militarily in Lebanon, which became an autonomous province under the protection of the Six Great European Powers and passed out of direct Ottoman control.

Nevertheless, other Arab countries such as Syria, Palestine, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, remained under the Ottoman Empire. In 1908, Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey was forced by the movement of the Young Turks to restore the Ottoman Constitution, which offered the Arabs a share in the working of the government. The Arabs believed that this was a beginning towards the fulfilment of their national aspirations but were soon frustrated as the Young Turks adopted a racial policy. Moreover, 1908 was a significant date for it heralded the beginning of a concerted effort, east of Suez, for Arab unity and independence. For the next fifty years, Arab nationalism was dominated by the

desire of the Arabs to free themselves from the yoke of the Turks as well as Western colonisation.

The initiative to act came from Sharif Husayn of Mecca. Mobilising the tribes of Arabia, he launched a movement to end the Turkish rule and requested Britain to help. British reluctance to intervene was overcome by other exigencies arising from the outbreak of World War I when Britain then seized the opportunity of undermining Turkish influence in the region. The Arab revolt with the British assistance was launched in 1916. However, the Arab unity and independence remained mere dreams because Great Britain had secretly concluded the Sykes-Picot agreement in1916 with its ally, France, for the division of Arab territories into British and France spheres of influence. Moreover, when the war ended Sharif Husayn found himself without a country. Arabia was claimed by the powerful Saudis of the province of Najd. Husayn himself was deported to Cyprus, but his sons Abdullah and Faysal were offered the kingdom of the newly carved state – Transjordan, and truncated Syria, respectively (Mahdi 4).

Meanwhile, Iraq was having its experience of British colonisation. In 1914, British troops landed in Basra, and after the siege of Kut, they occupied Baghdad in 1917. Reacting to the occupation, the Iraqis tried to drive the British away and appeals for *jihad* rent the country, leading to the Iraqi revolution of 1920. Nonetheless, the British quelled the revolution and made Iraq their protectorate. They also helped to establish the Hashemite dynasty there. Yet a far greater shock was in store for the Arabs. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 sought to create a home for the Jews in Palestine, disregarding the fate of the Arabs who formed ninety per cent of its population (Mahdi 5). At the end of World War I, with Egypt in the throes of revolution, unrest in other Arab regions and

occupation of some of their territories, the travails of the Arabs were just beginning. In these upheavals politics naturally became their foremost concern and affected all their cultural and social activities.

The fact that the Arab World had been ruled by non-Arabic speaking foreigners since 1250 was a hindrance to the development of Arabic literature. No intellectual work of high order could be expected under the political and concomitant social and economic conditions that prevailed in the Arab states under the Ottoman rule. Even though Arabic language retained an important position as the language of culture, it was chiefly used for academic purposes. It continued to be the language of the theologians and – to a lesser extent – of lawyers but lost its position as a literary language. Neither the Mamelukes nor the Turks were therefore intrinsically patrons of Arabic literature. But not all cultural activities had waned in the seventeenth and eighteenth century Egypt; in their own way, the Mamelukes promoted science and their zeal for building is still visible in the old Cairo (Brugman, *Introduction* 3). However, within such a social structure, the growth of literature was thwarted particularly at a time when it was completely dependent on patronage. The potential literary patrons, not only the sultans but also the lesser dignitaries, were simply unable to appreciate literary Arabic sufficiently.

The writers of the period were by and large commentators, compilers and abridgers. Literary formalism and intellectual rigidity characterised their works. Of the Egyptian chroniclers Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti (d. 1822) is the most important one. He was not a man of letter in the strict sense of the term, but his annals, the *Aga'ib al-Athar fi'l Taragim wa'l Akhbar*,[5] are among the best writings in Arabic historiography. Particularly because of their simple and direct style they are a refreshing relief amidst the

[5] It was translated in 2009 by Jane Hathaway as 'History of Egypt.'

affected and ornate rhymed prose characteristic of the time. However, in modern Arabic prose, al-Jabarti is criticised for using words from the vernacular and Taha Husayn condemned his work for its defectiveness (Brugman, *Introduction* 4). Nevertheless, al-Jabarti's annals are remarkable not only because of their style but also of the wealth of data they contain about the works and the lives of the poets from the period prescribed by al-Jabarti.

1.2 *Al-Nahdah* (The Renaissance)

Arabic literature from pre-Islamic times to this day has its high and low periods. It reached its zenith during the Abbasid period (750-1258), touched its low ebb following the takeover of the Arab land by the Turks. The years 1517-1800 denote one of the most bleak periods in Arabic literary history when Arabic literature ceased to be creative and in fact was a mere trickle; however, the foundations of the language remained unshaken. The fact that Arabic language and literature survived the bleak period extending over three to four hundred years in due to the Koran, which occupies a central position both in Islamic religion and Arabic literature. Arab intellectuals devised an elaborate system to preserve the Koran's original form without a single change in syllable or accent. Their whole emphasis was on the correct reading of the Koranic text. For this purpose they devised teaching methods, which while helping in understanding the Holy Book, also assisted in keeping the base of the Classical Arabic alive. Because of this method the Koran is read, understood and quoted by all who speak Arabic inside and outside the Arab world (Mahdi 5).

However, the bleak period was followed by *al-Nahdah* (the renaissance), which was the basis of the spurt in Arabic literature (6). Generally, two major events or

developments paved the way for *al-Nahdah*; European influence, which was represented by the Maronite missions in the Levant, and the French occupation of Egypt in 1798. In the Levant, European influence began to be noticed in the sixteenth century. In 1584, Pope Gregory XIII established a special school in Rome for the Lebanese missionaries called the Maronite School. He also provided students with stipends. Subsequently, the Lebanese prince Fakhr al-Din al-Ma'ari (1590-1635) started sending Lebanese students to study in Italy. Al-Ma'ari also established schools in Lebanon so that the graduates could acquire and promulgate learning in their homeland.

Despite the fact that the Maronite School was theological in character, the students had opportunities to learn secular sciences as well as European languages, literature and philosophy. When the graduates of the Maronite School came back to the Levant, they started a wide range of activities on what they had learned in Rome. For example, Bishop Gabriel al-Sihuyani al-Adhani (1577-1648) translated Sharif Idrisi's work *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq fi Dhikr al-Amsar wal- Afaq* into Latin (Mahdi 6). Ibrahim al-Haqalani was given the title of the Court Translator by Richelieu for rendering important Arabic works into French. Father Butrus al-Mubarak (1660-1747) supervised the printing of Arabic texts in Tuscany and returned to Lebanon to establish *Madrasa Aintura* (Aintura School).

In 1936, the Maronite missions, instructed by the Holy Academy at Rome, began opening schools in the towns and villages of the Levant. They undertook adult education in the monasteries and neighbouring areas and also sent students on scholarship to Rome. Other missions belonging to the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox churches also began working in the Levant and used education as the medium of missionary work. In 1755 the

Lazarities founded a boys' school in Damascus, and the Capuchines established their centres in Antioch, Beirut and Aleppo (Hitti, *Syria* 226). Before the end of the nineteenth century, Protestant education missions, including a training school for girls, were established by the Germans, Danes and British. The Americans founded the Syrian Protestant College in 1886, now the American University of Beirut (226). The French also established their Université de Ste. Joseph in1874.

Nonetheless, there was a reaction to the Christian missions, represented in the establishment of the *Madrasat Ain Waraqa* (The School of Ain Waraqa) in 1789. It was the first national school to be followed by a host of others. These institutions adopted methods different from the traditional Arab instruction and followed the European pattern. French and English were included in the syllabus. In 1863, Butrus al-Bustani started the first school for higher studies and, more importantly its main feature was that it was secular and taught sciences following contemporary methods (Mahdi 7).

In this way, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a constellation of Arab writers, thinkers, scientists, journalists, poets, printers and translators. Some remained in the Levant; however, others went to live in Egypt and other Arab countries due to political circumstances. Later waves of Syro-Lebanese literati settled as far away as North and South America, mainly to seek livelihood, and also to escape the political curbs imposed on them by the Turks (Hitti, *Syria* 233). Wherever they went they contributed to the renaissance of Arabic, especially in Egypt and the Americas (Mahdi 7).

The French occupation of Egypt in 1798 marks the next important phase of Arabic revival. That is why some of the contemporary writers consider the French

occupation of Egypt (1798-1801) the beginning of a new era in the cultural life of the Arab world. Moreover, they see it as the most significant link between Arabic thought and Western civilisation since the Crusades (Rifa'at 118). This new contact awakened the Arabs in general and the Egyptians in particular to their deplorable backwardness and aroused their national sentiments (Moosa, *The Origins* 3). Napoleon Bonaparte brought with him a team of French experts, scientists and scholars who established modern libraries and laboratories to carry out scientific and literary researches. Above all, he brought with him from the Vatican an Arabic language printing press, the first Arabic printing press to enter Egypt, for the publication of French proclamations in Arabic (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 4).

The responses of some critics and historians to the French campaign varied. Martin Bernal viewed the whole Expedition as a fascinating turning point in European attitudes to the East (Bernal, Vol. I 184). He argues that though there were important political and economic reasons for the Expedition, there is no doubt that the ideas of France to revive the 'cradle of civilisation' which Rome had destroyed and the desire to understand the Egyptian mysteries also provided important motivation (184). The scientific members of the Expedition believed that in Egypt they could learn 'essential facts about the world and their own culture and not just exotica to complete Western knowledge – and domination – of Africa and Asia' (185).

On the other hand, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, a historian of this period, regarded the year of the invasion as the year of ultimate catastrophe, of the disastrous reversal of the natural order of things (3). He bitterly criticised the behaviour of the French, especially their women, in Egypt. Furthermore, he described the "immoral" French as

inflicting the Egyptians with their corruption. Utterly shocked by the French "misbehaviour," this conservative Muslim was not slow, however, to observe the good qualities of the French. He greatly admired their efficiency, organisation, and sense of justice, which appeared outstanding when compared with the cruelty of the Turkish rulers. Moreover he admired the slogan of the French revolution, "liberty, equality and fraternity" (qtd in Moosa, *The Origins* 3). Other Egyptians from al-Azhar such as Shaykh Hasan al-Attar (d. 1835), the teacher of Rifa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi, to be discussed shortly, also appreciated French knowledge and learning.

For Badawi, the French Expedition is generally judged as a military failure for the French, therefore its significance for Egypt and the Arab world cannot be exaggerated (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 11). He also argues that the expedition had indirect and mainly political effect (11). It is true that the occupation lasted only three years, i.e. the Egyptians' exposure to Western learning, science and representative self-government was too brief to be meaningful, but the campaign brought to an end the isolation of the Arab world from the West (5). It, furthermore, signalled the beginning of a process of Western expansion and colonisation, which in the course of time resulted in practically the entire Arab world falling under the domination of Western powers, notably France and Britain.

Even after the Arab states formally attained their independence, they remained under the spheres of influence of Western powers for a long time, in fact until Gamal Abd al-Nasser appeared in the scene after the Egyptian Army Revolution of 1952, which in its turn helped to push Arabic literature in other directions (5). Generally speaking, the bloody and unequal encounter with the West which varied in ferocity and violence from

one Arab country to another and according to whether the coloniser was France, Britain or Italy, had such a profound and traumatic effect upon the Arab imagination, even though it was sometimes late and slow to reveal itself, that to this day the East/West opposition has remained one of the leading motifs in Arabic literature. In their attempt at self-affirmation and restoration of identity, Arab writers have for many generations often tried to define themselves in relation to the Other, which in most cases was the European.

Generally, modern Arabic literature constitutes in certain important aspects an entirely new departure from its indigenous tradition; nevertheless, it never really and completely severed its links with its past (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 1). In this respect, *al-Nahdah* was a fruitful meeting of two forces: the indigenous tradition and the imported Western forms. That is to say, from the beginning of the nineteenth century two currents flew into the making of *al-Nahdah*: Arab as well as European. The Arabic stream was represented by al-Azhar, which preserved the Islamic and Arabic literary heritage in the darkest days of the decline and was the only source of learning in Egypt and other Arabic countries (Mahdi 9). On the other hand, the European influence expressed itself through Christian missionaries in the Levant and French occupation of Egypt. Thus *al-Nahdah* represents, using Du Bios' concept, 'double consciousness' (Gilroy 30). It is a hybrid phenomenon in which 'two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings' and 'two warring ideals' are reflected together (126).[6]

Some other Western critics, such as Brugman, try to make a parallel between the Arab renaissance and European renaissance. He argues that the Arab renaissance, *al-Nahdah*, which, like the European renaissance of the fifteenth century, is characterised by

[6] This accounts for the hybridity reflected in Tawfiq al-Hakim's plays, which is explored in chapter four.

a return to classical literature whose masterpieces served as models for new writers. However, Arabic revival is different from European revival; he writes:

> The Greek and Romans had in every respect further receded from the European mind than the classical Arabic culture from the minds of the inhabitants of Arabic countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike classical Greek in Europe, classical Arabic had remained at least their written language, and Islam was still the religion of the majority of the Arabs. On the other hand, the Greco-Roman civilization has meant more for the flourishing of European culture than classical Arabic culture for the Arabic Renaissance. In retrospect it appears that modern Arabs have only been partly inspired by the ideas that were current in their classical culture. Modern writers may have seen in classical literature a greater expressiveness, a purer Arabic language, a larger possibility to involve reality into their work of art, but it was principally a matter of self-affirmation, of psychological satisfaction, awareness that the Arabs, too, had a great culture. (*Introduction* 9)

In fact, it is difficult to establish when *al-Nahdah* began. The Arabs themselves are not in agreement about its starting point. As far as Egypt is concerned, it is commonly believed that *al-Nahdah* was a result of the invasion of the Bonaparte in 1798. The consequences of the Bonaparte campaign have often been described in striking metaphors. F. Gabriel remarked that “it might be said that the Arab world, until then still wrapped in medieval slumber, was re-awakened by the tread of the French feet around the base of the Pyramids” (Gabrieli 35). P. Cachia also compared the campaign with “a

rock cast into a stagnant pond: the changes that have taken place in the past 150 years are the ripples and the upsurge of silt resulting from the disturbances" (Brugman, "Modern" 282). These views, as well as the concomitant metaphors, are usually adopted by Arabs, at least by Egyptian authors, for example by Abd al-Latif Hamzah, who in his history of the Egyptian press writes that "the Egyptians were awakened from their stupor by the tumult of the French attack" (Hamzah 8). Opinions to the contrary, which minimise the importance of the French expedition, are an exception.[7]

Generally speaking, the emergence of an autonomous state, independent Egyptian state had an effect which turned out to be an important stimulus for its cultural revival. Egypt is not the only Arab country to have known *al-Nahdah*. But even assuming that the Arab world as a whole went through *al-Nahdah*, it must be granted that in the nineteenth century the cultural revival was restricted to Egypt and Lebanon, for the rest of the Arab world "awakened" much later, parts of it in the twentieth century. Whether this Arabic *Nahdah* manifested itself earlier in Lebanon or Egypt is still not determined. The Egyptian scholars who consider Bonaparte's adventure as the starting point for *al-Nahdah* probably are inclined to favour the Egyptian priority.

On the other hand, equally sound arguments may be given for the Lebanese The Origins of the Arabic *Nahdah*. For example, G. Antonius sees Beirut as the cradle of the Arab national movement, which according to him has a cultural background, according to the famous first sentence of his book *The Arab Awakening*: "the story of the Arab national movement opens in Syria in 1847, with the foundation in Beirut of a modest library society under American patronage" (qtd in Brugman, *Introduction* 12). To this society he immediately links the names of men of letters Nasif al-Yaziji and Butrus al-

[7] See for example, Badr 8-15.

Bustani. The notion that the Lebanese are the heralds of modern Arabic literature is also found in Western scholars such as Schoonover and Wiet (Brugman, *Introduction* 12).

In fact it seems difficult to make final judgment about the time and the region in which *al-Nahdah* originated. It should be seen as a diffuse phenomenon of cultural revival rather than a well-defined movement, and as a retrospective gloss on events that took place rather than a programme of which contemporaries were aware. Moreover, it remains difficult to ascertain where the movement of literary revival was stronger or where it contributed more to modern Arabic literature. For the time being, it would seem that the Syrian-Lebanese were the most open among the Arabs to literary revival. However, Taha Hussein, an Egyptian writer and critic, argues that "the movement in Egypt was rather academically and practically oriented, while that in Syria (here including Lebanon) was rather oriented towards language and literature" (Hussein 74).

Generally speaking, most writers and critics are vague about the duration of *al-Nahdah*. For example in 1914 Gurgi Zaydan expressed his view that it was still going on and in the last part of his literary history in which he dealt with the modern era, he writes: "*al-Nahdah* starts with the French invasion of Egypt and is still in progress" (qtd in Brugman, *Introduction* 13). Many Arab writers, even today, feel that *al-Nahdah* is not yet over, and hold the view that Arabic literature is going through a preparatory phase of awakening, which ultimately will lead to a new literary culminating point. This is probably related to the peculiar need of stock-taking found in many Egyptian writers, who often explain how far Egyptian literature has progressed, and who now consider poetry and prose as having advanced more. In the past few years, however, the self-

confidence of the Arab writers, particularly the critics, seems to have grown and the notion of *al-Nahdah* seems to be losing its topicality (13).

1.3 The Contribution of Mohammed Ali

After the eviction of the French in 1803, Egypt was left in a state of chaos in which Mohammed Ali, a Turco-Albanian military commander, could seize the opportunity to have himself proclaimed governor (*wali*) of Egypt (1805-1848). He soon manifested his dissatisfaction with the delicate balance between the governor and the Mamelukes as it had existed until 1798. As early as 1811, he had the most prominent Mameluke beys murdered during a ceremony to which he invited them, thereby getting rid of his chief domestic opponents. The new governor generally called the pasha since then ruled Egypt as his private domain and in fact he made himself independent of the central government in Istanbul. The ambitious Mohammed Ali launched a more successful comprehensive programme of military reform along the lines of the superior and well-organised Western armies. He employed all the available sources in Egypt, and in doing so he altered the economic, political and the social structure of the country (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 6).

Mohammed Ali tried to modernise his country with all his might. He may have intended in the first place to strengthen his army, but in effect he made an all-out effort at modernisation and undoubtedly Egypt as a whole benefited from his innovations. His territorial ambitions, it is true, were a heavy burden to the country; however, his modernisation continued to be effective even after his death, a fact which has tended to be obfuscated since the fall of his dynasty in 1952 (Brugman, *Introduction* 5). The fact that the Pasha greatly stimulated contacts with Europe was particularly important for the

modest inception of cultural revival under his reign. He soon employed a large number of Europeans, initially mostly Italians, but later on many Frenchmen and some Englishmen, Australians and Germans. In addition, he established some schools and sent missions to Europe in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. One such example is *Madrasat al-Alsun* (The School of Languages), one of the most influential schools established by him in 1835 under the leadership and supervision of a pioneer Egyptian intellectual Rifa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi (d.1873). With his students, al-Tahtawi translated many books and scientific treatises, designed to serve Mohammed Ali's purpose in creating a modern strong Egypt. However, they had no immediate effect on Arabic literature (Moosa, *The Origins* 5).

Generally, the setting up of a new secular system of education, different from the traditional theocentric one, a system which produced men who were to occupy important posts in the government, was bound to result eventually in the weakening of the authority of traditional values. Arab Muslim society therefore ceased to be the 'closed' culture it had been for so long (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 7). In the course of time, Western culture and Western languages were to play an ever-increasing role in the cultural makeup of the Arab world. Another important development is that due to the fact that secular education did not grow slowly and gradually out of the indigenous traditional religious system of al-Azhar, but was instead imposed upon it from 'above,' cultural dichotomy or polarity ensued with grave psychological consequences, which had already worried the religious reformer Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), and which are visible today (8).

There seems to have been no question of literary patronage on the part of Mohammed Ali. Not until a later age did the pasha himself learn to read and write. He probably spoke little Arabic and was in no position to appreciate literary Arabic. It is no wonder that all his modernisation did not produce a sudden literary revival. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, literary traditions of the eighteenth century were continued. Arabic and Egyptian writers of this period were far from "modern." They took their inspiration mainly from post-classical literature. Baha'a al-Din Zuhayr was admired more than al-Mutanabbi and to prose writers the *maqamaat*[8] of al-Hariri continued to be an inspiring example. The traditional genres were still being practiced. The emphasis was on the refinement and virtuosity, which often degenerated into brittle linguistic tricks without a trace of individuality (Brugman, *Introduction* 7).

Nevertheless, during this period there were some writers who produced considerable works. For example, a famous work was written by Shihab al-Din Mohammed B. Isma'il (d. 1857). He became known in particular for his *Safinat al-Mulk wa Nafisat al-Fulk* (printed in Hijra 1273 = 1856-7), a treatise on music and poetry, which also contains a large number of stanzaic poems of the type of the *muwashahat*.[9] It is an elegant piece of work. In addition to the central part, it contains ten annexes (*migdaf*), in which traditional subjects such as wine (*Adab al-Nadim*) and garden-poetry (*rawdiyat*) are discussed. Equally traditional was Ali Hasan al-Darwish (d. 1857) whose book *al-Ish'ar Behamid al-Ash'ar* (printed in Hijra. 1284 = 1867-8) consists of three parts, the *sina'iyat* (literary tricks), the actual *diwan* (personal notes) and *maqama*

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[8] *Maqamaat* is the plural of *maqama*; it is a literary rhymed prose.

[9] *Muwashahat* is the plural form of *muwashah*. It is a musical form that originated in Al-Andalus (medieval Spain and Portugal). It may use more than one rhythm although the rhythm is single throughout. Rhythms in *muwashah* are poetry in classical Arabic and must neatly fit the rhythm (every syllable must fall on a beat).

(literary prose). Another traditional figure in the modern era was Mahmud Safwat al-Sa'ati (d. 1880) who became particularly famous for a poem in praise of the Prophet. The poem was written in 142 lines in which he used a different figure of speech for each line as well as a word of the same or almost the same stem as the technical term for this figure (8).

1.4 Arabic Printing Press, Birth of Translation Movement and Journalism

One of the most significant contributions of Mohammed Ali is the introduction of Arabic printing press. In fact the very first educational mission member to be sent to Europe went to Italy to study printing (in 1809). This press which was set up in Bulaq in 1822 was not the first to be found in the Arab world. Even before Bonaparte brought with him an Arabic press to publish his proclamations in Egypt. As early as 1706 the Maronite priests had their own press in Aleppo for the purpose of printing Christian texts (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 8). Mohammed Ali's press, later to be known as the Government Press, was to play an important cultural role in the Arab Muslim world. It printed translations of European works, at first scientific and technological, nevertheless, later literary translations as well as Arabic classics such as the work of Ibn Khaldun became more freely available than they used to be as handwritten copies of former days.

Likewise, the press printed the very first periodical, an official newspaper, *al-Waqa'i al-Misriyya* (The Egyptian Fact Sheet, 1828). This marked the birth of journalism which was to become a potent factor in the development not only of modern Arabic literature, but also of modern Arabic thought, society and politics (8). Together with the translations of scientific works, journalism helped to change gradually the style of Arabic prose, ridding it of excessive rhetorical devices, making it a simpler and fitter vehicle for

conveying ideas. In other words, newspapers and, to a lesser degree, magazines required a different Arabic, a language that could be written at a faster rate and therefore had to be less ornate and more succinct, and that could deal with a multitude of subjects that before had not or hardly been fit to be written about. Thus the birth of journalism brought about a major extension of reading public, an extension which had already been promoted by the introduction of printing press (Brugman, *Introduction* 14).

Obviously, one of the most important obstacles to the birth of a modern literature was the pitiful state in which the knowledge of standard Arabic in Egypt and other Arabic countries found itself in the first half of the nineteenth century. Naturally this was due to the fact that upper classes for a long time had known little Arabic, whereas, on the other hand, the spoken Arabic of the lower levels of the society quite strongly deviated from the written language. The latter was cultivated by the religious leaders, particularly by the Azhar scholars, who until Mohammed Ali came into power (M. Shukri 1127), had a mediating influence, but from their quarter no modernisation was to be expected, while their knowledge of classical Arabic literature was often insufficient. Hence the introduction of press as well as the establishment of newspapers and magazines played a significant and vital role in the development of standard Arabic into a usable modern literary instrument.

The Egyptian government gazette, *al-Waqa'i al-Misriyya*, was the first newspaper in the Arab world. The editing of this official gazette was assigned to the distinguished Rifa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi (1801-1873), who is generally regarded as the father of modern Arabic thought. As it was the official organ, it did not reflect the public opinion. Journalism continued to be in the hands of the government in the reign of Isma'il, but

when his politics became unpopular, political newspapers started appearing. *Abu Nazara*, edited by Ya'qub Sannu, was the first political newspaper to be produced in the lighter vein and the first to criticise official policy, in this case the policy of Isma'il (Dayf, *al-Adab* 34). Meanwhile in the Levant, Khalil al-Khuri founded the first Lebanese newspaper *Hadiqat al-Akhbar* in 1852 (Hitti, *Syria* 48). It was the first unofficial newspaper of the Arab countries. However, the political atmosphere of the Levant, which had witnessed the first activity of the press, was not conductive to sustain journalism. In the face of repeated closures, journalists migrated to Egypt, where they found a more liberated milieu for journalistic activity. The famous newspapers founded by the Syro-Lebanese émigrés in Egypt included *al-Ahram* in 1875 by Salim and Bishara Taqla in Alexandria. Later it was moved to Cairo and is today the most famous and respected daily in the Arab world (Mahdi 10).

Along with the printing press and the introduction of journalism publishing houses and libraries were established. *Jam'iyat al-Ma'arif* was founded in 1868 to print great works of Arabic literature. The national library *Dar al-Kutub* was founded by Ali Mubarak in 1870. It contained Arabic as well as European books and its press undertook the printing of rare books and precious manuscripts. Moreover, in the Levant every educational institution had a library; the Jesuit Library, the Library of the American University and *Dar al-Kutub al-Watani*. In Syria *Maktabat al-Zahiriyya* was founded in 1878 in Damascus and *al-Maktaba al-Malkania* in Aleppo. Among the private collections *al-Khalidiyya* in Jerusalem and *al-Taymurria* and *al-Asifiyya* in Egypt were the most famous (11).

More importantly, after Mohammed Ali had founded the Cairo School of Languages (in 1835) which was directed by al-Tahtawi, a Translation Bureau was set up in 1841 and this remarked the beginning of a significant translation movement. The graduates of the School of Languages are said to have translated some two thousand works from European languages (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 9). Though the translation was limited to technological and military books, in the course of time it included literary and historical writings. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, literary works alone formed no less than one third of the total output of the translations (9). It is worth mentioning that the first translations were made from French literature in both Egypt and the Levant because the earliest cultural contacts of the Arabs were with France.

The first attempt was made by al-Tahtawi, the first director of the School of Languages, who translated *Telemaque* of Fenelon. Al-Tahtawi gave an Arabic version to the title referred to as coupling, and called his book *Mawaqa'i al-Aflak fi Waqa'i Tilimak* (The Positions of the Celestial Spheres in Relation to the Adventures of Telemaque): this was the first attempt to acquaint the Arabs in general and the Egyptians in particular with a Western story and is identically the first introduction of Greek mythology to Arabic readers (Mahdi 12). Al-Tahtawi, furthermore, translated Voltaire's Elegy on Louis XIV and *The Marsaillaise*. Inspired by the French national anthem, al-Tahtawi composed many patriotic songs which became popular with the troops. This type of poetry was unknown in Arabic before and is one of the earliest cases of borrowing of European forms (12).

Another translator in Egypt was Mohammed Othman al-Jalal (1829-1898). He was a pupil of al-Tahtawi in the School of Languages. Jalal began his career as a member of the Translation Bureau. From the beginning he was interested in French literature, mainly drama, and translated several plays into colloquial Egyptian Arabic verse based on the *zajal*, a popular Arabic meter in strophic form. His voluminous translations included several comedies by Moliere – *Le Tartuffe* (al-Shaykh Matluf), *Les Femmes Savantes* (al-Nisa al-Alimat), *L'Ecole des maris* (Madrasat al-Azwaj), *L'Ecole des Femmes* (Madrasat al-Nisa), and *Les Facheux* (al-Thuqala) – *Paul et Virginie* by Bernardin de Saint Pierre, La Fontaine's fables, and several of Racine's tragedies. He wrote a play entitled *al-Khaddamin wa al-Mukhaddimin* (Domestic Servants and Employers) in the *zajal* meter.

The translations were first intended to amuse the readers who love stories and adventures and were not particular about the quality. Moreover, some translators started translating without an adequate knowledge of the original language. The most glaring example was the rendering of Hugo's *Les Misérables* by Hafiz Ibrahim, who did not know French (Badr 125). However, the Arab writers tried to overcome this problem by making a distinction between *tarjamah* (literal translation of the foreign text) and *ta'rib* (producing an Arabic version of the original text). Al-Manfaluti, for example, adapted *Pail et Virginie* of Bernadine de St. Pierre and called it *al-Fadila* (Mahdi 13). According to Latifa al-Zayyat, in *The Movement of Literary Translations*, the subject matter included oriental tales, historical fiction, love stories, social novels, picaresque and detective novels (Badr 126). The last were mainly translated from the works of Sir Walter Scott and Alexandre Dumas. The famous translations were: Scott's *Coeur de Lion* by

Ya'qub Saruf; Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Farida Atiyya; Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* by Najib Haddad and *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Bashara Shadid. Other individual translations of a higher order include Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* by Mohammed al-Siba'ii and *The Resurrection* of Tolstoy by Rashid Haddad (127-31).

Generally, the early translations were weak since Arabic prose was not fully developed. It was either pompous and extravagant or contained a lot of colloquial idioms. That is why translations appeared artificial when rendered in the old rhetoric fashion. Realising the need for a plain and direct style, writers experimented with a mixture of classical and semi-classical journalistic styles including some colloquialisms. The main style to dominate was the journalistic which tended to be 'busy' and 'easy.' The simplification of Arabic prose was one of the major contributions of the translators' activities. More importantly, translations brought about the birth and development of literary genres that were not prevalent in classical Arabic. The drama, novel and short story grew directly as a result of the translations and have become an integral part of modern Arabic literature (Mahdi 13).

1.5 Isma'il and Westernisation

The process of modernisation was continued by the Khedive Isma'il, Mohammed Ali's grandson, in whose reign (1863-1879) many native and European schools were established. In addition, under his guidance the whole system of education underwent dramatic changes which affected the development of literature (Moosa, *The Origins* 7). Although the Europeanisation of Egypt was built eventually upon the foundation laid by Mohammed Ali, he was less interested in education *per se* than in the aggrandisement of

his political ambition to create an empire. Unlike his grandfather, Isma'il showed remarkable interest in promoting culture and he was genuinely interested in popular education (including education of girls), which was organised by his able minister of education Ali Mubarak (1824-1893), an engineer who was himself a product of the new secular school system (7).

By the 1860s Arabic had replaced the Turkish as the official language of Egypt. Isma'il also allowed a large number of Christian missions to establish schools, where many Egyptian children, girls as well as boys, received their education in European languages, mainly French. In 1872, he established *Dar Al-Ulum* (The Teachers' Training College), which aimed at combining traditional Islamic and Arabic culture with Western learning (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 11). He founded learned societies and a museum and encouraged the liberal arts. In 1870 he set up *Dar al-Kutub* (The National Library). Moreover, he established *Madrasat al-Idarah* (The School of Administration) which produced qualified government personnel and prepared the future political leaders of Egypt.

The educational revival under Isma'il had one important consequence for modern Arabic literature: theatre was introduced in Egypt. He established *Madrasat al-Komedia* (The Theatre of Comedy) in 1868 and *Dar al-Opera* (Khedive Theatre of Opera) in 1869. These were probably intended less to meet a public demand than to show the Khedive's policy of Westernising Egypt. Since native literature could not provide the theatre and the opera with sufficient subject matter, the borrowing of themes from European or ancient Egyptian and Arabic sources became imperative (Moosa, *The Origins* 11). The most prominent works acted during this period were Verdi's *Rigoletto and Aida*, whose plot

was derived by the French archaeologist Mariette Pasha (1821-1882) from papyri sources. While the establishment of the theatre did not create an indigenous drama, it did afford writers (except Ya'qub Sannu, to be discussed later), the opportunity to adapt or arabicise and egyptionise many Western plays. They could also experiment with dramas whose themes were drawn from Arabic history (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 11).

1.6 Islam and Westernisation

Generally, Westernisation was problematic in a Muslim country. Not even Isma'il himself was prepared to shed some of his 'oriental' ways such as, for example, polygamy, an attack on which seems to have been the reason why the dramatist Ya'qub Sannu incurred his displeasure and was ordered to close down his theatre . The key issue that preoccupied the minds of the Arab intellectuals was how to modernise while remaining Muslims. However the problem did not arise in the case of Christian Arabs, some of whom like Farah Antun (1874-1922) and Shibli Shumayyil (1860-1917) believed in the need to separate secular and religious powers, and also like al-Shidyaq who adopted an anti-clerical stance or even advocated secularisation. The need for modernisation, however, was keenly felt by all when the supremacy of the West was a fact that could no longer be ignored (12).

The nineteenth century religious reform movement in Egypt and Syria, the two leading intellectual centres of *al-Nahdah*, was promoted by the desire to catch up with the modern world. The members of what Albert Hourani called the first generation of modern thinkers (up to 1870), that of al-Tahtawi of Egypt and Khayr al-Din of Tunisia (1810-1889), were impressed by what they saw in Europe, which for them stood for material progress and science rather than the political power and aggressive expansion of

which later generation were made painfully aware. Their problem was “how to reconcile reason and the rationalism of the French Enlightenment with *Shari’ah*, the divine law of Islam, and how to reconcile the need of *Ummah*, the Community of Muslims, with those of *watan*, the nation” (12).

Nevertheless, for the subsequent generation the situation had radically changed. It was no longer the question of Islam trying to cope or catch up with the West, but one of survival, of fighting against external danger. For example, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) preached the need to revitalise Islam, to oppose the autocratic government of Muslim despots, to limit absolute rule by constitution, to unite the Muslims so that they could fight against the European intervention. Furthermore, he insisted that Egyptians should endeavour to achieve national unity in order to fight British occupation. Mohammed Abduh was more moderate than al-Afghani; his position was one of eclecticism with a strong nationalist Mu’tazilite component (13). He held that Islam was never opposed to science or rational enquiry, that a distinction must be drawn between the permanent core of Islam, namely its simple doctrines, and its inessential elements, which may be changed according to individual judgment.

The younger generation of writers and litterateurs who had been profoundly influenced by Mohammed Abduh continued this Islamic apologetic tradition, especially as after the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate by Ataturk in 1924 and Western attacks on this religion in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was felt in some quarters that Islam was in grave danger. In Egypt, Taha Hussein (1889-1973), Mohammed Hussein Haykal (1888-1956), Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad (1889-1964), and Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987), tried to defend Islam or to make it more relevant to the problems of

contemporary Egyptian as well as Arabic societies by treating themes from Islamic history from certain angles or by writing a large number of Islamic biographies, including that of the Prophet Mohammed, or else by pointing out that Classical Arabic, the language of Koran, is no obstacle to progress (Mahdi 14). Seen in this context, it is not surprising that the very writers, who were enthusiastic about Western literature and thought and were anxious to introduce these to the modern Arab reader, devoted so much of their energy to write about Islam.

1.7 Pioneers of *al-Nahdah*

Al-Nahdah was an outcome of the contributions of the men of letters of the Levant and Egypt and the leaders of important reform movements. It would be useful to highlight some of their contributions. In the Levant, scholars were either patronised by rulers or nurtured by the Church. The court of the Shihabi Prince Bashir II of the Lebanon was the meeting place of the famous poets Nikula Yusuf al-Turk (1763-1828), Butrus Ibrahim Karama (1774-18610), Amin al-Jundi (1814-1887), and Nasif al-Yaziji (1800-1871). Al-Yaziji was not only a court poet but also a prose writer who played an important role in reviving the classical idiom. Moreover, his book, *Majmaa'a al-Bahrain* (The Conjunction of the Two Seas) written in the traditional *maqama* style of al-Hariri and al-Hamadani, shows his mastery over Arabic language (Heywood 56). He also wrote important books on the Arabic language and grammar.

Ahmed Faris al-Shidyaq (1805-1887), another pioneer of *al-Nahdah*, was known for his studies in lexicography. Al-Shidyaq called for a modern arrangement in Arabic dictionaries, i.e. in alphabetical order, instead of the traditional rhyme order based on final root-letter. In his dictionary, *Sirr al-Layal* (Secret of the Nights), al-Shidyaq began

with the gutturals to support the theory of onomatopoeic origin of language. He also treated two letters anagrammatically, for example b-d with d-b and r-d with d-r. In this way, he was reverting to the theory of bilateral origin of Arabic roots which Khalil Ibn Ahmed had originated in the eighteenth century (Mahdi 14). A versatile scholar, al-Shidyaq assisted in the translation of the Bible, for which he travelled to England.

Other pioneers of *al-Nahdah* were Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883) and Suleiman al-Bustani (1865-1925). Butrus was the founder of the first national school in the Levant and a school for girls. He also compiled a two-volume dictionary arranged in the modern order called *Muhit al-Muhit* (Circumference of the Ocean). Among his writings *The Life of Napoleon* and *Commentary on the Diwan of al-Mutanabbi* are well known. His outstanding contribution is his work on the Arabic encyclopaedia *Da'ira al-Ma'arif*, later volumes of which were completed by other members of al-Bustani family. Similarly Suleiman translated Homer's *Iliad* with a preface noted for its literary value. Factually, the *Iliad* was the first introduction of epic verse into Arabic and the translation was a masterpiece. Moreover, Sulaiman al-Bustani was the first to employ methods of modern literary criticism in Arabic (Hourani 67-83).

In Egypt, al-Tahtawi as a prominent pioneer of *al-Nahdah* was a unique figure in the history of Arabic thought in the nineteenth century. He was the first Egyptian intellectual who immensely understood Western values which he transmitted to his conservative society without prejudices (L. Awad, *al-Mu'aththirat* 7-9). His writings and progressive ideas helped in constructing a new social and cultural foundation of his society. He called for a re-evaluation of the archaic traditions that had impeded the progress of Arabic Egyptian civilisation. Despite his traditional Azharite schooling and

rigid religious upbringing, al-Tahtawi revealed an open mind which assimilated and appreciated European ideas and civilisation. His fellow-religionists, however, considered such foreign notions morally harmful and hostile to their way of life (Moosa, *The Origins* 6).

Apparently, al-Tahtawi played an important role in Egypt's cultural life but he did not rank high as a litterateur in the strict sense of the word. His best known work today is *Takhlis al-Ibriz fi Talkhis Baris* (Extraction of Gold in Summarising Life in Paris, 1834) and *Manahij al-Adab al-Misriyyah* (Approaches of Egyptian Literature, 1869) in which he expressed his respect for the nationality and good organisation of social and political institutions of the West, and the civic virtues such as the love of the motherland (al-watan) – some regard him as the first Egyptian nationalist – and qualities which he advocated as necessary for the betterment of Islamic society in Egypt and the Arab world. In his book, *Takhlis al-Ibriz* he records his experiences as a student in Paris. The book is distinguished by its style which for its day was uncommonly simple and easy to read. The rhyming title still has a touch of mannerism, but the work itself is not written in an affected *saj'* (rhymed prose). It is an entertaining description of the French society and of chief French public institutions, written from the point of view of a sympathetic onlooker, not of a bigoted *shaykh* or imam. Even French customs alien to him, such as the treatment of women, are described without prejudices (Brugman, *Introduction* 20).

From a literary point of view, al-Tahtawi was important mainly for the development of modern Arabic prose style. Even if his later works were not written in the same clear and simple style as *Takhlis al-Ibriz*, a work which easily lent itself to this style, his later prose also was great improvement in the clarity and efficiency compared to

the ornate style in which many of his younger contemporaries still felt obliged to write. Moreover, al-Tahtawi contributed greatly to the development of translation through his work for the School of Languages and Egyptian journalism, also through his work for *al-Wqa'i al-Misriyyah* (The Egyptian Fact Sheet) and for the magazine *Rawdhat al-Madaris* (Garden of Schools). It is not surprising that he should have been described as the first Egyptian to write an article (*maqal*) in Arabic (Mahdi 15).

Among the great reformers Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1898) played a very significant role. An Afghani by birth as his name suggests, al-Afghani made Egypt his home. As a revolutionist and a radical reformer, he attempted to break the hold of scholasticism which had encased Islam since medieval time. Al-Afghani first called for reform in religion, next for curbing the economic and political deterioration, and identified himself with the movement leading to the Orabi Revolt of 1882 (15). Although he left few writings, al-Afghani's liberal ideas profoundly stirred the sentiments of Muslims. He tried to revolutionise the Islamic world by constantly reminding Muslims that they were intelligent and able to manage their own affairs and live as a respected civilised nation. Al-Afghani believed that Muslims had lost their pride in their heritage and culture, and that they should do something to revitalise it. He may have viewed himself as a kind of "Messiah" ordained to redeem the Islamic world from the oppression of the Western invaders (Kiddie 170).

Mohammed Abduh (1849-1905), another reformer and pioneer, was probably al-Afghani's most devout follower. Apprehensive about coercive and revolutionary methods of achieving political aims, Abduh believed in gradual but constructive reform rather than in forced but short-lived changes. Therefore, he preferred to criticise the unjust rule of

Riyadh Pasha rather than collaborate with the revolutionary element in the army led by Ahmed Orabi (1839-1911). He also believed, with some justification, that the Egyptians were not ready for the revolution. He was particularly astonished at the radical enthusiasm of the middle and poor classes. A revolution erupted in 1881-1882 but was suppressed, and Egypt was occupied by British forces and came under British rule (Moosa, *The Origins* 15).

Even though Mohammed Abduh's various activities were mainly devoted to the revitalisation of the Arabic language, the purification of Islam from superstition, and the reformation of al-Azhar, he also advocated the writings of the novel and encouraged novelists. It is reported that under the inspiration and direction of Mohammed Abduh, Said al-Bustani (d. 1901) wrote his story *Dhat al-Khidr* (The Veiled One, 1884). Abduh, who regarded the novel as a useful instrument of social reform, wrote also an article in *al-Ahram* which reviewed most popular books of his time (May 11th, 1881). He found out that the audience/readers preferred works of history, articles dealing with moral subjects, and novels. However, Abduh considered fiction of secondary importance, and his role in its development never went beyond offering encouragement or complimenting others (Moosa, *The Origins* 16).

1.8 New Conception of Literature

As a result of those socio-cultural, political and historical changes, a new conception of literature emerged. The medieval view which had dominated until the nineteenth century and which regarded writing as either morally or spiritually edifying or else entertaining through mastery of language and verbal skill, gradually gave way to the attitude that literature should reflect and indeed change the social reality (Badawi,

Modern Arabic Literature 15). The patron prince or ruler who encouraged poets to gather in his court in order to sing of his achievements and immortalise his name in memorable *qasidas*, formal sonorous odes, was being replaced by a middle-class reading public, educated in secular and not theocentric schools, and who as a result of the introduction of printing press had access to printed books, newspapers and magazines.

Admittedly, in a society where the degree of illiteracy was extremely high, the size of the reading public initially was very small, but their number grew rapidly with the spread of popular education. Therefore, the poet-craftsman who offered his panegyrical verse to the highest bidder was replaced by the 'inspired' poet, the man of feelings who valued sincerity or the campaigner who had strong views about wider issues, such as the illnesses of his society. The traditional prose writer who sought to entertain the privileged learned minority by drawing, but not too heavily, on diverse aspects of knowledge or who embroidered his epistles to fellow writers or his *maqamaat* (narratives of sorts in rhyming prose) with all kinds of figures of speech (*badi'e*), in the most artificial manner imaginable, gave way to the concerned essayist or journalist burning with reforming zeal in matters, intellectual, religious and political, no less than in language and literature. Whatever might be the attitude to the mimetic view of literature nowadays in the era of Post-structuralism and deconstruction, it is the emergence of literature as a mimesis, as imitation of life, which signalled the arrival of modern Arabic literature on the scene (16). Instead of the ideal types provided in traditional medieval literature, presented in the most elaborate language, concrete observable reality became the subject-matter of writers, particularly in the newly imported forms of drama and fiction.

More than novel and short story, drama has become an integral part of modern Arabic literature. It has been an important facet of contemporary Arabic culture particularly since 1950s. It has attracted more attention than any other artistic genre with the possible exception of cinema (Wittingham 13). More importantly, Arabic drama has become integrated into the Arabic national identity and has an important role to play in the socio-political life. More details in this regard are offered in the following chapters.

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Chapter Two

Arabic Drama

This chapter attempts to briefly survey the history of Arabic drama in general and Egyptian drama in particular. In fact, drama as a genre (in the Western sense) was characterised by its absence from traditional Arabic literature. Nevertheless, some traditional dramatic forms, such as 'pharaonic drama,' 'maqama,' 'ta'ziya plays' and 'shadow plays' existed in early Arabic literature. Therefore, this chapter explores the growth of drama in Arabic literature, starting with such indigenous dramatic traditions which eclipsed and were back-grounded "as a lack of being from both within and without" (Amine 146). It also attempts to investigate the reasons behind the absence of drama from early Arabic literature, and why these traditional dramatic forms have not been developed by Arabic dramatists. Furthermore, this chapter traces the development of modern Arabic drama, and investigates how Western drama influenced modern Arabic drama, and what are the cultural and political factors that led to such influences. Generally, Arabic drama appeared first in Syria in 1840s at the hands of Marun al-Naqqash and then in Egypt in 1870s in the writing of Ya'qub Sannu. These early Arab literary scholars introduced Western drama and theatre into the Arab World by means of translation, adaptation and arabicisation. However, modern dramatists such as Tawfiq al-Hakim, who tended to be eclectic and experimented with several forms and techniques of Western drama, wrote original dramatic pieces.

Ancient Arabic literature appears to have no place for drama. Within Arab society in the pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods, literature favoured poetry and rhetoric. Arab poetry was oral in nature and was by no means intended to serve as a dialogue on stage in an imitative piece of action. Furthermore, the Arabs of the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. neglected Greek drama and

preferred to translate Greek philosophy and medicine.[1] Even ancient Syrian scholars, who introduced Arabs to Greek philosophy and translated many of these works into Arabic, had no concept of Greek dramatic genres. Thus, Abu Bishr Matta ibn Yunus (d. 940) in his translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* understood "tragedy" and "comedy" to mean "praise" and "satire." This misreading led the Arab philosopher Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198) to apply what he thought to be Aristotle's definition of tragedy and comedy to traditional types of Arabic poetry, *madh* (praise) and *hija* (satire) which he supported by examples from native poetry (A. Badawi *Fann* 95-96).

2.1 The Indigenous Dramatic Tradition

Arabs did not have dramatic literature similar to the Western forms, yet they had several traditions of performance (i.e. *pharaonic drama, maqama, ta'ziya plays* and *shadow plays*), which can be construed to have predisposed them to appropriate the Western model of drama. Pharaonic drama is an Egyptian drama that is 2,700 years older than Greek drama. *Maqama*, a unique Arabic form which originated in the Arabic Middle Ages, is based on a single anecdote and features a hero, usually a wondering rogue, in a solitary role, as narrator or monologist. A passion play which is called *ta'ziya* (condolence) was performed by the Shi'ite Muslims to commemorate the historical martyrdom of Hussein (the Prophet Mohammad's grandson). This is perhaps the most tragic form in the Islamic performing traditions. Shadow plays (*khayal al- zill*) were performed in streets, market places, occasionally at court and in private houses. Generally, Arabic drama is viewed as a product of some deeply rooted attitudes and tendencies inherited from the past history of indigenous dramatic or semi-dramatic tradition. More importantly, these traditional dramatic forms are not only "mnemonic devices that assist in the preservation of

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[1] See Tawfiq al-Hakim's introduction to *al-Malik Odib* 10-11. For an English translation of this introduction see *Plays, Prefaces and Postscripts of Tawfiq al-Hakim*, translated by Hutchins 273-89.

history but are also effective strategies for maintaining cultural difference" (Gilbert and Tompkins 54). Therefore the knowledge of such history is essential in order to see the manner in which the imported form was conceived and how it subsequently developed, for the imported form was in several ways determined by the local historic or theatrical tradition (Badawi, *Early* 7).

2.1.1 Pharaonic Drama

Pharaonic drama appeared in Egypt before Greek drama. That is to say, the people of ancient Egypt had a drama of their own long before the Greeks. The Greek historian Herodotus had a chance to watch a Pharaonic drama (a drama that is 2,700 years older than Greek drama). In 3200 BCE the most ancient Pharaonic play, which dealt with the theme of creation of the world and the Isis-Osiris-Horus legend, was composed. Pharaonic plays, however, were strictly religious and confined to the walls of the temples, though it is maintained that some plays achieved a degree of freedom from religious *telos* and transcended the temple as a religious site. Pharaonic drama, then, was born and buried within the temple, as Louis Awad maintains:

> There was a theatre in Egypt. And that was five thousand years ago. Egyptians knew theatre two thousand years before the Greeks. Nonetheless, Greek theatre survived, whereas the Egyptian died. In Egypt religion begot art; and in ... Egypt, religion killed art. (12)

Egyptian drama remained one of the secrets of a deeply rooted civilisation until the advent of Western archaeologists at the end of the nineteenth century. And even then the fallacy that had sustained the Greek theatre's originality survived. Why did such drama not reach the Arabs of the Middle East? This is not an easy question to answer, yet it is maintained that there was a lack of anthropomorphism similar to that of the Greeks, or rather that there was a rigid

Manichaeism characterised as superhuman/human, sacred/profane, and that "the gap between the human and the divine was too wide to be bridged, and therefore the ancient Egyptian theatre remained and died in the temple" (Gassner and Guinn 21). Pharaonic drama on the whole was not freed from theological constraints, and therefore was unable to transcend the temple and embrace the general public in secular spaces like the Greek agora. Because of the rigid opposition between the human and superhuman, this drama was not transported into the public and secular sphere. However, the very existence of such drama jeopardises the Western claim of dramatic origin (Amine 147).

Ancient Egypt's performing traditions were strongly affiliated with the cult of Osiris, which for several millennia held the foremost place in their spiritual life. Ample archaeological evidence of the existence of such performing traditions "'is provided for us by inscriptions and sculptures on Egyptian monuments going back as far as the Sixth Dynasty, by numerous papyrus texts, many of which are of great antiquity … illustrated with pictures of various scenes in the life and cult of Osiris and Isis" (Ridgeway 94-95). Besides the material evidence of the existence of such performing traditions among the ancient Egyptians, Herodotus, the Greek classical authority, "informs us that Isis and Osiris were the only gods worshipped by all the Egyptians, and he terms Isis the Moon (Selene), and Osiris Dionysus" (95). Another classical authority, Julius Firmicus Maternus contends that the ritualistic formulae held at the temples of Osiris were acts of commemoration of the dead hero and king rather than mere magical rites that ensure fertility as proposed by some Egyptologists. Maternus writes,

> Osiris and Isis were brother and sister, and Typhon was the husband of Isis. Typhon, on discovering that Isis had an illicit passion for her brother, treacherously slew him. He tore the body in pieces and scattered the quivering

> limbs along the banks of the Nile. Isis, in horror, thrust her husband, Typhon, from her, and taking with her sister, Nephthys, and the dog-headed Anubis, she resolved to seek the limbs of Osiris and to bury them. With the aid of Anubis she found and buried them. Osiris, who had been a just man, was henceforth worshipped in the temples under the form of a portrait figure. Typhon, on account of his pride, haughtiness, and arrogance, was held in abomination. In the shrines of Osiris *his murder and dismemberment were annually commemorated with weeping, wailing, and great lamentation*. His worshippers shave their heads and beat their breasts, gashed their shoulders, and inflicted other wounds on their bodies in imitation of the cuts and gashes that Typhon made in the body of Osiris. (qtd in Amine 148)

Maternus' description reveals a basic characteristic of Pharaonic drama: its re-enactment of human guilt in commemoration of the dead. Such behaviour, informed by a strong metaphysical input, is found in the Greek Dionysian rituals as well as in the Shi'ites' ritual passion play (Amine 148).

2.1.2 Maqama

Another form of indigenous dramatic tradition is *maqama* (plural, *maqamaat*). It is an Arabic rhymed prose literary from, with short poetic passages. It is derived from the root *qaama* which means 'he stood' and in this case it means to stand in a literary discussion in order to orate. However, the earliest meaning of *maqama* is "an assembly" or "a place of meeting" (Moosa, *The Origins* 121). The term was used in this sense by many pre-Islamic poets, such as Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma, whereas Labid ibn Rabia used it to signify the people who attended such an assembly. In the early Islamic era, *maqama* denoted the audience of the caliph, in whose

presence a witty person would deliver a speech or tell a tale, and it came also to refer to the tale told in the presence of the caliph. Later, it acquired the meaning of “a narration” or “an episode narrated by an eloquent individual” (121). In this sense, it is properly applied to the tales of Badi al-Zaman al-Hamadani and his followers.

Basically, each tale takes the form of a short narration related by an imaginary *rawi* (narrator) who describes the adventures of a fictitious hero. The hero, a rogue and beggar, is generally endowed with the supreme gift of rhetorical speech. The beauty of his language not only leaves his hearers spell-bound, but forces them, almost involuntarily, to reach into their pockets and shower him with money. Always restless, this rogue goes from country to country and from town to town, using his power of eloquence to get more money. Each *maqama* focuses on a single event which may either be drawn from experience or invented by the hero. Sometimes, he chooses to entertain his casual audience with another subject, such as poetry. He may roam into the realm of metaphysics, enchanting his listeners with tales about ghosts and evil. He may assume the role of a preacher to remind the people of the true precepts of their religion. Sometimes, the central figure of the tale may even be an animal, as in *al-Maqama al-Asadiyya* (The Lion’s Maqama), in which the same author provides a detailed description of the lion’s life and character and enumerates his various names in Arabic language (122).

The two classical exponents of the *maqama* are al-Hamadhani (967-1007), the composer of this work, and the later and better-known al-Hariri (1054-1122). Al-Hamadhani was born in Hamadhan, the ancient Ecbatana, in what is now Iran (to the southwest of Tehran) and spent his life as a wandering scholar. The *maqamaat* of al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri have a similar structure. They both consist of a series of unrelated episodes involving a wandering narrator, and a trickster protagonist. In the *maqamaat* of al-Hamadhani, the narrator is an alter ego of

Hamadhani, a wandering scholar named Isa ibn Hisham. In each tale, he encounters a mysterious rogue named Abul-Fath al-Iskanderi. Iskanderi wanders, surviving on his wits and a silver tongue, running scams, always one step ahead of an angry mob. Each story is a small capsule description of a sometimes absurd predicament that the characters find themselves in. Nonetheless the stories are often used as framing for discourses on serious topics such as predestination, the vanity of human life, and the inevitability of death and judgment.

Maqama, both in content and structure, is more limited in scope and theme than the modern short story. It is a dialogue between the narrator and the central figure, superbly framed in a highly rhetorical rhymed prose. There is no unified plot in the modern literary sense, and the aesthetic purpose is not primary. Its main objective is unmistakably didactic and rhetorical: to present to the Arab audience the quintessential beauty of their language. Thus, the tales are characterised by highly ornamental language, embellished with simile and metaphor. The narrative and its significance are less important. Because of its loose and episodic structure, its lack of plot and description, and its dialogue form, *maqama* can hardly be considered an antecedent of the modern short story. Properly polished and improved, it might have developed into a viable literary genre. With form exalted over content, it remained stylised. Furthermore, Arabic society, which had been declining since medieval times and was conservative in religious, social, and literary matters, was unable to nurture the first-rate authors needed to develop this and other viable literary models (122).

Some recent Arab critics have sought to draw an analogy between the *maqama* and certain European literary types, particularly those of Spanish origin. Shawqi Dayf, for example, asserts that *maqama* was introduced into Europe, along with other Arabic works, because of the intellectual interrelations between East and West in medieval times. He specifies that several of

al- Hariri's *maqamaat* were translated into Latin, German, and English. Dayf cautiously notes that the impact of the *maqama* upon European literature, unlike that of the *Thousand and One Nights*, is hard to trace because of its concentration on rhetorical, rather than narrative, style. Nevertheless, Dayf attempts to link the Spanish *novella picaresque* (rogue novel) with *maqama*, largely in terms of similarities between the Spanish *picaro* and the fictitious characters Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari of Badi al-Zaman and Abu Zayd al-Saruji of al-Hariri (Dayf, *al-Maqama* 10-11).

Another scholar, Fakhri Abu al-Su'ud, argues that the *maqamaat* of Badi al-Zaman occupy a place in Arabic literature comparable to that held by the works of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in English literature. Abu al-Su'ud traces the parallel emergence of a fictional form characterised by social consciousness, analysis of individual characters, skilful use of artistic devices, and unity of thought. This argument, however, rests on a weak analogy between the narrators of the *maqamaa*t and the invented personalities which populated the Tattler and the Spectator: Isaac Bickerstaff, Sir Roger de Coverley, Sir Andrew Freeport, and Will Honeycomb, along with a few female characters. Unlike the restless, ever-wandering heroes of the *maqamaat*, these characters are static and stereotyped (except Sir Roger) although endowed with some measure of individuality and humour. Abu al-Su'ud maintains, quite unrealistically, that had *maqama* appeared in the eighth century when Arabic literature was in its infancy, rather than in the tenth century: it would have been followed by developments which corresponded to those in English literature after the time of Addison and Steele, and would have led eventually to a full-fledged Arabic novel (653-54).

In the modem period, *maqama* was revived by writers throughout the Arab world, among them Faris ibn Yusuf al-Shidyaq (d. 1887), Ibrahim al-Ahdab (d. 1891), Abd Allah

Nadim (d. 1896), Ibrahim al-Muwaylihi (d. 1905), Muhammad al-Muwaylihi (d. 1930), Hafiz Ibrahim (d. 1932), Muhammad Lutfi Jumu'a (d. 1953), and many others. Moreover, there were two distinct lines of development within this revival: while some writers, including the Lebanese al- Yaziji and al-Shidyaq, followed the traditional form of *maqama*, Egyptian writers, such as al-Muwaylihi and Hafiz Ibrahim, attempted to experiment with it (Moosa, *The Origins* 124).

2.1.3 Ta'ziya Plays

The passion play, *ta'ziya* (literally "mourning; condolence") is another traditional dramatic form which commemorates the martyrdom of the son of the forth Caliph Ali, and the descendents of the Prophet Mohammed by the ruling house of Umayyad. This type of folk drama is performed by Shi'ite Muslims (i.e. the followers of the house of Ali) during the first third of the Muslim month of Muharram, the tenth of Muharram being their great day of mourning as it is the anniversary of the battle of Karbala (A.H.60/AD 680) in which Al-Hussein fell fighting against the Umayyad Caliph Yazid. *Ta'ziya* plays are generally performed in Persian but some have been done in Turkish and Arabic. In Iraq the more usual term for their performance is *shabih* (likeness), because the actors provide a likeness, a mimesis, to the historical figures whose actions and deeds are portrayed (Badawi, *Early* 8).

Ta'ziya plays are continually reworked and added to by poets who actually appear at the beginning of the performance to introduce the dramatic spectacle with appropriate verses praising and lamenting the dead. Accompanying the actors is a choir of boys playing the roles of mourning women and by gesture and sound expressing overwhelming grief. The characters themselves are numerous and they include angels (played by boys) like Gabriel and Biblical and Koranic figures such as Eve, Jacob, Mary and various prophets. Even animals are included like the lion that pays homage to Hussein's head. Every ounce of emotion is wrung out of the

situation in order to put across the plight of the descendants of the Prophet in the manner of, but more extreme than, the *Wakefield Miracle Play* of the Crucifixion (8-9). Moreover, the performers weep and ask for forgiveness for their personal sins. However, the performance contains many grotesque elements of real torture and violence, which the performers inflict upon themselves.

Structurally, the events of *ta'ziya* may not be performed in a particular chronological order. Nevertheless, many of the elements of drama are there. A stage is especially erected for the purpose in a public place which may be even a mosque. Furthermore, specific stage properties are used such as coffin 'with receptacles for holding lights, also Hussein's bow, lance, spear and banner' (qtd in Badawi, *Early* 9). Although an appeal is made to the audience's imagination, some realistic effects are carefully sought, a heap of straw may represent the sand of the desert of Karbala but real blood is employed. The reaction of the participants and the audience can be so overwhelming that violence directed against self as well as others has been known to ensure. However, despite such cruel realism and melodramatic sensationalism, the sincerity of the participants was known on occasions to be such that even foreign spectators, far from dismissing it as repulsive mass wallowing in grief, were deeply moved by the sight (9).

Comte de Gobineau (1866) argued that *ta'ziya* is ranked with Greek drama 'as a great and serious affair, engaging the heart and life of the people who have given birth to it' (9). In comparison, he found the Latin, English, French and German dramas to be 'a mere pastime or amusement, more or less intellectual and elegant' (Arnold 59-60). Arnold, in his essay "A Persian Passion Play" (included in his *Essays in Criticism*) argues that a better parallel was to be found in the Ammergau Passion Play, since the plays turn entirely on one subject, namely the sufferings of the Imam Hussein and his family (60). According to Badawi, Arnold is nearer the

mark, as there is much in common between *ta'ziya* and the medieval Mystery Plays produced by the guilds (Badawi, *Early* 9). Like the latter, the performance of *ta'ziya* is a corporate annual event in which people willingly collaborate and the expenses incurred, including the poets' fees, are paid by the well-to-do as an act of piety. Whoever builds the stage 'builds himself a palace in Paradise' (Strothmann 590). It is worth mentioning that *ta'ziya* , due to its Shi'ite origin, sentiment and manner of presenting Islamic history, has not spread to the Sunnis parts of the Islamic world; it remains more important in Persian than in Arabic and more relevant to Iraq than to Egypt (Badawi, *Early* 10).

2.1.4 Shadow Plays

Besides *pharaonic play* and *ta'ziya*, the shadow play remains the most substantial proof of the Eurocentric fallacy of dramatic origin. Shadow drama was an acceptable form of entertainment in Fatimid Egypt, even though it may not have been quite as well known as elsewhere in the Islamic world at that time. The shadow play was performed during the medieval period in the Arab world. This genre was referred to in the poetry of Abu Nawas (747-814?):

> The wine rises sparkling in the cup
> Which is decorated with flawless drawings
> Like the shadow player when he darkens
> And plays with the string tune… (Mubarak 7)

It was not confined to farces or cheap comic shows but probably dealt with moral, religious, or historical themes. The medieval allegorical habit of mind enabled the cultivated audience to see moral or religious lessons even in dramatic entertainments such as the shadow theatre. According to Ibn al-Farid, some of the themes of the shadow theatre ranged from the heroic to the common and homely: armies fighting, land and sea battles, knights and infantry heavily armed with

swords, spares and arrows etc. (Badawi, *Early* 13). The characters also include supernatural beings of fearful appearance. At the other extremes, we find fisherman catching fish with nets, fowlers spreading their gins for unsuspecting birds, benighted camels racing through the deserts, ships tossed by the waves or wrecked by sea monsters, etc.

In shadow plays, which were performed in the streets and market places and occasionally also at court and in private houses, the action was represented by shadows cast upon a large screen by flat, coloured leather puppets held in front of a torch, while the hidden master, *al-Rayyis* or *al-Muqaddim*, delivered the dialogue and the songs, helped in this by associates, sometimes as many as five persons including a youth who imitated the voice of women. Like other dramas, shadow theatre was based on a set of conventions, and it seems that buffoonery was one of these conventions. Buffoonery is a means to an end for each genre has its own method, the end being to produce good literature (*adab a'ali*) not cheap and vulgar writing (*adab ad-dun*). This idea is reinforced by the words spoken by the Presenter (*al-Rayyis*) who claims that *khayal* (shadow) is a literary art that can be appreciated only by *ahl al-adab* (men of breeding/literary taste). The shadow play is not mere entertainment or pastime but a mixture of seriousness and levity and it requires some intelligence to see the point of it (14).

Basically, the earliest Arab author to discuss systematically the technique of shadow play, without however using the term *khayah al-zill*, was the scholar Ibn al-Hayatham (d.1039) in his work on optics , *Kitab al- Manazir* (Book of Optics). He defines *khayal* as "(translucent) figures (of characters and animals) which the *mukhayyil* (shadow mover) moves so that their shadows appear upon the wall which is behind the curtain and upon the curtain itself" (Al-Haytham 408). There are holes pierced in the bodies of the shadow play figures so that they may be held against the screen with a stick, the Presenter holds another stick in his other hand in order to move their

heads, arms and legs. The light of candle or lamp placed behind them casts coloured shadows of the translucent figures on the white screen. The audience sitting in front of the screen saw only the shadows of the figures. The man who moved the figures spoke or sang the text just as though the moving figures were speaking or singing (Badawi, *Three* 6). The performance took place in a fully arranged theatrical space in which a screen separated stage auditorium. Ultimately, the shadow play remains the only performing tradition in the medieval Arab world that relies on a written script.

Ibn Hazm (994-1064) uses the term *khayal-al-zill* in his *Kitab al-Akhlaq wa'l-Siy*ar (Book of Conducts and Characters) in speaking of a different type of shadow play which may represent one of the first stages in the development of this art. He describes a system which gives the impression of a Chinese magic lantern. He likens this world to a shadow play in which images are mounted on wooden wheel revolving rapidly so that one group of images disappears as another appears, as a generation follows generation in the world (Monroe 98-99). This is the earliest attempt to be found in Arabic to see philosophical significance in the shadow play. The poet Ahmed al-Bayruti provides further information concerning the staging of the shadow play and its significance:

> I see this universe as a shadow play;
>
> Its Mover is the much-forgiving Lord.
>
> The right-hand box is Eve's womb;
>
> The left-hand box is the grave. (qtd in Hamada 45)

The presenter has two boxes from which he takes his figures, which are arranged in it in the order of their appearance laying them in the second after they have been displayed. The boxes

respectively symbolise the womb and the grave. The whole universe is but a shadow play, with God as the *muharrik* [Mover] (Moreh 46).

As far as the terminology of the shadow play is concerned it is commonly designated *khayal al-zill* and sometimes *khayal al-iza*r (very occasionally *khayal al-sitar*). The curtain on which the shadows of the figures are cast is called *izar* or *shash*, and sometimes *sitar*. The figures are called *shukhus*/*ashikhas* or *suwar* (rarely *tamathil*). The plays are known as *babat*, and sometimes *fusul* ("scenes" or "acts"), the former term is being used to both shadow play and live play (53). However, the word *khayal* had, in the *Jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic era) and the first century of Islam, the primary meaning of 'figure' and 'statue,' but it later underwent semantic evolution and acquired besides the various meanings of " imagination" (as the antithesis of *haqiqa*; "truth", reality"), "phantom" and "fantasy." During the third to ninth century it was used as synonym for *hikaya* ("imitation" or "mime"), and by the beginning of the fifth to eleventh century it had completely replaced this term; *khayali* and *mukhayil* were used both for an actor in a live performance and for the presenter of a shadow play (46).

Mohammed Ibn Daniyal Yusuf al-Khuzai (1248-1311) is the name most associated with this tradition and he can be called the first Arab dramatist par excellence. He wrote three shadow plays under the title *Tayf al- Khayal*, "by far the oldest known to us and the only dramatic pieces that have come down to us from the Islamic middle ages" (Badawi *Three* 1). Generally, Ibn Daniyal's plays are considered to be a rich source of information for the social historian. Though they concentrate on certain aspects of medieval Islamic society (in Egypt) they are deeply rooted in social reality (Badawi, *Early* 15). All the three plays: *Tayf al-Khayal* (The Shadow Spirit), *Ajib wa Gharib* (The Amazing and the Stranger), and *al-Mutayyam* (The Love-Stricken One) begin with a short introduction in which the author briefly explains his intention. The

introduction is addressed to the audience by the first character that appears in the first piece. Each of these three shadow plays has its own individual form. Despite their common characteristics as shadow theatre, each of them has its own peculiar atmosphere and theme or themes. Far from being formless, random effusions in verse and rhyming prose, from which passages can be cut at will on grounds of obscenity or whatever, they are fairly well organised creations of a conscious craftsman, both in dramatic technique and in spirit they come very close to medieval European drama, to the Mysteries and Moralities (15).

Generally speaking, the medieval Arabic shadow play is permeated with traces from another genre that was prominent among the Arabs at that time, *al-maqama* (the assembly). Many Arabic critics, such as al-Khousai, argue that the shadow play (*khayal al-zill*) developed from *al-maqama*:

> If Arab culture lacked drama in the European sense, it could certainly pride itself on a literacy 'genre' that was unknown to other nations. The 'maqama' (assembly) undoubtedly has been considered the most perfect form of literary presentation in Arabic literature since it came into being in the eleventh century at the hands of Badi Azzaman al-Hamadani. The imprint he left on this genre has been imitated throughout the ages.… The maqama has played a role in one of the forms of drama known by the Arab as khayal al-zill. (19-20)

Arabs did not only know *pharaonic drama*, *maqama*, *ta'ziya* and *shadow play* but they also knew some other indigenous dramatic forms such as the *samir* (theatre-in-the-round), the *madh* (chants of praises), the *qaraquz* (puppet shows similar to Punch and Judy shows) and the *hakawati* or story-telling. However, these forms have not been dynamised from within because they were not considered as drama. That is why some critics argue that drama was absent from

Arabic literature. In fact, the possible reasons for the lack of dramatic heritage in the Arab world have been continuously debated by Arab and Western critics. According to M. M. Badawi, Islam, being a strictly monotheistic religion, forbade the worship of idols and, therefore, just as it discouraged figurative arts like painting it would not have allowed drama (Badawi, *Early* 4). The fact that Greek drama was strongly repudiated by the early Muslims is mainly due to its paradigmatic multi-theistic constructs. Greek drama's celebration of simulacra and conflict constituted a real danger to the newly established order of the monotheistic Arab-Islamic society (Amine 153). However, there is no mention in the Koran and Sunna of the Prophet Mohammed of any kind of rejection of theatrical practice or of the making of spectacle. Hassan Buhraoui, in his critique of Ahmed Bin Siddiq's attack on theatrical activities in the name of Islam, argues that "among the biased ideas that settled in the minds of the early Muslims under the influence of Orientalists' propaganda and the exaggeration of theologians is that Islam forbade all kinds of visual representation" (qtd in Amine 153). That there is a modern theatrical trend in the Arab world called *al-Masrah al-Islami* (Islamic Theatre) disproves the early claims that Islam forbids theatrical representation.

In his introduction to *al-Malik Odib* (Oedipus the King, 1949), Tawfiq al-Hakim also raises a similar argument. According to al-Hakim, there is no direct prohibition of the dramatic art in Islamic teachings. He also rejects fear of paganism as a reason for the disregard of the early Arab translators for the theatre (20). Al-Hakim argues that the early Arab translators were never reluctant to borrow from non-Islamic or pagan cultures; he cites as examples several translations from the Greeks and the efforts of these translators to mould these works as to suit the Arab mentalities and the Islamic philosophies (20). Al-Hakim also proposes several possible reasons that might explain the Arabs' avoidance of drama. He ascribes the absence of the theatre in the

early Islamic era to two reasons: first, the absence of mythology from the Arab culture which made it difficult for the Muslim mind to understand the Greek dramatic action, and second, the absence of theatre art in both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods which made it impossible for the Arabs to visualise this art form (22-23). It was therefore a lack of the "tool" and not a "permanent hostility" that caused this schism between the Arabic literature and drama (A Said 10). Al-Hakim also considers the pre-Islamic nomadic way of life to be partly responsible for the absence of any form of collective art. He argues that the lack of the necessary stability for the rise of a theatrical activity (similar to that in the Greek and Roman cultures) could be attributed to the Arabs' lifestyle (al-Hakim, *al-Malik* 25). A fourth possible reason which al-Hakim considers is the Arabs' mastery of lyrical poetry. Poetry has been the Arabs' distinguished literary heritage of which they were always proud (26).

Jacob M. Landau, in his *Studies in the Arab Theatre and Cinema*, attributes the absence of the genre in the Arab world until the nineteenth century to the following:

> a) The peoples with whom the Arabs came into close contact had no well-developed theatre, b) Women, particularly if unveiled, were strictly forbidden to appear on the stage. Only the combination of these two reasons may account for the fact that while a large part of the Greek cultural heritage in the various fields of literature, science and thought, no item of the classical drama found its way to Arabic translation until recent years. (1-2)

Initially, Arabs came into contact with Greek drama through Christian Syrian translations, though they developed an ambiguous animosity towards the genre. The same Arabs came into contact with the Turks, Persians and Indians, who had developed their own performing traditions before their encounter with the West. If women by the end of the nineteenth century were

forbidden to appear on the stage, such absence does not in the least obstruct dramatic activity, as Greek and Elizabethan theatres were also exclusively male domains and women were not allowed to appear on the stage until 1660, the period of Restoration drama and the reopening of theatres in England. Therefore, the absence of women in the dramatic activity has never been an obstacle to theatrical activity (Amine 152).

For some critics, these different types of traditional dramatic forms (*shadow play*, *maqama*, *samir* and *qaraquz)* were essentially popular entertainments which, with the possible exception of Ibn Daniyal's works, were not regarded as serious literature and were therefore ignored by literary historians and critics. It is probably for this reasons that they did not develop much in form. On the contrary, their development was arrested; they did not go beyond an elementary stage of dramatic representation (Badawi, *Early* 28), with the obvious exception of some shadow plays. For example, Jacob Landau argues that the shadow play was a means of entertaining the rich and the poor without paying any attention to its artistic and literary attribute. He writes:

> A shadow play is histrionics performed by the casting of shadows on a curtain, visible to the audience. This is a pastime, which entertained even the rich, intellectual highbrow, but in the main it was an amusement enjoyed by the humblest in various countries. (9)

On the textual level, Arabic indigenous performing traditions were excluded from the realm of theatre in its Western form because they were not based on written scripts. That is to say there were no dramatic texts as self-referential scripts that would develop writing for the stage. The idea that there is no dramatic script in the Arab heritage has been appropriated by the Arabic intelligentsia (Amine 56). For example Abdelkrim Berrchid, the founder of Festive

Theatre in Morocco, reproduces the typical discourse that the Arabs have adapted to speak about themselves since the humiliating encounter with the Western 'Other' (that is, since the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798):

> We can mention a basic reality related to Arabic theatre: the absence of a founding text that is the absence of a theatrical unconscious in writing. Such absence makes our writing no more than a duplication (supplement) of an absent text that is necessarily the Western text instead of being a real contribution and a creative writing. How, then, can this founding text be achieved and found? (Berrchid 33)

However, according to Khalid Amine, the absence of an Arabic self-referential dramatic text is "a big lie" and "an effect of the Western surveying gaze" (Amine 156). In fact, the shadow play is the only performing tradition in the medieval Arab world that relies on a written script. George Jacob (1862-1937), an Orientalist, found three manuscripts signed by Ibn Daniel: the first manuscript is in Derenbourg, the second in Istanbul and the third in Cairo. These three scripts had remained unnoticed till George Jacob's first investigations in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus, the self-referential dramatic script that Berrchid refers to was not absent before appropriating the Western model of textual practice, but rather it was eclipsed, back-grounded and dismissed in favour of the Western text (Amine 156).

However, a few modern dramatists employ some of these traditional dramatic forms (or some of their characteristics) in their plays. For example, the influence of the shadow play is discernible in the early popular comedies and in the writings of the early twentieth century writers such as Naguib al-Rihani, Mohammed Taymour, Tawfiq al-Hakim and Yusuf Idris. Gilbert and Tompkins maintain that "When traditional performance elements are incorporated

into a contemporary play, they affect they play's content, structure, and style and consequently, its overall meaning and effect" (54). According to Badawi it is important "to remember those common features of popular traditional dramatic entertainments because they seem to have influenced the imported foreign forms for many years" (29). Song and music, for instance, remained a feature of the Arabic theatre during the first two decades of the twentieth century and they were revived "partly by the influence of Bertolt Brecht, by many post-Revolution avant-garde dramatists" (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 3).

Similarly, modern plays (mostly comedies and dark comedies) followed the line of social and political satires dated back to medieval popular entertainments. This continued into the 1960s and 1970s when plays "constituted a protest against the ruthless crushing of the individual by the all-powerful machine of a totalitarian state" (3). Likewise, the influence of the episodic structure of the shadow play is evident in modern Egyptian plays; for modern Egyptian playwrights

> Had preference for the unilinear, episodic form, and it is significant that they welcomed with alacrity Brecht's epic theatre. The ease with which they employed a Presenter or Narrator to introduce the character of a play or to relate or comment on the action, even when there was no apparent justification for it, could be explained by an atavistic desire to return to the technique of the shadow theatre. (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 4)

In spite of the Western influence, Arabic playwrights attempt to search for a national drama by means of reviving traditional dramatic forms. For example, Yusuf Idris recommends the *samir* theatre (a peasant theatre in the round) similar to the simple form of folk entertainments in villages which retained the medieval elements of song, dance and story-telling

and allowed for a free interaction of performer and audience. With these elements included in modern drama, Idris aspired for a theatre which would achieve "complete involvement in the dramatic act, a state of spiritual elation in which both actor and spectator become one and the same" (qtd in A Said 17).

A similar idea of an actor-spectator theatre was also raised in al-Hakim's *al-Safqah* (The Deal, 1956). The play is intended to reproduce a theatre in the round to portray the simple life style of the peasants. Al-Hakim recommended an open air performance with no scenery, the audience surrounding the action while actors enter and exit among the audience. The play's events take place in an open space in a small Egyptian village. Al-Hakim emphasises the need for a national theatre in his book *Our Theatrical Form* (1967). Here he advocates a "poor man's theatre" which employs older techniques of the recitations of the rhapsodies such as the Narrator and the Mimick. The Narrator (a kind of one-man chorus), is to present the play, explains things to the audience (apparently village peasants), links events and comments on the action. The Mimick (a man or a woman) presents the roles without impersonating the characters. They are to make that clear to the audience from the beginning by addressing them in their actual personalities. Ali al-Ra'i remarks that:

> This form al-Hakim found appropriate to our needs. For one thing it is easy to adopt. It is really a poor man's theatre, easy access for all sorts of people, and particularly convenient to strolling players and the like, who would be able to take it to the smallest village without much trouble or expense. (qtd in A Said 18).

Though al-Hakim never put his theory into practice, other writer experimented with this technique. Najuib Sorour's *Yassin wa Bahiya* (Yassin and Bahiya) which is a semi-narrative and

semi-dramatic play is a good example of this. Sorour employs the story-teller as narrator and commentator while the dramatic parts are acted.

The last element taken from medieval drama in modern Egyptian plays is the use of folklore (*hakawati*); the *Arabian Nights* and *Kalila and Dimna* are two major sources for modern playwrights. Al-Hakim is one of the writers who relied on Eastern sources for his choice of material for plays. He states that while writing his play *The Sleepers in the Cave* (1933) he was under the influence of ancient Egyptian culture. With the intention of mixing Western dramatic techniques with texts and plots derived from the Eastern cultural heritage, he wrote his next play *Shahrazad* (1934). Moreover, al-Hakim employs *hakawati* in order to provide a Brechtian distancing mechanism to his drama (Allen 322).

2.2 The Beginning of Modern Arabic Drama (1870-1910)

Although traditional dramatic forms never ceased to exercise some influence on the writings of many modern Arabic playwrights, they never developed into drama in the Western sense (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Lit*. 330). The latter was imported to Arabic literature only around the middle of the nineteenth century. During the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt (1798-1801) the French troops were entertained by French dramatic spectacles. As the European community in Egypt increased under the modernising rule of Mohammed Ali and his successors, the interest in European opera and drama grew and performances were given both by visiting foreign companies as well as local amateurs. Thus Western theatre was introduced to the Arabs with strong aura of authority. A whole apparatus of translation and reproduction of Western theatrical cannons flourished in the Arab world. As a result, Arabic dramatists started to adopt Western models leaving behind their own indigenous dramatic forms that could have been dynamised from within. The first Arab writers to resort to Western drama as a source of

inspiration and imitation are the Lebanese Marun al-Naqqash and the Egyptian Ya'qub Sannu. They introduced Western drama into the Arab world by means of translation, adaptation and arabicisation. Though modern Arab dramatists translated and adapted Western plays, they wrote original dramatic pieces as well. More importantly, they assimilated Western dramatic techniques in their original plays. As Gibbs indicates:

> It was, then, as a self-confessed imitation of the European theatre that the drama was introduced into the Arab world in the nineteenth century. Aspiring actor-managers hitched their wagons to Corneille and Moliere. Perspiring translators battled with the Anglo-Saxon idioms of Shakespeare and Shaw. But out of all this there has gradually emerged a mixed art, in which Arab elements have been grafted on to a transplanted and acclimatized stock. (qtd in al-Shetaiwi 21)

2.2.1 Marun al-Naqqash and the Rise of Drama in Syria

The first Arab dramatist to imitate Western drama was Marun al-Naqqash (1817-1855), a Lebanese merchant who saw dramatic performances in Italy and France during his trade visits. Though al-Naqqash was not Egyptian, he influenced Egyptian theatre. The theatre company of his nephew Salim al-Naqqash and some other Lebanese troops also learned theatre from al-Naqqash and popularised theatre in Egypt. Al-Naqqash motivated other scholars of his time to import Western drama and theatre and to write original plays. He might be acclaimed as the founder of the Arab theatre (Moosa, *The Origins* 26).

Al- Naqqash was born in Sayda (Sidon) on February 9th 1817 to a Maronite family, but raised in Beirut, where the family moved in 1825. A precocious boy, he learned beside Arabic, Turkish, French and Italian and began to compose poetry at eighteen. He soon mastered oriental

music. Later al-Naqqash became a business man. His work took him to Aleppo, Damascus, and the rest of Syria. In 1846 he visited Alexandria and Cairo and then he sailed to Italy, which had strong relations with the Arab East. In Italy he visited many theatres and was so impressed that he decided to introduce the stage into his own country (26).

Upon his return to Beirut, he formed a troupe with some friends who shared his enthusiasm. In 1847 he wrote and produced, with the help of his family in his own house, *al-Bakhil* (The Miser), the first modern play in Arabic (26). Encouraged by the favourable reactions of his invited audience, which included local notables and foreign consuls, he went on to produce, again in his own house, his second play *Abu'l Hasan al-Mughaffal wa Harun al-Rashid* (Abu al-Hasan the Gullible and Harun al-Rashid) in 1849-50. Subsequently al-Naqqash managed to obtain an Ottoman decree to allow him to have a theatre built close to his house in which he produced his third and last play *al-Salit al-Hasud* (The Sharp-tongued, Envious Man) in 1853. His dramatic career, however, did not last long, for in 1855 while he was away from home, he caught a fever and died at the premature age of thirty-eight (Badawi, *Early* 43).

Al-Naqqash's first play *al-Bakhil* (The Miser) deals with two misers, al-Tha'labi and Qarrad. Al-Tha'labi wants to marry off his young and beautiful, widowed daughter, Hind, to the ugly and elderly miser, Qarrad. Ghali, al-Tha'labi's son, is horrified at this prospect and tries in vain to persuade his father to consent to Hind's marrying instead his friend, Isa, a relation of her deceased husband, whom Hind loves. The action of the play consists in the young people's successful attempt to get rid of old Qarrad and marry off Hind to Isa. In brief, knowing what a miser he is, they arrange that Hind should pretend not only to agree to marrying Qarrad, but also to show him how eager she is to be his wife because she is looking forward to spending his money extravagantly on clothes, finery, jewels and gracious living. At once Qarrad, who is

himself after what he believes to be Hind's money and inheritance, is alarmed and declares that he is no longer interested in the marriage, but Hind will not release him without financial compensation. In the mean time, al-Tha'labi is persuaded by the young people that Qarrad intends to kill him in order to seize the money which Hind would inherit on his death. Shocked and disgusted by Qarrad's behaviour, al-Tha'labi turns Qarrad out of his house and consents to marry off Hind to Isa (44).

Apparently, *al-Bakhil* has the same title as Moliere's *L'Avare*. Therefore, some scholars such as Mohammed Yusuf Najm argue that it was a translation (*The Drama* 416-17). According to a contemporary critic, Jurji Zaydan, this "was the first drama in the Arabic Language" which al-Naqqash had "composed this play from the beginning to the end" (qtd in Moosa, *The Origins* 27). Najm goes on to acknowledge that al-Naqqash wrote his play after he had read Moliere's comedy and made use of its characterisation and humorous elements (*The Drama* 416). The treatment of miserliness and stinginess, which constitutes the main humorous elements of the drama, shares much with *L'Avare*.[2] Similarly, Badawi is of the view that al-Naqqash's *al-Bakhil* is not a translation or adaptation of Moliere's *L'Avare* but rather "original" (*Early* 44). He writes:

> Probably because of the similarity of its title, it was wrongly assumed for a long time that al-Naqqash's first play, *The Miser*, was not a translation or adaptation of Moliere's *L'Avare*. But a cursory look at the Arabic play is sufficient to show that it is indeed an original although, as in the rest of al-Naqqash's work, one can detect in it an echo of Moliere as well as the *general* pervasive influence of his

[2] Moliere's *L'Avare* deals with the petty attitudes of a miser who is extremely avaricious. No matter how ugly and deformed, this miser, like other men, is a human being. He loves to be flattered beyond belief. He wants to marry a young pretty girl-provided his marriage brings him financial gain, because money is his chief love. His love of money even tempts him to sacrifice the happiness of his own children if it conflicts with his aim. While he vies with his sons to wed the same pretty young lady for pure selfish interest, he denies his daughter the right to marry the man she loves. He would rather have her marry an old but wealthy friend of his.

> drama. Bearing in mind the fact that it is the first modern Arabic play, it is for the most part a remarkably competent work. (44)

The most striking feature of *al-Bakhil* is that it is written in verse rather than prose and that it is set to music. In other words, it is meant to be an opera, especially since the author's intention is evident from the introduction he delivered before its first performance (Moosa, *The Origins* 27). He classified dramas into different categories: "One of them, which the Europeans call prose, is divided into comedy, drama, and tragedy, which are performed without verse and unsung; the second one, which they call opera, is sung" (qtd in Moosa, *The Origins* 28). Al-Naqqash goes on to explain:

> It is important and necessary for me to compose and translate in the first place the first and not the second type [the opera] because it is easier and more likely. But what made me deviate from the norm and follow this course is that the second type [the opera] was to me more tasteful, desirable, splendid and delightful. Secondly, my opinion, desire and earnest concern made me inclined to believe that the second [opera] would be preferable to my people and kindred. (28)

In this way, *al-Bakhil* was not merely the first native Arabic drama, but also the first Arabic comic opera.

His second play *Abu al-Hasan al-Mughaffal* (Abu al-Hasan the Fool) was based on the *Thousand and One Nights* story "al-Naim wa al-Yaqzan" (the Sleeping and the Wakeful), tale number 153. It describes how, disgusted with the ways of the world and the fickleness of friends, Abu al-Hasan wishes he could be given sole sway over the world even for one single day in order to set things right. Overhearing him, the Caliph Harun al-Rashid who happens to be on one of his usual nightly inspection tours of the city of Baghdad accompanied by his executioner,

decides to grant him his wish to see how far Abu al-Hasan will be able to change the world. He has him drugged and transported to the palace where he wakes up to find himself the Caliph. When his time as Caliph is over, Abu al- Hasan discovers to his dismay that he has been able to realise very little of his good intentions, having spent his time in the pomp and distractions of royal office which blurred his vision and affected his judgment.

However, the play departs from the sources in both plot and structure. Unlike the story, it treats the problem of the movement from one social class to another. Whether or not al-Naqqash was aware of the social implications, the encounters of his protagonist, who comes from a low class, with the privileges of a higher class intermingle questions of social standing with the problem of appearance and reality, which is the point of the original story (Moosa, *The Origins* 29). Abu al- Hasan has always dreamt of bettering his lot, and his daydreams have become a reality to him. However, the Caliph and his Vizier devise a ruse to show him that the world is not as he sees it. Even when he is given the power and authority he has never had before, he faces as many problems as he did when he was poor and powerless.

Al-Bakhil, unlike, *Abu al-Hasan* is only partially set to music. Its language is a combination of prose and poetry. Moreover, the style of this play is less lucid than that of *al-Bakhil*. Al-Naqqash uses the traditional rhymed-prose prevalent at the time. More importantly, al-Naqqash makes charming use of Moliere's wit (29). A good example is seen when Abu al-Hasan asks his brother Said if he knows the attractive Da'd, if he visits her family, and if he has any relation with them. The scene follows the same pattern as Harpagon's questioning of his son Cleante about Marian in *L' Avare*. Cleante praises the young lady before he realises his brother's interest in her (Najm, *The Drama* 369). This entertaining drama must have appealed to the nineteenth century Syrian audience, and the mere fact that al-Naqqash adapted a story from the

Thousand and One Night to the stage is evident of his fertile imagination and prodigious originality (Moosa, *The Origins* 29).

Al-Salit al-Hasud (The Sharp-tongued, Envious Man), al-Naqqash's third play, is probably the most symmetrically structured of al-Naqqash's plays. The events of the play take place in nineteenth century Beirut, although very little social reality is, in fact, portrayed in it (Badawi, *Early* 50). The course of events shows Abu Isa, a teacher of Arabic language and literature who has moved into Beirut from Damascus and who owes a large sum of money to a handsome young man, Sam'an, the sharp-tongued and envious man of the title of the play. Rahil, Abu Isa's attractive young daughter is in love with Sam'an and they want to get married. Abu Isa agrees to marry off his daughter to Sam'an because he owes him money. Sam'an is not only misanthropic but also jealous. He always suspects that Rahil is deceiving him and accuses her of hiding lovers in her room. Nevertheless, Rahil loves him. At last, a good man Ishaq al-Qudsi offers to marry Rahil. Her father consents to the marriage though he had promised Sam'an to marry her off to him. Abu Isa likes Ishaq because he is rich and can get money from him to pay off his debt to Sam'an. Rahil refuses to marry Ishaq but when Sam'an continues to accuse her of dishonesty she changes her mind and agrees to marry Ishaq. Feeling defeated, Sam'an pretends to bless their marriage but secretly plans to kill them and their guests by presenting them with poisoned chocolate. Sam'an's servant reveals this, and Sam'an is shamed. He leaves threatening to take revenge on all of them.

To the earlier plays, the plot and setting of al-Naqqash's third and last drama *al-Salit al-Hasud* reflects various aspects and customs specific to Syria in mid-nineteenth century, although it manifests the Molierian touch (Moosa, *The Origins* 29). The characters are recognisable as contemporary types and the action centres on the practice of fixed marriages. Parental authority

was dominant, but children sometimes defied it. The author could have ended this drama with the marriage of Rahil to Ishaq al-Qudsi. But for no demonstrable reason he engages Sam'an and the rest of the cast in unnecessary intrigues. Thus, the finale becomes flat. Moreover, this play is written in a mixture of rhyming prose and verse, and it is not entirely sung. On the whole, the language of the dialogue does not express the character of the speaker, except in a few scenes. One interesting feature of this drama, however, to be seen here also, is the use he makes of the chorus. While occasionally commenting on the action, the chorus changes its character and plays several roles at different moments ranging from pupils to night-watch-men to ordinary male and female citizens (Badawi, *Early* 52).

Again, Moliere's inspiration is conspicuous. The dialogue between Abu Isa and his pupil, Jirjis regarding what is prose and what is verse brings to the memory a similar dialogue between Jourdain and the philosopher master in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.[3] The strange and thoughtless Sam'an recalls Alceste in *Le Misanthrope*. Furthermore, the two valets, Jabbur and Bishara, who appear as wealthy men of prestige, remind us of Mascarille and Jodelet in *Les Precieuses Ridicules*. When Madelon and Cathos reject their respective lovers, La Grange and Du Croisy, these lovers employ their valets Mascarille and Jodelet to expose the weakness of the two ladies. To conceal their identity, Mascarille clothes himself in his master's finery and assumes the title Marquis of Mascarille while Jodelet appears as the Viscount of Jodelet.[4] Al-Naqqash admits through Sam'an that he has "borrowed some of its (this drama's) themes from the *Riwayat Ifranjiyya* (European dramas)" (al-Naqqash, *al-Salit* Act 3 Scene 4 389).

Al-Naqqash's plays are significant for many reasons. First, they attracted the attention of the Arab dramatists to European drama; Arab scholars introduced European drama and theatre

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[3] See *al-Salit al-Hasud*, Act 1, Scene 4 and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Act 2, Scene 4.
[4] See *Les Precieuses ridicules*, Act 1, Scene 9 and *al-Salit al-Hasud*, Act 2, Scene 7-9.

into the Arab world. Secondly, they inspired Arab scholars to emulate Western drama by writing original plays. Thirdly, al-Naqqash opened the door to assimilating European dramatic techniques, especially French, in Arabic. More importantly, he played a significant role in introducing theatre not only into Lebanon but also into Egypt – his nephew, Salim al-Naqqash (1850-1885), whom he trained in theatre, went to Egypt in order to practice his theatrical career. Nevil Barbour writes:

> In 1876 Salim al-Naqqash, a nephew of Marun, with his friend Adib Ishaq and a company of actors including Yusuf al-Khayyat, famous, it is said, for his skill in female parts, visited Alexandria and gave a season at the theatre of Zizinia. The pieces presented were translations of European plays, including *Andromache*, *Charlemagne*, *Phedre*, *Horace* and *Zenobia* adapted by al-Naqqash and Adib Ishaq and enlivened with songs. (174)

Al-Naqqash premature death was a great loss to the burgeoning stage. Nevertheless, his theatrical activity was directly continued by his brother Nicola, and his nephew, Salim Khalil al-Naqqash. Nicola's interest in the theatre came more from recognition of his brother's pioneer accomplishment than from personal ambitions. He continued the training of amateur actors and always wished that his brother were still alive to see what his disciples had accomplished. Completely modest, he acknowledges his brother's superior dramatic talents and admitted that he was the first to follow his footsteps (Moosa, *The Origins* 32). As a token of his devotion, he produced his brother's drama *al-Salit al-Hasud*. The performance was attended by the Ottoman Wali and proved to be a success. Nicola's own dramas included *al-Shaykh al-Jahil* (The Ignorant Old Man), *al-Musi* (The Testator), and *Rabia Ibn Ziyad al-Mukaddam* (a name of a character), whose theme was drawn from Arab History (33).

i. Salim al-Naqqash

Marun's nephew Salim Khalil al-Naqqash, an active writer, translator and journalist, proved even more active and ambitious in the theatre. Although most of the dramas he produced were adaptation of European originals, his literary and theatrical output was prolific. In addition to his uncle's three plays, Salim al-Naqqash brought to Egypt five works more which he had adapted or loosely translated. These were *Aida* (adapted from Verdi's opera *Aida*), *Mayy aw Horace* (Mayy or Horace) based on Corneille's play *Horace*, *al-Kadhub* (The Liar) based on Corneille's *Le Menteur*, *Ghara'ib al-Sudaf* (Strange Coincidences) and *al-Zalum* (The Tyrant), the last two obviously adapted from European plays which have not yet been identified (Badawi, *Early* 53).

Aida was first staged in Cairo in 1871. Al-Naqqash based his work on Ghislanzoni's libretto and turned the opera into an operetta mainly, but not wholly, sung to popular Arabic tunes of the time. The dialogue is a mixture of verse and rhyming prose. Moreover traditional poetry of love and boasting is used in this play. Lovers express their emotions in the traditional Arabic idiom, just as warriors praise their own valour and courage in the conventional Arabic heroic manner. There is hardly any characterisation; the main character, the Egyptian soldier and lover, Radamis, takes major decisions affecting his as well as other people's lives, without his motivation being made psychologically convincing, as the author makes no attempt to show any character analysis or development. The last two lines of the 'play' with which Aminaris concludes her elegy on the two dead lovers refer to Aida and Radamis as *shuhada gharam* (love's martyrs). The theme of a young man giving up everything – military glory, the offer of marriage to the royal princess who is madly in love with him, the prospect of the throne of Egypt and life itself, for the sake of the woman he loves – was found captivating by the Arab audiences.

The same use of non-dramatic, traditional poetry of love and boasting is also found in *Mayy aw Horace*. The theme of the play is, of course, love and war, and the inevitable conflict which ensues between love and duty. Horace, the Roman, is married to Malaka, who comes from Alba and whose brother, Guriace, is betrothed to Horace's sister, Mayy. When war breaks out between Rome and Alba, the men have to fight one another in single combat. Horace kills Guriace much to Mayy's horror and, shocked at the unpatriotic reaction of his own sister, he kills her in a fit of uncontrollable anger, but is pardoned in the end by the king in recognition of his heroic services to his country. It is obvious that the story outline of Corneille's play is kept and with it the main (historical) characters, King Tulle, Horace's father and son and Curiace. However, the King is given a vizier by al-Naqqash; the names of some characters are changed: Valere becomes Qaysar, Sabine and Camille are Arabicised becoming Malaka and Mayy respectively and their confidante, Julie, becomes Rogina, a servant in the household of Horace's father. Al-Naqqash also adds a chorus consisting of the King's retainers, but they hardly say anything until towards the end of the play when they join in singing a hymn of praise for the King and the Vizier in the true Arab manner (55).

In *Aida* and *Mayy wa Horace*, the lovers die in tragic circumstances but this is not so in *al-Zalum* (The Tyrant), which, despite its happy ending, has much in common with *Aida*. The King's son, Iskandar, the tyrant of the play's title, falls in love with Asma, the orphaned commoner, who does not reciprocate his love because she has lost her heart to Salim, the nephew of Lubna, the dead Queen's midwife. Salim is offered riches by Iskandar in return for giving up Asma, but he refuses the offer and prefers to endure jail torture for his love. Likewise, Asma rejects the attentions of the King's son and chooses to suffer in jail instead. After a series of complications, wild adventures and improbable events, Salim is united with Asma and all ends

happily. Critically speaking, the work has many of the ingredients of a popular medieval romance. The characters are painted in black and white: Iskandar, the tyrant, is all bad while Salim and Asma are idealised lovers (in fact the play was known also as *Salim wa Asma*). Furthermore; the dialogue is full of traditional and non-dramatic poetry in which the speakers complain of the pangs of love, of the weakness of tyrant or the harshness of fate (56).

Like *al-Zalum*, *Ghara'ib al-Sudaf* (Strange Coincidences), known also as *Hifz al-Widad* (Faithfulness) is a tale of love, adventure, improbabilities and coincidences, as the title suggests, but is set against the background of a nationalist uprising in India. Thanks to the miraculous interference of a grateful India all ends happily for the European characters, English and French alike. The dialogue is mainly in prose interspersed with verse, but interestingly enough the prose here is generally free from the fetters and artificialities of the customary *saj'*. The last play, *al-Kadhub* (The Liar), however, did not prove successful after its first performance. As it has been said it is based on Corneille's play, but unlike Dorante in *Le Menteur*, Dib does not in any way gain the audience's sympathy. He is a thoroughly evil man who deserves punishment for his wicked lies. The play ends with the moral uttered by all the characters on the stage and addressed to the audience, that lying is a wicked vice and that a liar is bound to fail (Najm, *al-Masrah* 247-8).

It is obvious from the preceding account that Salim al-Naqqash's contribution is in no way an improvement upon the work of his uncle from the point of view of dramatic structure or characterisation, although it sheds considerable light on the types of plays the Arab audience saw and which helped to form their taste. Several things become clear: the dominance of love themes, the romantic quality of events, and the passion for singing as well as the overtly didactic and moral function of drama. Like his uncle, Salim believed that drama was meant to portray virtue

in an attractive light, thereby encouraging people to follow it, and to show clearly the disastrous consequences of vice so that they could avoid it (Badawi, *Early* 56).

In Egypt, Salim al-Naqqash enlisted the help of his fellow Lebanese friend, Adib Ishaq, who had already translated Racine's *Andromaque* (in the usual mixture of prose and verse with songs added) at the suggestion of the French Consul in Beirut. Ishaq joined him in Alexandria where for a while they collaborated in theatrical activities but soon (in 1877) they turned away from theatre becoming engrossed in political journalism. The works of Ishaq were progressive steps towards the creation of a domestic drama. Like al-Naqqash and other contemporary writers, he introduced verse and music into the adapted dramas as a means of attraction for Arab audience. Furthermore, he cut down lengthy dialogues because they were boring to Arab audience (Moosa, *The Origins* 35).

After Salim al-Naqqash and Adib Ishaq deserted their theatre in 1877, Yusuf Khayyat (d. 1900) reorganised the troupe and added a few Egyptian actors to it. He made his successful debut as director with the performance of *Sun' al-Jamil* (Doing Good), at the Zizinia Theatre. In 1879, the company moved to Cairo where it enjoyed the Khedive's encouragement and support. The Khedive became indignant, however, watching a performance of *al-Zalum* (The Tyrant), which contained allusions to despots and injustice. Thinking the play was an indirect criticism of his rule and person, the Khedive ordered Khayyat and his troupe out of Egypt. The Opera House was closed to Arab actors and performances until 1882. In that year Sulayman al-Qirdahi (d. 1909) and al-Shaykh Salama Hijazi (d.1917) obtained the government's approval to resume Arab acting.

When the Khedive dismissed al-Khayyat, Sulayman al-Qirdahi, a member in al-Khayyat's troupe, organised the remnants of the troupe in 1882 and added new actors and singers

including the famous Egyptian singer, Salamah Hijazi. Al-Qirdahi introduced women (in the first place his wife) in the female parts, hitherto exclusively taken by men, and added a female singer called Laila to the company (Barbour 175). In Alexandria, al-Qirdahi produced a number of plays such as *Nakth al-Uhud*, a translation of Racine's *Phedre*, 1885; Fenelon's *Telemague*; *Harun al-Rashid* by al-Qabbani, 1884; and others. He inserted tunes and songs in his shows. Al-Qirdahi's troupe continued working until 1909.

ii. Ahmad Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani

Many of the plays in al-Qirdahi's repertoire were the work of the Syrian actor and dramatist Ahmad Abu Khalil al-Qabbani (1833-1902), who had already produced considerable theatrical activity in Damascus. Al-Qabbani, a product of traditional Islamic education, knew no European language. Probably inspired by the example set by Marun al-Naqqash, he tried to establish Arabic theatre in Damascus sometimes during 1870s. Together with the works of Marun and Salim al-Naqqash, he produced plays of his own which were derived from Arab and Islamic heritage and folktales and contained much singing, music and dancing of which he was very fond (Badawi *Early* 57). He first met with some success and was even encouraged by the authorities, particularly the Turkish ruler, Midhat Pasha, who commissioned Iskandar Farah to form a theatre troupe in Damascus of which al-Qabbani was to be an important member. However, after a while al-Qabbani was opposed by extremist religious and puritanical factions which forced him to close his theatre and bring his activities to an end. In 1884 he moved his troupe to Alexandria where he began to produce his plays at the Zizinya theatre and Danube café. Soon he was able to act in Cairo, even at the Opera House and subsequently in the provincial towns of Egypt. He continued to be active until 1900 when, after the burning of his theatre, he returned to Damascus where he retired on a state pension.

According to Najm, the number of plays performed by al-Qabbani totals thirty one (*al-Masrah* 401-2). Of these fifteen were his own works, while the rest were either written by other Arab authors ranging from Marun al-Naqqash to Najib Haddad or freely translated from plays by European playwrights, notably Corneille, Racine, Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas (402). The first play which al-Qabbani wrote is entitled *Nakir al-Jamil* (The Ungrateful Man). The theme is the ingratitude of a destitute young man named Ghadir to Halim, the Vizier's son, who, against the advice of his mentor Nasir, befriends him, adopting him as his intimate companion and sharing his worldly possessions with him. Ghadir plots Halim's murder because he resents being bound to him and feeling subservient to him, but his plot misfires and by mistake he kills Habib, the King's son, instead. He simulates deep grief and regrets at what he has done and persuades Halim to help him, and in order to turn suspicions away from himself he gives him the dagger he has used. In the mean time, he treacherously convinces the King that his son's killer is Halim since the blood-stained dagger is found with him. The aggrieved King orders Halim's execution, but later he finds out the truth and Halim is set free. To the astonishment of all, Halim pleads with the king on behalf of Ghadir, who is then forgiven by him.

Generally, the play remarkably shows little dramatic insight, being both episodic in structure and excessively verbose in dialogue. It is written in a mixture of verse and rhyming prose, which is meant to be sung. Moreover, the characters are crude types whose names suggest their dominant quality. Ghadir means 'treacherous,' Halim 'forbearing and forgiving,' Habib 'beloved,' Nasir 'supporter' and so forth. There is no attempt at psychological analysis and despite the excessively long and worldly speeches; characters do not even begin to explain their motives. In addition, the action takes place in a timeless world of nowhere in particular. Despite

the Arabic names of its characters, *Nakir-al-Jamil* may have been derived from the plot of a Western origin (Badawi, *Early* 58).

The source of the next play, *Hiyal al-Nisa* (Trickeries of Women) – also known as *Lusiya* (Lucia) – seems to be an adapted European play (59), judging at least by the European names of characters and the setting. Lucia, the wife of Count Frederick Governor of Messina, is in love with her husband's nephew Jean, who does not feel the same about her but is instead in love with her stepdaughter Eugene. His rival for Eugene's love is the Count's secretary, Emile. The Count proceeds to marry off his daughter Eugene to Jean as they are deeply in love with one another. The frustrated Lucia and Emile plot to destroy the young married couple but fail in their attempts and are punished by the Count who puts them in jail. Like *The Ungrateful Man*, this play, which starts reasonably well, soon develops into a popular romance full of improbable events and ends happily with the unbelievable forgiveness of this wicked characters and a prayer for the Sultan. *Afifa* (The Chaste Woman) and *Lubab al-Gharam aw al-Malik Mitridat* (Lubab al-Gharam or King Mitridat) are two plays by al-Qabbani derived from European sources (60).

As already mentioned, not all al-Qabbani's plays were derived from European sources; he also wrote plays with indigenous traditional Arab themes. *Harun al-Rashid ma'a Uns al-Jalis* (Harun al-Rashid with Uns al-Jalis), which is based on the forty-fifth night of the *Arabian Nights*, seems to have been one of his most popular plays. Al-Mu'in ibn Sawi, the Vizier of Prince Ibn Sulayman of Basra, becomes jealous of his colleague al-Fadl Ibn Khaqan because he is convinced that the latter is the Prince's favourite and he therefore plots his downfall. A chance presents itself when al-Fadl allows his son Ali Nur al-Din to marry Uns al-Jalis, the beautiful and accomplished slave girl whom al-Fadl has been commissioned to buy for the Prince, and with whom Ali has fallen desperately in love. At the instigation of al-Mu'in, who forges a letter from

the Caliph ordering the death of al-Fadl and his son, the incensed Prince imprisons al-Fadl, seizes his property and is about to put him and his son to death. However at the eleventh hour the Caliph intervenes for, by a series of adventures, Ali and his wife Uns a-Jalis have been able to see him and impress him with the justice of their case. Al-Mu'in and Ibn Sulayman are punished by life-imprisonment, al-Fadl is promoted to the post of Governor of Basra and the young couple is generously recompensed by the Caliph.

Generally speaking, the story of the play deviates from the *Arabian Nights* version in some important details designed largely to make the character of Ali more sympathetic, while the events are telescoped in order to render the work somewhat more dramatic. Nevertheless, the play is not dramatic enough and once more it is largely an excuse for singing. However, while it shares with other plays the jail scenes which provide ample opportunity for tear-jerking, self-pitying verse, it differs from most of them in that it is not mainly about love; al-Mu'in's destructive jealousy is certainly an important component, even though the author does not allow himself sufficient room to portray it in a convincing manner (62).

Al-Qabbani's other plays include *Harun al-Rashid ma' al-Amir Ghanim ibn Ayyub wa Qut al-Qulub* (Harun al-Rashid with Prince Ghanim Ibn Ayyub and Food of Hearts), *al-Amir Mahmoud Naji Shah al-Ajam* (Prince Mahmoud, son of the Shah of Persia) and *Antar Ibn Shaddad* (Antar Ibn Shaddad). In fact, al-Qabbani's dramas are far too limited in scope to be universal. It is perhaps expecting too much from a nineteenth-century Arab playwright to harmonise his dramas with traditional and modern ideas. Also, it is unfair to expect him to use some ancient tales to criticise the foibles of his society. Al-Qabbani was an imitator rather than an innovator. However, he was perfectly in tune with the traditional set by Marun al-Naqqash. He might be considered the creator of the "Arab operetta" which influenced the succeeding

theatre in Egypt (Moosa, *The Origins* 40). He helped to popularise musical drama not only in Egypt but also in the whole Arab world. Moreover, because of his more traditional, cultural upbringing and background and his greater command of Arabic language, he also played a considerable role in establishing the tradition of regarding the cultural and literary heritage of the Arabs, including the *Arabian Nights*, as a constant source of inspiration for Arab dramatists.

Although Salim al-Naqqash, Adib Ishaq, and Al-Qabbani were all Syrians, they were active in Egypt. It was an Egyptian nationalist Jew, Ya'qub Sannu, who first established a significant native theatre in Egypt.

2.2.2 Ya'qub Sannu and the Rise of Drama in Egypt

Ya'qub Sannu (1839-1917) is considered to be the father of the modern Egyptian theatre (Badawi, *Early* 31). Sannu, who was born in Cairo, came of Jewish parents. He seemed to have been a precocious child, for he claimed that at the age of twelve he could read the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in English as well as the Arabic Koran. He began to compose Arabic Poetry at an early age, and one of his earliest works was a poem in praise of the principal of his school. On his father's advice, he composed a poem praising Ahmed Yagan Pasha of the ruling house of Mohammed Ali; the Pasha was so impressed that he decides to send the thirteen-year-old boy to Italy to study at his expense. In Italy, Sannu spent three impressionable years (in Livorno), during which time he acquired such mastery of the Italian language that he is reported to have written three plays in Italian (31).

Soon after he returned to Egypt at the age of sixteen, Sannu lost both his father and benefactor. He supported himself by teaching European languages and sciences to the sons and daughters of Egyptian dignitaries. Moreover, Sannu participated in varied intellectual activities among which were the founding of cultural societies and the establishment of several

newspapers and periodicals. More importantly, he soon became keenly aware of the need to arouse the interest of the average, non-westernised Egyptians in drama and theatre. He was already convinced that theatre had a vital role to play in the renaissance of the Arab world in general and Egypt in particular. He held the aim of the theatre to be, as he put it in one of his plays 'to promote civilisation, progress and the refinement of manners' (qtd in Najm, *al-Masrah* 211).

In 1870, Sannu formed his troupe of players, chosen out of a number of his old pupils, and he trained them to perform a play which, he claimed, he had written specially for them having studied works by Moliere, Goldoni and Sheridan in their original languages. What that play was we shall probably never know for certain. One scholar writes that it was 'a small vaudeville show complete with songs sung to the tune of popular melodies' (Gendzier 34). On being introduced to Isma'il's aide, Khayri Pasha, Sannu requested him to show the text of one of his plays to the Khedive and seek his support. Isma'il was apparently impressed and granted the young dramatist permission to perform before him at a show attended by the court, several diplomats and local dignitaries.

The play had a good reception that Sannu was encouraged to reorganise his troupe and to include two women, which was a daring step to take at the time. Sannu was, therefore, the first to introduce women onto the stage in Egypt and not, as Landau asserts, the Syrian, al-Qurdahi, who included actresses in his troupe more than a decade later (68). However, the two women who served in Sannu's troupe were non-Muslim Levantines whom Sannu claims he taught to read, write and act in a matter of weeks. Subsequently, Sannu was invited to perform before the Khedive again and it was on one such occasion, during a performance given in the Khedive's private theatre at Qasr al-Nil, that the Khedive is alleged to have conferred upon him the title

"The Egyptian Moliere," partly in recognition of what Sannu was doing and partly out of a desire to compare himself with Louis XIV, Moliere's illustrious patron (Badawi, *Early* 32).

On that evening, Sannu's troupe put on three plays: *Anisa ala'l-Muda* (A Fashionable Young Lady), *Ghandur Misr* (The Egyptian Dandy) and *al-Durratayn* (The Two Rival Wives). Obviously, all the three comedies were satirical. However, the author does not provide us with a brief account of the first play where he launches an attack on the blind imitation of Western manners and superficial aspects of Westernisation; a young woman spoils her chances of marriage by flouting social customs and indulging in excessive freedom in dealing with young men copying the behaviour of Western women. It is reported that *The Two Rival Wives* which is an outspoken attack on the practice of polygamy, incurred the displeasure of the Khedive who felt that it was directed against a practice followed by himself as well as by members of the court. It does not seem, however, that it was this play that brought an abrupt end to Isma'il's patronage of Sannu in 1872. The reasons for the Khedive's closure of Sannu's theatre are not clear. Many have assumed that it was because of the dramatist's political criticism (33).

Whatever the real cause, Sannu's theatrical activities, which lasted barely three years, came to an end, and his relations with the Khedive became strained. Having gone through periods of ups and downs, he was finally exiled in 1878, after launching an attack on the Khedive in his satirical newspaper *Abu Naddara Zarqa* (The Man with Blue Spectacles). Sannu went to Europe where he resumed his political journalism, issuing a series of satirical periodicals in which he published a large number of short dramatic dialogues called *Muhawart* (dialogues). However, they are too brief to possess any dramatic structure, too caricature-like to allow for any characterisation or deep psychological insight and too directly political to be works of art (33). Nevertheless, the interesting thing about them is that Sannu developed within them a crude kind

of symbolism in his *dramatis personae* whereby *Shaykh al-Hara* (the Quarter Chief) stood for Isma'il, *al-Wad al-Ahbal* (the Foolish Boy) for his successor Tawfiq, *Jam'iyyat al-Taratir* (the Assembly of Clowns) for the council of Ministers, and *Abu'l-Ghulb* (the Man of Misery) for the Egyptian peasant, etc.

Sannu, moreover, wrote larger plays such as *Bursat Misr* (The Cairo Stock Exchange). It is the first in the collection and it is basically a comedy of manners and intrigues. It is clearly the work of someone who had read the work of Moliere, Goldoni and Sheridan before trying his hand at writing Egyptian drama. The main theme is the rivalry between two suitors for the hand of Labiba, the daughter of a rich banker, Salim, and the success of Ya'qub, the victorious suitor, through the intrigue of his agent and servant, Yusuf, in contrast to the failure of the other suitor, Halim, who is only after her money. The play consists of two acts: Act I takes place at, or near, the Stock Market while the setting for Act II is the home of the rich banker, Salim. Act I contains no fewer than eleven short scenes, whereas, there are seven in Act II, and each act ends with a song.

Sannu's satirical intent in this play is abundantly clear. Apart from the dangers of monetary speculations at the Stock Exchange, the butt of the author's social criticism is the foolish imitation of Western manners by Egyptians in an attempt to impress outsiders as well as one another. Similarly, the playwright attacks prearranged marriages and the failures of parents to take onto consideration their daughter's wishes or feelings. Moreover, he condemns the contemptuous attitude towards the Egyptian working class which dismisses them as mere *fellaheen*,[5] as exemplified in Teresa's manner of treating the servant, Faraq. Yet the play is not merely a didactic exercise; it is lively, dramatic entertainment (Badawi, *Early* 35). The humour

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[5] Fellaheen (in Arabic) means peasants.

sometimes arises from the traditional linguistic sources, i.e. mispronunciation of Arabic by foreigners or the comic effect of dialect, such as the use of Nubian in the reported speech of the Nubian doorman at the Stock Exchange.

Like *The Cairo Stock Exchange*, *al-Alil* (The Invalid) dramatises the successful attempt of a young couple to achieve a marriage union after overcoming obvious obstacles, in this case, instead of disparity in wealth the impediment being the mysterious illness of the young woman's father. Whereas the action of the former play takes place against the background of "the Stock Market," in *The Invalid* the context is medical practice in contemporary Egypt, particularly in the newly established sanatorium at Hulwan. Habib is suffering from severe depression as a result of the shock of hearing his brother's sudden death in Istanbul. He has been receiving treatment from several doctors but without success, much to the chagrin and near despair of his unmarried, young daughter, Hanum, who is looking after him. Mitri, a young friend of the family who is in love with Hanum, has been calling on the patient every day and giving her much moral support.

A Moroccan Medicine man, Hajj, visits the patient and prescribes treatment by magic. Hajj prevails upon Habib to make a solemn vow to give his daughter in marriage to the person who manages to bring about his cure. Mitri takes Habib to Hulwan sanatorium which is run by his friend Dr. Kabrit and he at once confides to him his plight concerning Habib's vow. Kabrit agrees that should he be able to cure the patient he would give up the daughter in favour of his friend Mitri. In this way, Habib gets better as a result of the hot baths and the special treatment administrated by Dr. Kabrit. Consequently, he becomes entitled to the daughter whom, according to the plan, he gives up at once for his friend Mitri. The play ends with a song celebrating the benefits of the Hulwan sanatorium and praising the ruler of Egypt for his having given the order for its establishment.

Once more the humour, which becomes more striking when the scene shifts to Hulwan, relies largely upon language – the faulty Arabic used by the European doctor, Kabrit (whose name, incidentally, means sulpher). Also amusing is the appropriate language of Moroccan. Here again the echoes of the traditional shadow plays can be heard. As in the previous play, the minor characters of the servants, both in Habib's household and at the sanatorium (e.g. Said) are memorable and lively sketches. The underlying social criticism is directed not only against quack medicine but also against the foolish practice of arranging the marriage of daughters without their consent (Badawi, *Early* 36).

The third play in the collection *al-Sawwah wa'l-Hammar* (The Tourist and the Muleteer) is no more than a brief dramatic dialogue (covering a couple of pages), between an English tourist who insists upon speaking faulty and ungrammatical classical Arabic, and a muleteer who complains that it would have been considerably easier for him had the tourist spoken English to him. It is a mildly amusing scene, where again the humour arises from the popular, traditional use, or rather misuse of language.

Another work, *Abu Rida wa Ka'b al-Khayr* (Abu Rida and Ka'b al-Khayr),[6] a play in two acts, opens with a song by a black-man servant, Abu Rida who is madly in love with the black maid, Ka'b al-Khayr. After complaining of his passion in an amusing speech, which is addressed to the audience and which derives its humour from the Nubian mispronunciation of Arabic and partly from the colourful imagery he uses, when by chance the mistress of the house, rich, young widow, Banba, learns of his passion he pleads her to help him and use her influence with her maid in obtaining her agreement to marry him. Banba soon discovers that the maid, convinced that Abu Rida is really after the neighbour's maid, cannot bear him and would rather see the back

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[6] Some of the characters' names in the titles of plays were translated and some others transliterated depending on thematic relevance.

of him. Banba, however, assumes that Ka'b al-Khayr is only jealous of the neighbour's maid and she therefore promises to further the cause of Abu Rida.

Parallel to this theme of the servant's love for the maid is that of the eligible cloth merchant Nakhla's love for the young widow, Banba; here we find an interesting inversion of the usual practice of making the servants' love a sub-plot to the main theme of love between their masters and mistresses. And just as Banba undertakes to bring the servants together, so the professional matchmaker-cum-saleswoman, Mabrouka, assiduously endeavours to promote the cause of the marriage union of Banba and Nakhla, in the mean time earning quite a bit of money from both sides. A somewhat tenuous link between the two themes is created by the mistress's vow to bring about the marriage of her servants before her own wedding. As it happens, the engagement of the mistress proves a lot easier to bring about than that of the servants. Despite the various tempting offers made to her in the way of money and expensive clothes, she categorically refuses Abu Rida and agrees to marry him only at the end of the play when he seriously threatens to commit suicide in her presence.

Critically speaking, this play has many merits, and is certainly one of Sannu's plays which deserve to be revived on the stage. It is a competent piece of dramatic writing for it is reasonably well-constructed and moves forward fairly smoothly, with enough action to sustain the audience's interest. The dialogue is witty and lively, and exploits to the full the colourful potentialities of the extremely expressive, colloquial language; each character is given a distinct type of language in keeping with his temperament, sex and station of life (Badawi, *Early* 37). The author once more derives much humour from dialect, mispronunciation of Arabic and amusing malapropisms (e.g. the Nubian servant's calling the matchmaker, Mabrouka, by the name Mafrouka with its slightly obscene suggestions). Moreover, we have a memorable

character, Mabrouka, who is a masterly portrait of the traditional figure of the matchmaker in Egyptian society.

Al-Sadaqa (Fidelity),[7] a one act play, also begins with a song sung by one, Najib, who proceeds to give in a soliloquy, too, the necessary background information to the audience. Najib and his sister Warda are orphans who have been living for four years in Alexandria with their Aunt Safsaf, a rich widow who has taken good care of them. Warda loves her young cousin Na'um, who is studying in England, and they have vowed to marry after his return. She is worried because for three months she has not received a letter from him. Her brother Najib loves Taqla, the daughter of the Syrian merchant Nimat Allah, who is himself in love with the widow Safsaf and wants to marry her.

A young English man meets Warda at a party, admires her, and asks his friend Ni'mat Allah to ask her aunt for her hand. Warda naturally refuses because she is waiting to marry her cousin, who is in England. When Safsaf tries to convince her niece to marry the young English because her cousin must by now have found an English young woman, Warda tearfully answers that she will never betray him. The young Englishman tells her that he knows her cousin in England, and that the cousin has become engaged to his sister and will soon marry her. Warda faints upon hearing this news but soon recovers and prepares to leave the house when her aunt rebukes her for not marrying the young Englishman. The suitor follows her to the door and reveals his real identity. Na'um has disguised himself and played the role to test Warda's love and devotion. In the end, Warda marries him, her aunt marries the wealthy merchant, and her brother Najib marries Taqla. According to a critic, this play is a very light-weight piece, despite the lively dialogue and the typical Sannu humour which arises from the usual linguistic sources:

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[7] Badawi's translation of the title seems to be thematically grounded although the word *sadaqa* in Arabic literally means 'friendship.'

broken Arabic of Hincks and the Syrian dialect of Ni'mat Allah (Badawi, *Early* 35). Not much social criticism is attempted here. The play ends, just as it begins, with Najib's singing.

Far more serious is *al-Amira al-Iskandaraniyya* (The Alexandrian Princess). Unlike *Fidelity*, which is designed largely as an entertainment, *The Alexandrian Princess* is obviously satirical in intent (39). It is perhaps the first extant Arabic play to launch a frontal attack on the negative aspects of superficial Westernisation, the problem of the blind imitation of the outward forms of Western life in Egyptian society. Maryam, the wife of a wealthy Alexandrian merchant of humble The Origins, is a social climber and a snob who gives herself airs and graces. Having fallen under the spell of France and all things French, she forces her reluctant but henpecked husband, Ibrahim, to agree to her adopting a French way of life at home. She will not hear of her daughter marrying Yusuf, the decent young man who is in love with her, because he is a mere Egyptian and a common man. She also has made up her mind to marry her off to Victor, whom she believes to be a titled Frenchman on a visit to Egypt and the son of the French aristocrat whom she and her husband met in Paris during their summer holidays the previous year.

The plot of the play, which is basically a comedy of intrigue and impersonation, influenced to some extent by Moliere's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* and *Georges Dandin* (39), describes the course of action adopted by the young couple to fool the mother and circumvent her opposition to their marriage. By an ingenious stratagem Yusuf pretends to be Victor, the son of the French nobleman (whom Maryam has not seen in Paris as he had been on a visit to England at the time). He forges a letter of introduction from his assumed father and engineers a meeting one evening at the theatre with the mother and daughter to whom he subsequently pays attentions. When he comes to ask for the daughter's hand in marriage, the mother is naturally delighted and only after the couple has naturally been married does the mother learn the truth

about the impersonation from the real French nobleman who unexpectedly visits Alexandria. The shock of the discovery makes her faint, but being powerless to do anything about it she gradually learns to accept this marriage.

The play is cunningly constructed; the very opening scene is in a sense a harbinger of the main theme of the play; the juxtaposition between the Egyptian servants, Hasanayn, and the European maid, Carolina, and the former's infatuation with the latter's beauty. The audience's interest and suspense are maintained because the audience is not told of Yusuf and Adila's plot until very late in the course of the play; to add to the credibility of the action the dramatist makes the husband equally ignorant of the plot, so that his comments on the strange course of events become a vocal expression of the view of the audience. In short, *The Alexandrian Princess* is no primitive drama; it makes its point concisely, competently and without at any moment ceasing to be entertaining. Interestingly enough, there are no songs in this play.

Equally satirical in intent is the play that apparently aroused the Khedive's displeasure, *al-Durratan* (*The Two Rival Wives*). It is a short play, about one-third the length of *The Alexandrian Princess*. Ahmed, the central figures, is a lower-middle-class Egyptian whose friends usually call him "malik" (king). He spends most of his time smoking hashish with his friends. Although Sabiha, his wife of fifteen years, is faithful and devoted to him, Ahmed is captivated by Fattuma and desires to marry her. He convinces his wife that she needs a helper around the house, and that Fattuma is just the person. Sabiha reluctantly accepts, but, of course, the two wives begin to fight constantly. Ahmed's life becomes miserable, and he eventually divorces and expels both wives. Soon, however, he discovers that although he is free, he is lonely and unable to manage by himself. He realises that he has made a great mistake in taking a second wife. Sabiha feels that she should have been more understanding of her husband's situation and

returns to him, admitting her mistakes. Ahmed is soon reconciled with her and promises not to disrupt their married life again.

The Two Rival Wives is clearly a skeleton of a play, and not a full length drama. It is also more primitive in technique, although as usual with Sannu his mastery of dialogue already reveals itself, particularly in the speeches given to the first wife, whose character is briefly sketched out but in an exceedingly vivid manner. The fighting scene is rather crude and the humour arising from it is of the cheap variety. The play may have set out to criticise a serious social custom, polygamy, which was practiced by the Khedive and the court. But dramatically, it is basically more than a farce in which the playwright seems to resort to puppet shows of *qaraquz*.

The last play in Sannu's published collection is of a different nature and style. It is the only play of a reasonable length which he published in his lifetime; it came out as late as 1912. This is *Molier Misr wa ma Yuqasih* (*The Egyptian Moliere and What He Suffers*). This play has been linked to Moliere's *L'Impromptu de Versailles* by which, as Najm claims, it was generally inspired (Najm, *al-Masrahhiyya* 434), although we must not exaggerate what some scholars see as 'the unmistakable influence' of the French play (Moosa, 'Ya'qub Sannu' 428). The only thing in common between the two plays is that both deal in part with the difficulties faced by the dramatist or director vis-à-vis his company of actors and actresses in rehearsing for a performance. However, the difference is much more significant. Moliere wrote his play to avenge himself on his professional rivals, in particular Boursault, who had attacked him in the play *Le Portrait du Peintre*. It is true that Sannu does refer to an attack on his plays by an Italian critic, who condemned him for his use of the colloquial language in his dialogue, and that Sannu defends himself on the grounds that drama is meant to be about what people actually say or do,

and that in real life nobody speaks classical Arabic. However, Sannu's play deals primarily with Sannu himself and the efforts he made to establish Arabic drama in Egypt (Badawi, *Early* 41).

It is important to remember that these plays were written to be acted, not read. While Sannu attempts, often successfully, to dramatise life in Egypt as he sees it, the published texts do not emphasise the settings or provide accurate descriptions of them. The fact that the dialogue is in colloquial Arabic makes it more difficult to understand the humour and meaning. The humour in these dramas derives not only from subtle situations and odd characters, but also from the different accents of non-Arab characters. Moreover he shows great skill and facility in handling the dialogue of his plays. By accurately rendering both idioms and nuances, Sannu faithfully captures the thoughts and life-style of the class he portrays. He knows the language and topics of conversation of the peasants, bourgeoisie, and high-class society.

Sannu's dramas not only attracted a large audience of Egyptians of all classes, but also provoked the curiosity and interest of the spectator. The audience became involved with the stage, sometimes to the point of participating in the action. De Baigniers quotes a journalist writing for the *Saturday Review*, who praised Sannu's theatre, stating that the audience frequently made comments or suggestions to change the end of a play to satisfy their wish for happy endings. Sometimes the spectators would tell the actors what to do, or incite one character against another. In a love scene for example, they would exclaim, "Let see whether you will let your rival take your beloved away from you," or, "How can you prefer such a stupid and arrogant man to this decent and respectable young man?" (qtd in Moosa, *The Origins* 65). When these comments were spoken, Sannu was hiding backstage, ready to prompt the actors with the right answers to save them from embarrassment.

Furthermore, Sannu remarks that the quality of his audience improved considerably in the second year of his theatre. Intelligent, responsive, and interested, it represented all segments of Arabic and Egyptian society. Its indirect interventions in the performance turned the most serious situations into occasions for roaring laughter. In the drama *Ghandur Misr* (The Egyptian Dandy), Sannu did not realise that the actress he had assigned the role of a desperate lover hated the actor who was to play opposite her. The poor actor truly loved the actress and was grateful for the opportunity to perform a love scene with her. After the actress finished a line expressing her love, the actors, taking her acting as a truth, elatedly turned to her and whispered softly, "May God bless this stage which finally humbled you and made you express your love to me before thousands of spectators" (qtd in Moosa, *The Origins* 65). The actress became furious and, forgetting that she was on the stage, slapped the presumptuous actor in the face. She turned to the audience and declared that the words of love she had whispered to the conceited actor did not represent her true feelings. "For", she continued, "I would rather be blind than love him. It is the author, the Egyptian Moliere, who put these words in my mouth" (65). Sannu was shocked and utterly embarrassed by the incident. To his complete disbelief, the audience roared in laughter and applauded. They were so amused by the feud that they demanded a repetition of this incident.

More importantly, the influence of Sannu's theatre on the conservative elements of Arabic and Egyptian society was apparently tremendous. He seems even to have stirred the imagination of the Azharite Ulema, who had never been stirred to writing a play. Al-Shaykh Mohammed Abdo al-Fattah, a learned friend of Sannu's, composed a tragedy titled *Layla,* which was performed on Sannu's stage. Cabinet ministers, scholars, and poets attended the performance, and the audience's response was quite favourable. During a scene depicting the

killing of four sons of a tribal chief by a ruthless despot, however, a wag slyly whispered to two newly assigned police officers in the audience that it was their duty to prevent people from being murdered. The gullible police officers jumped to the stage and arrested the "murderer" amid the jeers and laughter of the spectators (I. Abduh 32). Such incidents reflect Sannu's importance as the creator of a native theatre using familiar rather than classic situations. His social comedies reflected his profound understanding of the ethos of the Arabic Egyptian people, whose strengths and foils he depicted more accurately than the Syrian dramatists working simultaneously.

It may be useful at this stage to pause and ask, what did the two pioneers (Sannu and al-Naqqash) of modern Arabic drama have in common? It is interesting that, although both dramatists clearly followed their paths independently and a gap of twenty-three years separate their first plays, Sannu and al-Naqqash share a number of features. In the first place their work betrays the influence of Italian opera (Badawi, *Early* 51); they both emphasised the role of singing in drama, albeit in different degrees. Secondly, both were clearly inspired by Moliere, whose influence was crucial in shaping the early attempts at writing Arabic plays. The plays we have been discussing owe an obvious debt to the artificial comedy of intrigue; they have complicated plots, in which servants are no less involved than their masters, with disguise and mistaken identity as obvious sources of humour which also arises from malapropisms, dialect and misuse of language.

On the thematic level, the dominant themes in the work of both dramatists are love and marriage, money and greed. Where the plot requires mixing of the sexes, non-Muslim characters are introduced. It is interesting that both playwrights confined their work to comedy and farce; even when complications threaten to take a sad turn, a happy end is never in doubt. Here and in the particular kind of comedy they wrote, al-Naqqash and Sannu determined the course of Arabic

drama for generations. It is noteworthy mentioning that few serious attempts at writing tragedy were made later and these tended to belong more to melodrama than to tragedy proper. The result is that Arabic tragedy did not develop to the same extent as comedy. For tragedy the Arabic theatre generally turned to translations from European dramatists, particularly Shakespeare, Corneille and Racine.[8] Yet there are important differences between Sannu and al-Naqqash, both in the content and the language of their plays. Sannu's work reflects contemporary social reality much more intimately than al-Naqqash's, which as reflected above, tends to be set either in social vacuum or else in the fantasy world of the *Arabian Nights.* Likewise, unlike al-Naqqash, Sannu did not hesitate to use spoken Arabic in his dialogue, and with the exception of his last play he refrained from the employment of traditional rhyming prose (Badawi, *Early* 53).

In this way, after the closure of Sannu's theatre in 1872, Arabic theatre in Egypt seemed to have passed through a period of stupor until the arrival of Salim al-Naqqash from Beirut in 1876. He brought with him a company of actors and began performing the plays of his uncle Marun al-Naqqash. Moreover, Salim was the first of a series of Syrian actors and dramatists who, attracted by the Khedive's encouragement of the arts, came to perform in Egypt, where they often settled, forming and reforming different troupes, thereby determining the course of the Egyptian and Arabic drama both by their own activities and by the example they set to the Egyptians. The closing of years of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth witnessed the rise of a large number of theatrical companies which included Egyptian actors and playwrights. As early as 1900, Egyptian theatre had become not only a permanent feature of Egyptian urban life, but a political force of some significance (Badawi, *Modern Arabic*

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[8] See the chapters "The Arabs and Shakespeare" in Badawi's *Modern Arabic Literature and the West*.

Drama. 5). Original plays dealing with recent political events were banned by censorship and even some translated plays were treated with suspicion by the British authorities if they contained matter which could be regarded as capable of inflaming national feelings. The ever-growing number of theatres showed musicals, translations and adaptations of Western drama, together with serious original Arabic plays, as well as the popular farces which were a development of the rude traditional form. Leading Egyptian actors and actresses became widely known throughout the Arab world.

From the late 1920s, the Egyptian government began to take an active interest in the serious theatre in an attempt to protect it from the threat posed by the popular commercial theatre which provided a cheap diet of singing, dancing, slap-stick comedy and Arabicised French vaudevilles. Scholarships were provided to study drama and acting in Europe and in 1930 a school of dramatic arts was set up under the direction of the properly trained Zaki Tulaymat. By the 1930s drama and acting had acquired some respectability for various reasons, which include the increasing number of well-educated or upper-class individuals who became involved in the theatre, and the growth of theatre criticism, published first in the national newspapers or weeklies and then in many magazines devoted almost exclusively to the theatre which began to flood the market in the twenties. Another relevant factor is the interest taken in drama, ancient and modern, by the highly esteemed author and critic Taha Husayn, whose enthusiastic reception of the first serious and mature play by Tawfiq al-Hakim remains one of the most memorable passages in his critical writings (5). It is significant that the first play the new National Theatre Troupe performed, in 1935, was al-Hakim's first serious and mature play *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1933).

There are, therefore, good reasons to deal, in the next chapter, with Tawfiq al-Hakim who is the best known and most important figure in the development of modern Arabic drama. When al-Hakim started publishing his work in the early thirties, drama was slowly becoming a respectable form of literature, although, partly because of the world economic crisis, the Egyptian theatrical world was shrinking rapidly, and the theatrical activities that managed to survive were largely confined to the popular commercial stage. The rift between drama as literature and drama as stage performance was, alas, becoming ever wider. Al-Hakim's extraordinarily long and active career as a dramatist, during which he produced more than eighty plays, spans over half a century, from the 1920s to the 1970s, a period which can justly be described as that of the fully-fledged modern Egyptian and Arabic drama (6).

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Chapter Three

Al-Hakim's Contributions to Modern Arabic Drama

The chapter attempts to briefly explore al-Hakim's life in order to determine the social, political and intellectual environment that made up 'the greater proportion' of al-Hakim. This chapter also endeavours to introduce the reader to a large output of al-Hakim's dramatic writings. It provides synopses and general assessments of al-Hakim's major plays. Having written over seventy plays, al-Hakim has contributed a significant body of plays to modern Arabic drama. As a matter of convenience, al-Hakim's major plays are classified here chronologically and thematically into different categories. The first category includes plays of his early experimentation with drama; it includes plays such as *al-Dayf al-Thaqil* (The Unwelcome Guest, 1919) and *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The Modern Woman, 1923). The second category, Theatre of Variety, deals with comedy of manners and themes from society. It includes plays such as *al-Khuruj min al-Janna* (Expulsion from Paradise, 1928) and *Hayat Tahattamat* (A Wrecked Life, 1930). The third category, Theatre of the Mind or Intellectual Theatre, deals with abstract ideas such as the struggle between man and time as in *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1933) or between man and space as in *Shahrazad* (1934). The fourth category, Theatre of Society, deals with plays related to social and political issues. It includes plays such as *al-Rajul alladhi Samad* (The Man who Withstood the Current, 1950) and *Ughniyat al-Mawt* (Song of Death, 1950). The fifth category comprises plays dealing with issues related to the 1952 Revolution in Egypt. It includes *al-Safqah* (The Deal, 1956) and al-*Aydi al-Na'imah* (Soft Hands, 1959). The last category, Theatre of the Absurd, includes plays

such as *Ya Tali' al-Shajarah* (The Tree Climber, 1962) and *Rihlat Qitar* (A Train Journey, 1964).

3.1 His Early Life

Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987) is considered one of the greatest and most influential figures in the contemporary Arabic literature. Had the committee for the Nobel Prize decided at an earlier date than 1988 that recognition should be given to the renaissance that was occurring in modern Arabic literature, the prize would surely have been awarded to Tawfiq al-Hakim. As with Bernard Shaw in the West, Tawfiq al-Hakim's fame as a writer was not helped by being regarded in the main as a playwright at a time when most readers found their preferred reading in the novel (Johnson-Davies 1). In fact, great claims have been made for him; for example Gibb regards him as the founder of drama in Arabic (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 8), Louis Awad describes him as 'the true founder of Egyptian drama in every serious sense' (qtd in Vatikiotis 159), and Ghali Shukri calls him 'the first pioneer of the dramatic art in Arabic' (27). His drama is claimed by the famous poet Salah Abd al-Sabur to have been 'born in a vacuum' (96). Moreover, William Hutchins, the author of an English translation of some of his plays, gave his introduction the descriptive title 'A One-Man Egyptian Theatre Tradition' (qtd in Badawi, *Mod Arabic Drama* 8). Richard Long concluded his study *Tawfiq al-Hakim, Playwright of Egypt* (1979) with his remarkable statement that Tawfiq al-Hakim 'had virtually nothing that was indigenous onto which to graft his own historic achievements' (207).

Generally speaking, al-Hakim is the only Arab playwright to have achieved an international recognition. Some of his works have been translated into several world

languages. His greatness springs from his daring innovation in drama, which contributed much to the acceptance of the genre in Egypt in the mid-thirties, and also from his everlasting impact on Egyptian novelists who are his juniors. He is possibly the most voluminous twentieth-century playwright in the world (Ghattas 1), having written more than seventy plays which are viewed by most critics as 'intellectual' plays. As for literature in general, he contributed to upgrading the short story and the novel. As a novelist, he has written only four major novels. Paradoxically, al-Hakim has left his mark on younger novelists more than he has on dramatists (Long 187-88), as evident in the work of Najib (also spelled as Naguib) Mahfouz.[1] His stories reflect his artistic talents in description which requires accurate observation and knowledge. He, furthermore, made diary writing one of the arts of Arabic literature. He obviously impressed the Egyptian and the Arabic society in general through his opinions and philosophy in life and his contribution to political, asocial and literary issues. He set an example in advocating freedom of opinion and sacrificing position and money.

In his autobiography, *Sijn al-Umr* (The Prison of Life, 1964), Tawfiq al-Hakim writes:

> The tragedy became evident to my eyes one day when I was analyzing myself, and it occurred to me that only a minor proportion of the life I was living was my own, the greater proportion being that mixture, kneaded like dough, of contradictory elements deposited in the generative fluid out

[1] Mahfouz, the 1988 Nobel Prize winner in literature, has always acknowledged al-Hakim's influence on him and the development of modern Arabic novel in general. For more on the influence of al-Hakim on Mahfouz, see William Hutchins, Introduction, *Return of the Spirit*, by Tawfiq al-Hakim, trans. William Hutchins 8-9.

> of which I was formed. I am a prisoner in what I inherited, free in what I have acquired. (201)

What was, then, the social, political and intellectual environment that made up 'the greater proportion' of al-Hakim? And to what extent was he imprisoned by it?

Al-Hakim was born in Alexandria, Egypt, to an Egyptian father who worked in the judiciary and a Turkish mother who was a member of the Egyptian Turkish aristocracy and whose family roots may have been Persian (al-Hakim, *Sijn* 9). Due to the superiority the Turks claimed to have in Egypt at the time, the relationship between the couple was very definitive from the outset: she is the boss. She took upon herself the job of "civilising" her husband by acquainting him with her people and detaching him from his own. She made no secret of her superiority. Al-Hakim writes that "she constantly used to tell (him), I am cleverer than your father. I'm quicker in understanding than your father!" (26). However, as Isma'il Adham notes in his biography of al-Hakim that the father Isma'il al-Hakim was not as naïve as it seems: he knew exactly the sort of conveniences the marriage could offer him; social status along with three hundred acres of rich land his wife would bring (qtd in Ghattas 2).

As a child al-Hakim experienced severe strictures: for instance, she prevented him from playing with peasants' children, who were socially beneath them, and was determined, against his wish, to send him to his elementary school in a horse-carriage to distinguish him from other pupils. Al-Hakim narrates a very telling incident of his mother's lack of tenderness:

> Still clinging to my memory is the image of a small basket containing fruit that was always by her beside, for a breakfast of fruit was prescribed for

> her. I used to steal glances at these fruits and my mouth watered at the sight of them, but I was not allowed to approach them; I was told they were some kind of medicine. (*Sijn* 42-43)

He narrates in the same book that his mother who was fond of candy, used to tell him that sweets were prescribed for her, and when he asked for some, she gave him a little and told him to go to hell (46).

Even though he was an educated man and a respected judge, al-Hakim's father was probably backward as many Egyptian farmers of the time with regard to raising a child. He was often impatient and inattentive. Although al-Hakim is very much appreciative of his parents in general, he emphasises throughout his autobiography that his up-bringing continued to work to his disadvantage for the rest of his life. He tells us that one day his father, who loved poetry, asked him to read a poem loudly. And when he did, his father stopped him and inquired about the meaning of a certain word. For his bad luck, he could not come up with the right answer; his father slapped him, causing his nose to bleed. Al-Hakim reflects on this incident: "it would have been natural and logical for me to have loved poetry as my father did, but my nosebleed made me hate it for a long time – how could I love it then when blood had been shed between us?" (72). Most probably, it was the lack of parental love which unconsciously made young al-Hakim choose "love" for a subject, when asked by his Arabic composition teacher to get up to the chalkboard and write a subject to talk about in the class (al-Hakim, *Awdat* 81).

According to Adham, the harsh treatment al-Hakim received at an early age at the hands of his parents and his consequent detachment from them have shaped the writer's "pattern" of thinking for years to come. Moreover, Adham argues that al-Hakim's

childhood was full of abstract thoughts, which he developed in his mind in order to counteract the strict system imposed on him by his parents (Ghattas 3). This may very well be true, given the contemplative nature of al-Hakim as an adult. In his *Fann al-Adab* (Art of Literature), al-Hakim testifies to Adham's finding: "I did not get all that I was eager to have of toys and things, so I created them myself through my passionate imagination" (270). As a grown up man, he preferred loneliness to company and contemplation to conversation. In *Himar al-Hakim* (Al-Hakim's Donkey), he tells us that one day, after considerable begging on the part of a French movie director, he accepted a dinner invitation to discuss the dialogue he was writing for an Egyptian documentary film with some French nationals. But when he got there, he avoided contact with guests, preferring to sit by himself instead. When a female guest asked him whether he always liked to be alone, he replied that he was "predestined" to be so (128). In *Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, the Public Prosecutor, who resembles al-Hakim when the latter worked in the judiciary, explains why he prefers seclusion:

> By nature I am fitted to be a hidden observer of people strutting across the stage of life rather than to be skilled actor flooded with limelight under the eyes of an audience. For such situations dazzle and unbalance me so that I lose my memory and am deprived of that inner calm wherewith the deeper issues can best be observed. (77)

Besides, al-Hakim was never comfortable with the politicians and intelligentsia of his time and did his best to turn down all sorts of invitations, the most notable of which was that of Abd al-Nasser,[2] because, as he wrote later in *Awdat al-Wa'y (Return of Consciousness)*, he could not utter the kind of flattery Abd al-Nasser wanted to hear. Al-

[2] Gamal Abd al-Nasser was a president of Egypt at that time, roughly during 1952-1970.

Hakim refused to belong to any political party because, as he wrote in *Malamih Dakhiliya (Inner Features),* political parties assigned a secondary role to intellectuals. But he insisted that "the isolation" he "promoted was from politicians not from politics" (153). Accordingly, all of the solutions offered to the many social and political problems he dealt with in his writings were not the result of many lively debates on his part, but rather of his ideal analysis while sitting at his desk. Up until the last day of his life, he was referred to as the unsociable man living in an 'ivory tower' (Ghattas 5).

In addition to his unsociability and the inconveniences it brought upon him, the accusation of being a misogynist put him on the defensive for almost all his life. But this was an unenthusiastic and careless defence, to say the least. It may be true that his early troubled upbringing and his less-than-smooth relationship with his mother contributed to igniting his critics' opinions about his hatred of women. "Woman's foe," was the title he was first endowed with in 1935 by Hoda Sharawy, the leader of the feminist movement in Egypt at the lime. But his troubles with women in general had begun when he objected to the "unveiling" of modern Egyptian women, believing that it would endanger traditional family values, as stressed in his play *The Modern Woman* (1923), which was apparently a parody of Qasim Amin's book, *Al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New Woman).[3] He later abandoned his position and called the play the most ridiculous piece of drama he had ever written (*Malamih* 291). But it was probably too late for him to clear his reputation, even with the peace he attempted to make with Sharawy, whom he asked to recommend a future wife. But when Sharawy came up with the name of a feminist activist, he hesitated to marry her on the grounds that the proposed wife might turn his house into a conference on woman's rights (Ghattas 5). Later, when he was forty-six, he met and married a

[3] Qasim Amin (1863-1908) was an advocate of women's liberation and education in Egypt.

woman on his own.

3.2 His Career as a Dramatist

Having written over seventy plays, al-Hakim has contributed a significant body of plays to modern Arabic drama. The five proposed categories of his dramaturgic career are discussed below in some detail.

3.2.1 His Early Experimentation with Plays

In his autobiographical work, *Sijn al-Umr* (The Prison of Life), al-Hakim relates how as a child he was taken by his father to see a performance of *Shuhad'a al-Gharam*, the Arabic version of *Romeo and Juliet*, in the provincial town of Dusuq. It was an experience which left an indelible mark on his mind and to have ignited his interest in the theatre (al-Hakim, *Sijn* 85). As a schoolboy in Cairo he would go to the Opera House whenever he could afford the price of the ticket, to see his favourite actor Jurji Abyad perform the leading role in Arabic translations of *Oedipus Rex*, *Othello*, and *Louis XI* from which he says he could recite from memory 'whole pages' to his fellow theatre fans (140). In 1918-19 while he was still at school, he wrote his first play, *al-Dayf al-Thaqil* (The Unwelcome Guest) – a satiric allegory in which he attacked the British occupation of Egypt. As a law undergraduate he managed to write, either singly or in collaboration with a friend, four plays for the troupe of Ukasha Brothers. These plays were: *Aminusa* (1922), which was an adaptation of Alfred de Musset's *Carmosine*, set in Pharaonic Egypt, *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The Modern Woman, 1923), which was inspired by the Egyptian movement for the emancipation of women; *al-Aris* (The Bridegroom, 1924) and *Khatem Suleiman* (Suleiman's Ring, 1924) both of which were adapted from French plays whose author al-Hakim could not recall. In 1925, he began his sixth play, *Ali Baba*

which he completed in France in the following year. However, the first two plays were never performed. For obvious reasons, *The Unwelcome Guest* could not have been passed by the British censor, while *Aminusa* ran into insurmountable difficulties with the person who was supposed to set it to music. The other four plays were all staged by the Ukasha Brothers, *The Bridegroom* and *Suleiman's Ring* in 1924, and *The Modern Woman* and *Ali Baba* in 1926, while al-Hakim was in France.

Due to al-Hakim's passion for music which he developed very early in his boyhood, he had a great desire to contribute to the thriving musical theatre of the time. The plays he wrote in this genre, known as 'operetta,' did not seem to differ materially from those that had dominated the Egyptian stage for a long time. Like them, they were adaptations of European works rather than original creations, with a strongly pronounced melodramatic or farcical element (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 10). *Amiusa* deals with the story of the daughter of the court physician whose mysterious illness is attributed to her passion for the person she took to be the Pharaoh, with whom she has fallen desperately in love at first sight; it involves mistaken identity, a complicated plot and a melodramatic ending. *Suleiman's Ring,* another tale of romantic love, is based on an even more complicated plot involving disguises and mistaken identity, with situations reminiscent of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, *All's Well*, and *Measure for Measure.* A young woman, Budour, resorts to all manner of tricks, including disguising herself as a soldier and courting another woman, and even passing herself off as that other woman in an attempt to get the man she loves, Suleiman, to sleep with her – all so that she can get him to give her his ring, which was the condition he had made for agreeing to marry her. *Ali Baba,* although it deals with the well-known tale from the *Arabian Nights*, was, in

fact, not derived directly from the Arabic heritage in the manner we have seen in the work of other dramatists, such as Marun Naqqash and Qabbani, but was based on a French *opera-comique* by Albert Vanloo and William Busnach entitled *Ali Baba et de quarante voleurs* (10).

On the other hand, the non-musical plays were not less complicated in their structure than the musical ones. *The Bridegroom*, also an adaptation from the French, involved considerable use of disguise and mistaken identity, masters and servants exchanging roles, illicit relationships, strange coincidences, farcical and melodramatic situations, with an artificially contrived happy ending in which all three couples in the play are conveniently married. Despite the Egyptian names of the characters, newspaper critics who saw it on the stage complained of the improbable and un-Egyptian nature of many of its situations (R. Awad 19). Replying to one such critic, al-Hakim wrote that his play was meant to be a farce and as a farce its plot was made deliberately and unnaturally complicated, its characters being mere caricatures and its aim no more than to entertain and provoke laughter (22).

The Modern Woman, which was produced as late as 1962, was not only meant to be a farce, but it was also a social satire on the movement for the emancipation of the Egyptian and Arabic woman. Al-Hakim was inspired by what the author described, several decades later, as his misplaced fear of the disappearance of institution of marriage and the collapse of traditional values in general as a result of the excesses of the emancipated women (*al-Masrah*, Preface). Nevertheless, the plot of *The Modern Woman* is not free from complications and improbabilities. Mahmoud Bey Lam'i, a rich landlord and widower in his forties, enjoys freedom from the fetters of marriage and keeps his

teenage daughter in the care of an older sister, thereby enabling him to lead a life of dissipation, drinking and womanising. When the aunt dies, the father is worried about his daughter and who is going to take care of her. Therefore, he desperately tries to find a husband for his daughter and seeks the help of his rent collector. They both think of Suleiman, a tenant in his block of flats, a charming young man who has wasted a huge inheritance on riotous living. He, somewhat, gets attracted to her. However, being an emancipated woman, Layla does not wish to marry Suleiman, but is content to have him as her lover. In the end he too renounces all thought of marrying a loose woman when he learns that Layla has been the mistress of Sami, her father's friend. The play ends with the disillusioned Suleiman lamenting the disastrous representations of women's emancipation, which has led to unveiling and free love. However, the irony of the play is that while the male characters, Mahmoud and Suleiman, do not wish to marry and are happy to have extra-marital sexual relationships, they are most indignant when their own women-folk wish to do the same thing.

In fact, these early plays by al-Hakim are clearly the work of a young man learning his craft. However, despite their obvious limitations they highlight two points. One is how deeply rooted in the Egyptian theatrical tradition al-Hakim's beginnings were. Secondly, they underline the continuity in his work. Al-Hakim may have turned away from musical drama; however, the change in his work was gradual rather than sudden and in his early attempts seeds can be detected which grew and developed in his later productions. His concern with social and political problems continued unabated. The symbolic or allegoric tendency, already seen in his first play, was to be further developed in his later productions. In *The Unwelcome Guest*, the British occupation of

Egypt is presented in terms of a guest in the house of a lawyer who outstays his welcome and takes advantage of his host when clients call in the lawyer's absence, by collecting the fees for himself under false pretences. The framework of satiric comedy continues to be employed by al-Hakim, whose gift for comic situations, and in particular for comic dialogue, was noted and admired by theatre-goers from the very beginning of his career, as is amply illustrated by contemporary theatre reviews (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 12).

Except for *The Modern Woman*, none of these plays was published by al-Hakim, who for many years seemed too embarrassed to publicise his authorship of them. He was careful not to incur the wrath of his bourgeois parents or jeopardise his professional legal career by publishing the fact that he was the author of these plays. However, as soon as his association with the theatre was discovered, he was sent to France to pursue postgraduate legal studies, in the hope that his links with the disreputable theatre world would be severed forever. In one of his letters which he wrote to a friend, dated 19th September 1925, we are told that before being sent off to France by his tyrannical father, al-Hakim had made up his mind to work as a lawyer, not because of his love for the profession but because it would enable him to study in depth some of the social ills of his country and therefore qualify to write better drama (R. Awad 4-9).

Once in Paris, al-Hakim was fully immersed in the world of French and European theatre and indeed in the whole of European culture: literature, art and thought. Of these facets of culture he seemed to have drunk to his fill, but it was drama that was his passion. The three years he spent in Paris in the 1920s as an impressionable young man in his twenties were crucial in forming his consciousness as a young artist (El-Enany 41).

Having seen the plays of the top dramatists of the day – Ibsen, Shaw, Maeterlinck and Pirandello – the word 'drama' had come to mean to the aspiring dramatist something palpably different from its connotation in Cairo. Gone were the days of farce, vaudeville, operetta and popular theatrical entertainment. The works of those masters were to become al-Hakim's ideal, his guide in fulfiling the self-imposed task of saving Arabic drama from contempt. By writing dramas which could be considered literary works of value, good in their own right, apart from their meeting the exigencies of the stage. Al-Hakim hoped to gain a sufficiently good name for his favourite art to allow it to take its place alongside poetry, long considered by Arabs their major achievement (al-Ra'i, "Tawfiq al-Hakim" 369).

Although al-Hakim tells us that the intellectual atmosphere in Paris was responsible for diverting his attention from studying law and making him fall in love with different kinds of art at first sight, it is worth mentioning that the switch was very much decided on long before he reached the shores of France. A recent scholar has described al-Hakim when he first graduated in 1925:

> He was now a young man full of powerful emotions as yet unfocused, very sentimental and idealistic, given to deep and lengthy thought, very attached to his people and his country and bursting with desire to serve, but seeing no opportunity for such service before him; in love with art, with music, feeling a profound need for beauty and bursting with a desire to be an artist, but finding no means of satisfying that desire, not even dreaming of the possibility of one day finding himself in an environment in which art was the principal preoccupation. (qtd in Ghattas 11)

Nevertheless, al-Hakim tells us throughout his autobiography, *Zahrat al-Umr* (The Bloom of Life, 1943) that the three years – this period is described by him as the bloom of life – he spent in France shaped his artistic talent for years to come. More importantly, al-Hakim actually started his writing career in Paris – he remarks: "my writing period started only after my departure to Europe when I was able to drink from the real culture" (*Sijn* 223-24). During those short years, he read everything he could get in his hands. In a letter to his French friend, Andre, on the day he failed his doctorate final exam and was consequently ousted from the programme, al-Hakim indicated that he was reading at least a hundred pages a day in literature, philosophy and other disciplines, and that what he read in a month was as much as one needed for the entire doctorate degree in law (*Zahrat* 77). In addition, to his impressive breath of reading, he attended lectures given by famous writers, the most notable being James Joyce (Ghattas 12).

According to Badawi, two things determined al-Hakim's career as a dramatist, as a result of his three-year sojourn in Paris: his deep realisation that theatre is a noble and serious branch of literature, and his overwhelming interest in the French avant-garde theatre of the time which inspired him to write his 'theatre of ideas.' Badawi writes:

> For our purpose two things, not altogether unrelated, can be singled out, which were to determine the subsequent course of his career as a dramatist and which resulted from his three-year sojourn in Paris. First is his deep realization that, far from being an ephemeral activity, the theatre is, or should be, a noble and serious branch of literature.… Second, before long al-Hakim was surprised to find himself turning away from the popular

> theatre in Paris, from the farces, vaudevilles and operettas he was used to in Cairo and developing an overwhelming interest in the French *avant-garde* theatre of the time: the stage productions of plays by Ibsen, Pirandello, Maeterlinck and Shaw.… The highly intellectual content of such works was soon to inspire al-Hakim to write what became known later as his 'theatre of ideas.' (*Modern Arabic Drama* 13)

When in 1928 he failed to obtain his doctorate in law, al-Hakim was ordered by his father to return immediately to Egypt, where he held a succession of posts in the legal service in different parts of the country. These provided him with interesting experience and hence valuable material for his creative writing. However, his return to Egypt was traumatic. Not only did he miss the brilliant and stimulating cultural milieu of Paris, but he discovered to his chagrin that the Egyptian theatre, which had been bubbling with activity when he left Cairo, was now virtually dead (al-Hakim, *Sijn* 264). Al-Hakim gave two reasons for the death of the theatre: on one hand, the squabbles and struggle for power between the various political parties, which made politics and political journalism occupy the forefront of people's attention to the exclusion of the arts, and, on the other hand, the growing world economic crisis, with its impact on the Egyptian economy. The only theatres that managed to survive were those that catered for either the melodramas of Yufus Wahbi or the farces of Najib al-Rihani and Ali al-Kassar (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 14).

3.2.2 Theatre of Variety (Comedy of Manners and Themes from Society)

Al-Hakim resumed writing plays on his return from France in order to promote theatre and acting. The plays al-Hakim wrote in this period include *al-Khuruj min al-*

Janna (Expulsion from Paradise, 1928); *Ba'd al-Mawt* or *Sirr al-Muntahira* (After Death or The [Female] Suicide's Secret, 1929); *Hayat Tahattamat* (A Wrecked Life, 1930); *Rasasah fi al-Qalb* (A Bullet in the Heart, 1931) and *al-Zammar* (The Piper, 1932). The first two were written in literary or classical Arabic, while the Egyptian colloquial was chosen for the other three. Although all were set in contemporary Egypt, they cover a variety of subjects, ranging from social and psychological problems to more abstract issues such as the relative nature of truth, the relation of art to happiness, or the choice between 'perfection of the life or of the work,' to use W.B. Yeats' phrase. Despite the fact of being a measure of continuity in al-Hakim's work, there is no doubt that these plays constitute a significant development in modern Egyptian as well as Arabic drama: with them a new note of intellectuality has crept in. That is to say, Egyptian and Arabic drama has acquired a philosophical dimension (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 15).

In *Expulsion from Paradise*, al-Hakim dramatises the story of Inan, a young beautiful girl who has been married for a year to Mukhtar, a very rich young man of latent poetic talents. Her father, who was a Pasha and an ex-cabinet minister, likens his joining the cabinet as 'entering Paradise' and losing the ministry to 'expulsion from Paradise' (al-Hakim, *al-Masrah* 350). However, Inan's view of paradise is somewhat different: for her it is the paradise of love and since she assumes that no love lasts forever she feels that she should have the courage and determination to walk out of paradise before being expelled from it. She, moreover, thinks that the paradise in which her husband lives, in which he is able to enjoy anything he wants, has led to wasting his artistic talents (364). She therefore proceeds ruthlessly and systematically to push her husband, who she dearly loves, but to whom she does not show her real feelings in any

visible form, to give her the divorce she made up her mind to obtain. The act ends with Mukhtar giving her divorce as a proof of his love, since divorce is what she really wants.

The unhappy Mukhtar, having been expelled from his paradise and having spent away most of his fortune, now lives alone in a small flat surrounded by his books. His sufferings have unleashed in him his creative energies. He is now a noted playwright, having turned his unfortunate experience into a play which has proved a great success and is entitled *Expulsion from Paradise* – the same title as al-Hakim's play. The actress who is playing the leading female role, having been deeply moved by the play and being curious to know more about the author – who has now acquired a great reputation – visits Mukhtar in his flat. After a reasonably civil conversation, during which he admires the perfume she is wearing, is completely bewildered by his sudden inexplicable anger and rudeness when she insists on making him a present of her bottle of perfume (not knowing that it is the same scent that his wife used to wear). After her departure he is surprised by another visit, this time from Inan (now the wife of another man and the mother of several children). She has come to congratulate him on his splendid play, which she has just seen and which has moved her to tears. She also wishes to explain to him after all these years her real motives in expelling him from paradise, although she does not quite manage to tell him that she has done it for his own sake. Despite her own suffering, she feels she has done the right thing: she has turned him into an artist who has immortalised their love. The play ends with a moving farewell scene; she goes off to join her diplomat husband and children on their way to a posting abroad and he returns to his sad and lonely existence as a creative writer.

Critically speaking, the play has an unmistakably poetic atmosphere, in spite of

its simple and straightforward dialogue. Apart from the romantic conception of the artist, which precludes happiness, clearly one of the play's main themes, the action is enveloped in a Maeterlinckian ethereal, melancholy air, resulting in (for al-Hakim) an untypical absence of humour (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 16). In addition, due to the author's concentration on the psychological interactions of his characters, the outside world of Egyptian society is virtually shut out, except for one satirical jibe at politicians when Inan's father tells her that when a man becomes a cabinet minister he loses half his brains and loses the other half when he ceases to be one (al-Hakim, *al-Masrah* 351). Inan, the heroine of the play, is portrayed as a beautiful, mysterious woman whom nobody, even her husband, can understand. He complains to her, saying, "I've been married to you for a whole year now and yet I cannot unlock that strange mystery which is yourself" (354). In fact, in Inan is the germ of the later and greater woman mystery we encounter in the play *Shahrazad*. Mukhtar, the artist, idealises her and the loss of her becomes the inspiration for his art. In the preface of his play, al-Hakim describes her significantly: "The strange woman who is the heroine of this story is merely a product of my imagination. Yet how I wish I could find such a woman, or that I could meet her face to face one day, for I am sure there must be somehow such a person in the world" (qtd in Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 16). Of course, the deliberate thinning of the line of demarcation between art and reality which is a striking feature of this play is one of the recurrent topics in al-Hakim's plays. Here it is highlighted by the obvious use of devices reminiscent of Pirandello: *Expulsion from Paradise* is the title both of al-Hakim's play and Mukhtar's, which is a play within a play.

In *The Suicide's Secret*, al-Hakim deals with the theme of the relative nature of

truth and the extent to which our actions are determined not by the facts but by our interpretations of them (16). It is set in upper-class urban Egyptian society. It dramatises the story of Mahmoud Azmi, a distinguished ageing doctor, married to Iqbal, an elegant lady who is fifteen years his junior. Aziza, who is a beautiful eighteen-year-old female patient, tries to make him understand that she is madly in love with him. Once in his clinic, while he is desperately trying to finish writing his notes in time for a lecture he is about to give the same day, she forces her way into his clinic in a state of nervous excitement and demanding attention. Mahmoud who does not pay attention to what she says, is soon shocked to find her threat to kill herself for his sake is real. Act I ends melodramatically with the young woman jumping out of the clinic's window to her death. Act II opens with the investigations by the police and public prosecutor in the clinic and the interviews conducted with the dead girl's mother and doctor. The wife started to suspect her husband who began to idealise the suicide and change his behaviour, thereby giving her reason to believe that he has been unfaithful to her.

Act III takes place in the doctor's house six months later. We witness the total transformation in the doctor's character and appearance, with a consequent demoralising effect on his wife who looks neglected and rather dowdy. It opens with the wife's successful attempt to probe the cause of the girl's suicide, in the course of a conversation with the girl's mother, and ends with her mercilessly confronting her husband with the real cause. She discovers that the real reason for the girl's suicide was not her uncontrollable passion for the doctor, but that her chauffeur, a handsome young man also called Mahmoud, with whom she was obviously in love, has recently run away with another woman. The husband who is shocked and his vanity is hurt, reacts first by

refusing to believe his wife and finally by abusing her and throwing her to the ground. Being unhappy, the demoralised doctor refuses to see the women patients congregating in his waiting room. He is visited by his wife who is more elegantly dressed and looking extremely cheerful. But she has to gloat about her success over her husband and rub salt into his wound by telling him that no woman (including herself) would show any interest in him now. The play ends with the doctor throwing angrily the picture of the suicide out of the window.

A parallel between the wife and the husband is presented in this play. In the wife we have a portrait of a powerful woman. She is justifiably outraged at the way her rejuvenated husband, who is fifteen years her senior, rudely calls her an old hag. In fact, al-Hakim does some justice in making her turn the table against him. She does not hide her pleasure at watching him wince at her merciless blows as she deliberately and systematically proceeds to denude him of his comforting illusions. Her spite and vindictiveness are all too apparent: she does not refrain from brutally kicking him when he is down. Al-Hakim must have known the psychological state of a broken-hearted woman. The husband, on the other hand, does not hold a particularly high opinion of any woman (with the exception of the suicide, whom he initially idealised, only to be disillusioned later when he learned the facts). The result is that the battle of sexes in this play is not without an admixture of bitterness, which brings it, closer to Strindberg and Yazabak than the joyful world of humorous entertainment (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 19).

Generally, the play, which consists of four acts, is neatly constructed. Though written in classical Arabic, the dialogue flows very smoothly and the language seems to

express the dramatic personae clearly and easily. Al-Hakim's keen sense of humour is absent in this play, even though it shades sometimes into grim irony. For instance, in Act I the doctor and the young woman seem to be at cross-purpose, each using the same words but with entirely different meanings. The fact that Aziza does actually commit suicide certainly renders the play closer to the world of black comedy. The sight of once sober and dignified middle-aged doctor now rejuvenated, his hair dyed, sitting in front of a large mirror attended by his coiffeur, and flanked by two attractive young women who look after his manicure and other beauty needs, is certainly funny. However, it is difficult to think of it without remembering the gruesome medical forensic report on the state of the suicide's corpse.

Furthermore, another important aspect which deserves to be pointed out because of its presence in much of al-Hakim's work is the strikingly intellectual aspect. The dramatist, probably influenced by Pirandello, tends to view the human comedy more as an intellectual puzzle than as a complex, messy but warm human drama in which individuals struggle with their own passions or with one another in concrete, life-like situations (19). The dramatist, therefore, lays himself open to the charge of lack of warmth or compassion: for instance, he is less interested in the tragedy of the young woman's suicide or the feelings of her mother than in the effect of that event on the doctor's thesis, which is the subject of his lecture, namely, the role of ageing in determining man's actions and thoughts. Among the issues raised by *The Suicide's Secret* is the question 'Can man struggle successfully against Time?' It is a question to which, as we shall see, al-Hakim returns later in his work.

The range of al- Hakim's drama can be seen when we look at the other two plays:

Hayat Tahattamat: (A Wrecked Life) and *al-Zammar* (The Piper). These two plays are different from the previous ones for they are both set in the country and written in the colloquial. The opening scene of *A Wrecked Life,* a full-length drama in four acts, is again set in a doctor's clinic, not an opulent private clinic as in the other plays but a rural public health clinic where poverty and corruption are hinted at, but not emphasised, since they do not constitute a major theme of the play – which is mainly a study of moral decline and psychological disintegration. Shahin, once a prosperous and successful lawyer and a friend of Dr Subhi, goes to pieces after his wife, Aziza, on whose expensive taste in jewellery and perfumes he has wasted his inherited fortune, leaves him for a more powerful and richer man, the landowner Isawi. Shahin's self-confidence is utterly destroyed to the extent that he believes that Isawi is now married to his former wife who has the custody of their son, Izz al-Din of whom he is extremely fond.

In a desperate attempt to rescue Shahin from the slough of despair, nihilistic cynicism and self-destructive irresponsibility, Dr Subhi arranges for him to defend a plaintiff in a well-publicised case of arson; but Shahin, unable to recover, only provokes the laughter of the judge and the law court by his ridiculous and clownish behaviour. He also alarms the plaintiff, who instructs the court that he no longer wishes to be represented by Shahin. Shahin's failure has a deleterious effect upon his health and, thinking he has died, his landlady sends a telegram to Subhi who, together with Isawi and his ex-wife, turn up for the funeral, but are surprised to find Shahin still alive. Thoroughly humiliated, particularly at the discovery of the sordid conditions under which he lives, Shahin decides to end his life, and commits suicide by shooting himself with a revolver he had borrowed from Isawi and failed to return.

In fact, the play succeeds in presenting a series of vivid tableaux of life in the Egyptian countryside: the yawning gulf that separates the rich and the poor, the corruption of men in authority, the hypocrisy of the outwardly pious clergyman who secretly lends money at exorbitant interest. Above all the dullness and utter emptiness of village life drives the notables and functionaries to spend the evenings gambling and drinking. We even catch a glimpse of the way their women-folk live and the lack of trust between husbands and wives, which is revealed in the way wives resort to all manner of tricks, including stealing from their husbands, in order to obtain material gain. All the unsavoury details are mercilessly exposed by the dramatist, but with humour and even pathos. However the play does not really hang together very well. It lacks dramatic economy, for example, much of the dialogue between Aziza and the doctor's wife is not immediately relevant – which the dramatist himself knows, since he suggests that can be omitted when the play is performed (al-Hakim, *al-Masrah* 93). Even though Shahin's character arouses, to some extent, our sympathy, we are more relieved than moved at his death. We only encounter him when he is already a broken man, whose weakness, lack of dignity and clownish antics are often more embarrassing than comic: the past glory from which he has fallen is merely reported to us. The result is that he fails to elicit any tragic feeling, for we are not allowed to see his fall from prosperity to adversity, despite some competent use of tragic irony (115-124).

Like *A Wrecked Life*, a*l-Zammar* (The Piper) is set in a rural public health clinic. It is an interesting one-act play whose plot is very slight: a melomniac gives up his job as a medical orderly in order to work as a servant in the retinue of his idol, the national female singer, Suma. The play opens in the rural public health clinic in which the whole

action of the play takes place. The doctor has not arrived yet, though it is late in the morning, and the medical orderly Salim is seen sleepy at the Doctor's desk. We soon learn that both Salim and the Doctor have been up all the night enjoying themselves, though at different parties. The patients consist of men, women and children, all peasants who have been at the clinic from early in the morning anxiously waiting to be attended to so that they can go about their daily business. Salim wants to make up for the night's lost sleep and growls and hurls abuse at those who from time to time disturb him by asking him when they will be attended to. Instead of looking after his patients, Salim makes them listen to his reed pipe. Soon the Health Public Clerk arrives and announces the exiting news that the great singer, Suma, has been in the village since last night when her car broke down. She is being entertained by the landowner, Isawi, in his mansion, where she has given a private concern lasting all night.

Salim is stunned and upset that he was not given the chance to see and hear his idol singer. When the Doctor arrives, he is shocked by the state of the clinic. He orders Salim to clear it of 'those animals' and lock them up in the store-room, as he is expecting to show the clinic to some guests (Suma and her companions), and therefore wants it to be clean and tidy, with none of the 'filthy' peasants around. Suma arrives with her companions and her host and they are offered a cup of coffee. After some amusing, though embarrassing incidents, Salim, who has been spellbound by the singer, manages to play his reed pipe for her, and successfully begs to be employed by her so that he may be near his goddess, whom he believes to be made wholly of light! He announces his resignation from his present job and as he cannot go away in his orderly's uniform, he steals the Clerk's jacket and fez which he puts on in order to look more respectable. The

play ends with the Clerk coming on the empty stage (since the others have all gone: Suma and her companions back to Cairo and the rest to bid them farewell) and inquiring who has taken his jacket and fez.

In this play, al-Hakim, with masterly economy draws a remarkably vivid picture of many aspects of Egyptian village life. There are the peasants with their warm humanity, their affections and animosities, their filth and lice, their children's faces covered with flies. They steal chicken or burn their neighbour's property. They live in hope from one crop to another, from corn to cotton to beans: when it is a good crop they can afford to have their children circumcised, their daughters married off, or to take on another wife themselves. We even learn about the way the local Arab gypsies celebrate their weddings: parading the trousseau during the day – a brightly decorated red chest on a camel, a cone of sugar sticking out of the saddle bag and copper pots and pans held in their hands – and all night their firing their guns in the air, wildly clapping their hands, and devouring piping-hot sweet semolina before they go to sleep. Despite its more biting satire, revealing the appalling conditions of the peasants, the mood of *The Piper* is much less sombre than that of *A Wrecked Life* as it does not end with the death of one of its characters.

The Piper has been criticised by Richard Long as not being 'in any way noteworthy' (23). However, Badawi disagrees with Long's judgment as it is "a grossly unfair judgment of a work which, despite its apparent levity of tone, reflects so much sensitivity and humanity" (*Modern Arabic Drama* 24). Moreover, the exquisitely delineated character of the protagonist gives the play its powerful impact. Although the play is a study of the artistic temperament, albeit in a minor key, *The Piper*, despite its

title, is deeply rooted in the realistic world of Egyptian village, a world which al-Hakim does not gloss over but describes almost with the same candour and sense of outrage as in his later great novel, *Yawmiyyat Na'ib fi'l-Aryaf* (Diary of a Country Prosecutor). The solitary figure of the Clerk on the empty stage at the end of the play contrasts strikingly with the crowded opening scene. The peasants, the patients at the clinic, who were locked away before the arrival of the privileged city folk, are now completely forgotten: the playwright could not have made his point more eloquently.

3.2.3 Theatre of the Mind

In the preface to his *Pygmalion*, al-Hakim explains what he means by his theatre of the mind: "I set up my stage inside the mind, making my actors' ideas moving in the region of abstract thought, but dressed as symbols. It is true that I retain the spirit of *coup de theatre* but the theatrical surprises are not so much in the incidents as in the thoughts" (10). *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1933) is the most famous play of this category. It has proved a great literary success and a significant event in Arabic Drama. Enthusiastic reviews were written about it by some leading intellectuals and litterateurs such as Taha Hussein, who remarked that its appearance:

> ... is an important event, not in modern Arabic literature alone, but in the whole of Arabic literature.… It is a significant event, which is epoch making.… I have no hesitation in stating that it is the first work in Arabic literature which may be properly called drama ... and may be described as having raised the status of Arabic literature, making it possible to stand comparison with modern and ancient European literatures. (qtd in Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 189)

More than any other play, *The Sleepers in the Cave* managed to make Arabic drama a respectable form of literature. It was no wonder, therefore, that when the National Troupe Theatre was formed in Egypt in 1935, under the direction of the poet Khalil Mutran, in order to serve the cause of the serious theatre, *The Sleepers in the Cave* was chosen as the opening play of the season.

Nonetheless, the performance was not a success for the audience who failed to appreciate it seemed unimpressed by a performance in which the action on the stage was so limited in comparison with the more popular types of drama. In addition, the commercial theatre had for a long time been providing a regular diet of cheap farces and sensational melodramas. Many years later, al-Hakim lamented the fact that there was no small experimental theatre in Cairo at the time, where his play could have been produced before a small and well-educated audience instead of being shown to a crowd of people some of whom fell asleep during the performances (al-Hakim, *Sijn* 224). He also explained the abstract quality of his play which made it difficult for this play to be performed:

> What did I see? I saw what I had feared. This work is not suitable for performance, or at least not until [it is] made suitable for staying in a manner in which most people have become familiar with.… How will people feel when they see a struggle between man and time, between man and space and between man and his faculties? Are those abstract things and enigmatic thoughts suitable to arouse feeling just as they (do to) the mind? (224)

As a result, with the exception of *The Suicide's Secret*, which was staged by the National

Troupe in 1937, al-Hakim was not to have any of his full-length plays on the stage for nearly twenty years, with incalculable loss to the development of the Egyptian and Arabic theatre (Faraj 185). More importantly, a myth was born that al-Hakim's plays were not suitable, or even meant, for the production on actual stage, but were something called 'drama of the ideas' or 'theatre of the mind.' However, later many of al-Hakim's plays were performed because 'no dramatist writes a play to be read only,' he admitted to the playwright Alfred Faraj (qtd Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 27).

The Sleepers in the Cave, a full-length, four act play, is based on the Koranic version of the Christian legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus: young Christian men who seek refuge from the persecution by the pagan Emperor Decius in a cave and who miraculously sleep for two centuries, waking up in the reign of the Christian Emperor Theodosius II. Al-Hakim places the events in Tarsus and, following the Koran, makes the period of their sleep last three hundred years. Whereas the original legend had seven characters, for reasons of dramatic economy al-Hakim has limited his characters to three (and a dog): the Emperor's (King's) two ministers: Marnush, secretly married, with a son by a Christian woman, who was the cause of his conversion; Mishlinya, a younger man in love with the King's daughter, Prisca, who under his influence had undergone a clandestine conversion to Christianity; and a shepherd Yamlikha who had helped them to find the cave and who was accompanied by his dog Qatmir. The scene opens in the prevailing darkness of the cave, when the sleepers are beginning to wake painfully from their long slumber. Because of the dark, only their dim figures can be seen, which creates an other-worldly poetic atmosphere and indirectly emphasises the uncertainty of things and the absence of an absolute, clearly defined reality. The fact that the shepherd is not

known to the other two men gives the dramatist a plausible excuse to let him, and therefore the audience, know the basic relevant facts about the main characters.

Act I is a masterpiece of construction. The characters wake up one by one, complaining of their aching bones, Marnush blaming Mishlinya for their misfortune, because of his foolish and impulsive behaviour which leads the King to discover their secret religion. Mishlinya, hurt by his friend's accusation, offers to go to the King and give himself up in order to save Marnush's life, but is promptly stopped by the latter in case he causes further harm. Yamlikha is given some silver coins to buy food for them, but he soon returns to tell a strange tale: he finds a curiously dressed hunter on horseback, asks him to sell him some of his game, but the man is struck with terror when he sees him and is about to rush off on his horse when Yamlikha grasps the reins of his mount and offers him some coins. Looking at the coins, the hunter is amazed to find that they were struck in Decius's reign and, with a mixture of fear and curiosity, asks if he has any more of this ancient treasure. Convinced that the man is mad, Yamlikha snatches the money from his hand and rushes back to his companions. Marnush agrees that the man must be out of his mind but Mishlinya begins to wonder about the length of time they must have spent in the cave. Yamlikha tells a story he heard from his grandmother about a devout Christian shepherd who, sheltering from a rain storm, miraculously slept a whole month in a cave, but his story is at once dismissed by Marnush as an old wives' tale, thereby ironically making the miracle of the three hundred years' sleep all the more striking.

While the characters are debating this, they hear an approaching din: the horseman and a crowd of people have come to the entrance of the cave and they call out to 'the hoarder of the treasure' to come out; but meeting with no response they fetch torches and

storm into the cave. They are terrified by the appearance of the three men and rush out in disarray, screaming: 'Ghosts! Dead Men! Ghosts!' and leaving their torches behind. Act I ends with the three men seen in the light of the torches, frozen like statues, afraid and puzzled by what they have seen and heard. From Act I alone, the three characters emerge as clearly distinct from one another. The shepherd, Yamlikha, is an embodiment of simple and firm religious conviction, undisturbed by doubt. Born a Christian, he later goes through an experience of mystical dimensions which confirms and deepens his faith. His vision is clear and he has direct insight into things. Marnush is practical and sceptical: he lacks depth and sensitivity, but he is down-to-earth, and utterly loyal, devoted to his wife and son, who alone seem to give his life a meaning and a purpose. As for Mishlinya, he is the typical lover, sensitive and impulsive: on account of his love for the princess, he has exposed his own life (as well as his friend's) to danger and is prepared to do so again. He is impressed by Yamlikha's account of his mystical experience, unlike Marnush who being incapable of grasping it dismisses it as nonsense, and he (Mishlinya) is made to realise that they are both different from Yamlikha, in whose heart and thoughts God always comes first and reigns supreme.

Act II, which presents a contrast to Act I, takes place amidst the splendour of the hall of columns in the King's palace. Princess Prisca, the daughter of Theodosius, who by a strange coincidence looks like Decius's daughter of the same name, is looking for her aged tutor, Gallius, who comes on to the stage gasping for breath, having rushed back from the town where he heard the news of a newly found treasure from the reign of Decius in a cave in the Raqim valley. She had a strange dream in which she saw herself being buried alive and she wishes Gallius to explain its meaning to her. Gallius

wonders if there is any connection between her dream and the treasure. He reminds her that Decius was the father of the saintly princess after whom she herself was named and whom, the fortune-tellers predicted, she will resemble both in looks and in the strength of her faith. Prisca finds herself strangely interested in the ancient princess. She wishes she could find out the truth about her, but is not prepared to accept at the face value the story that she refused all offers of marriage because she had made a vow to wait for the return of Christ. She suspects that she was not merely a saint, but had a woman's heart as well. The King comes in to announce the news about the strangely dressed men and the dog discovered in the cave where there were silver coins going back to Decius's reign and Gallius concludes that they must be the long-awaited Christians who fled from Decius's persecution and have come back at long last. The King orders that the people of the cave, now regarded as saints, should be brought to the royal court and treated with the honour they deserve. Prisca, alarmed, asks Gallius to remain by her side.

When they come to the palace, each man reacts differently, in keeping with his character. Mishlinya excitedly remarks that nothing has changed and that the hall of columns still looks the same; Marnush agrees that this is true as far as the hall is concerned. Yamlikha, on the other hand, laments in a wailing voice that everything has changed. When he catches sight of Prisca, Mishlinya, thinking of his own beloved, cannot refrain from shouting her name, much to her alarm, and she slinks away, taking her tutor with her for protection. The King summons up enough courage to make a formal speech welcoming the return of the long-awaited saints, which makes the uncomprehending Marnush think that he is mad. However, Marnush expresses his gratitude to God for replacing the tyrant Decius with a pious Christian king overnight,

and begs the King to allow him to visit his wife and son who have been waiting for him for a week or more. Yamlikha asks leave to go and inspect his flock of sheep and they both hasten to go, leaving behind Mishlinya, who asks the King's permission to go to his rooms in the palace in order to change his clothes and have a wash and trim his hair and beard, and he too disappears, to the astonishment of the King, who calls out to Gallius. When the latter reappears and enquires about the saints, the King tells him that he thinks they are just mad people. Marnush comes back to ask for some 'valid' money so that he can buy a present for his son. The baffled King calls for help to Gallius:

> KING (*pointing to Marnush*). You can understand what the saint has to say?
>
> GALLIUS (*moving to Marnush, bowing submissively in reverence*). You have come to us, your holiness, surrounded by a halo of light. Most welcome is your appearance – we have been waiting for you so long, patiently and anxiously awaiting your return. We never lost hope; our hearts were strengthened by our faith.
>
> (*Marnush examines Gallius's face, doubting his sanity, but Gallius resumes.*) What is truly marvellous is that your appearance should take place in *our* times; it seems that you have preferred our happy king to all his predecessors, favouring his noble subjects with the honour of your glorious appearance.
>
> MARNUSH (*to himself*). I swear to Jesus that this man is mad.
>
> KING (*whispering to Gallius*). Look, Gallius, I have already expressed our welcome to the saint. Now ask him what he desires.

GALLIUS. Desires, my liege? What can he desire other than solitude and retreat to be with God? I shall do with him as I have done with his companion, take him to the guest quarters and order the servants and slaves to see to it that his needs are met, and to obey his holy instructions. (*to Marnush*) Come with me, beloved of God.

MARNUSH (*without moving*). Where to?

GALLIUS. To your noble cell (*about to take him by the hand*).

MARNUSH (*pushing him away and bowing to the King*). My lord, are you going to let this mad man loose on me? (*The KING and GALLIUS exchange glances and draw close together.*) Your Majesty, I am waiting for your permission to go to my house.

KING (*whispering*). Did you hear, Gallius? Did you hear that?

MARNUSH (*hesitating*). And I am also waiting for an earnest of your royal kindness to your honest servant and to his family.

KING (*whispering*). What do you think of that, Gallius?

GALLIUS (*summoning courage to approach MARNUSH*). Holy Saint! We know where your house is.... But we beg you not to depart from us so soon.

MARNUSH (*surprised*). You know where my house is?

GALLIUS (*turning to the KING with some pride, as if he was able at last to establish communication with the saint*). Yes, of course. Do you expect someone in my position not to know where it is?

MARNUSH (*astonished*). Strange! How have you been able to know

where it is? I have only divulged the secret to very few friends who are close to me.

GALLIUS. Am I not close to you, beloved of Cod? My hair has turned grey in your devoted service.

MARNUSH. You? I only set my eyes on you today!

GALLIUS. Yes, indeed. And it was a great honour I had never dreamt of attaining all the time I had been praying, thinking about you and waiting for your return, seeking to be close to the secret of your abode.

MARNUSH. The secret of my abode? Tell me, how have you learnt that secret? I want to know who it was who told you the secret of my house?

GALLIUS (*in a deep voice*). I have been guided by Faith.

MARNUSH: Listen, old man. Whether it was faith as you say or anything else I now want to know from you where my house is, which direction? Tell me, if you speak the truth, which quarter of the city?

GALLIUS (*in a deep voice*). In Heaven.

MARNUSH (*looking at the KING and as if addressing himself*). Didn't I swear that this old man's mind is cracked?

KING (*whispering to Gallius*). You stay here, Gallius. (*The KING begins to move away*.)

GALLIUS (*whispering*). You can't go away, my liege, and leave me here alone. (*The KING is about to go when a stifled voice is heard getting nearer. YAMLIKHA appears and so the KING retreats close to GALLIUS.*)

YAMLIKHA (*entering in a state of agitation*). Marnush, Mishlinya. Where are you? (*falls on his knees next to MARNUSH*.)

MARNUSH (*surprised*). What has come over you?

YAMLIKHA (*pointing to the KING and GALLIUS*). Heavens, Man! Have you been talking to these creatures?

(*The KING and GALLIUS exchange glances, retreat to the nearest door.*)

MARNUSH. Have you gone mad, Yamlikha? (*pointing to the KING and GALLIUS*). You mean His Majesty the King and this old crack-pot?

(*The KING and GALLIUS quietly go out by the door, leaving behind the two saints together.*) (59)

It is obvious from this extract that, despite the seriousness of his subject, al-Hakim's treatment is not devoid of humour, the discrepancies between the characters, viewed mainly as human beings, earthly creatures with human frailties and practical needs, and the saintly roles imposed upon them by those amongst whom they are resurrected give al-Hakim ample scope for the kind of humour in which he generally excels and which consists of long stretches of dialogue with characters talking at cross-purposes.

Yamlikha has just discovered the appalling fact that they have been asleep for three hundred years, that their world has long since died, and tries in vain to make the others believe him or to persuade them to go back to their cave to resume their sleep or die. Mishlinya, now having shaved and put on new modern clothes, and looking like a handsome young man again, could not care less how long they have been asleep as long as he thinks his beloved Prisca is there; Marnush too decides to do something about his appearance before going to look for his wife and child, Unheeded, Yamlikha goes back

to the cave, but only after making a moving speech in which he explain to the others his sense of utter isolation in the streets of Tarsus, where people made him feel the full weight of the three hundred years that separate him from them by their silent, cautious and tearful glances, and where even his dog, Qatmir, was strangely and fearfully sniffed at by the dogs of the city which chased him and formed a cautious ring round him as if he were a different species of animal. Act II, therefore, ends with Yamlikha slowly and sadly making his way back to the cave, Mishlinya and Marnush following him with their eyes, in silence, until he is out of sight.

Act III is set in the same hall of columns, but the time is now night. Mishlinya, puzzled and worried about the strange behaviour of the Princess, who seems to be avoiding him, waits for her as she comes out of the King's chamber where, he learns from Gallius, she has been reading to the King. In the meantime Marnush comes back, dejected and unhappy because he has just discovered the awful truth of Yamlikha's words: his house has been turned into an arms mart, his wife and son have been dead for a long time, he finds that there is no place for him in this world, where they are no more than ghosts. He too decides to go back to the cave, leaving Mishlinya stunned and wondering if, like Yamlikha, he has gone out of his mind. Meanwhile Prisca appears and is taken aback to find Mishlinya, now looking young and well-groomed, waiting for her. She is clearly fascinated by him and for a while is carried away by his courtship. However, she tells him the truth that he has mistaken her for her ancient ancestor of the same name. Moreover, she explains to him that the woman he loved had died a long time ago, at the age of fifty, having remained constant to him until her death. He is shocked at her words, not knowing whether he is awake or asleep, live or dead, and he goes off in an

agitated state, colliding on the way with Gallius, who is surprised at the 'saint's' strange excitement. When he comes back she reminds him that she is only twenty years old while he is over three hundred and he had better wake up to this truth; so he bids her farewell:

> Now I see my misfortune is greater than what has befallen Marnush or Yamlikha. There is only one step between us: less than one night separates us. Yet the step has proved to be as wide as endless seas, and the night many, many generations. I see you standing before me: alive and beautiful. I stretch out my hand to touch you but a huge, all-powerful creature stands between us: history! Yes, Marnush was right. Our time is past and we are now the property of history. We wanted to return to time, but history is taking its revenge. Farewell. (127)

Act III ends with the slow departure of Mishlinya for the cave.

In Act IV, a month later, the sleepers are back in the silent cave and now they are all lying dying, including the dog. They are all considerably weaker now. Mishlinya does not know whether it has been a dream or not. When Marnush tells him it is not a dream but a fact, they turn to Yamlikha for confirmation. Reluctant to face reality, they are all unable to decide whether or not they had the same dream. Even Yamlikha, who is the first to die from weakness and exhaustion, admits that he is dying not knowing whether his life has been a dream or reality (141). Mishlinya confides in Marnush that he actually fell in love with the Prisca of his dream while Marnush assures his friend that he prefers the reality, however insignificant and lowly, to the dream. However, looking at their new clothes both of them is now convinced that it was not a dream but a real experience after all. Marnush is horrified at the discovery that he had been resurrected only to suffer

death, the death of his heart (143), and he dies in a state of despair, no longer believing in the value of resurrection (146). Mishlinya who has returned to the cave having lost all hope now realises that he is really in love with the new Princess, his love enabling him to retain his religious faith and to believe that he has overcome time (148-9). He is rewarded by hearing, just before he dies a love confession from his Princess who has come to die with him. The heart, they both now believe, is stronger than time, although she feels that she could not be united with him in love in this world, but in the next. That is why she has persuaded her devoted tutor Gallius to bring her into the cave which, at her suggestion, is soon to be sealed off and a temple erected on top. The play ends with her being left alone with the dead, walled up in the cave in a rather melodramatic fashion reminiscent of the conclusion of Verdi's *Aida* (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 34). Her dream of being buried alive has come true, or rather she has willed it to be realised, although from the start Prisca has been behaving like a fey character, doomed to die.

In fact the play seems to describe the failure of Yamlikha and Marnush to adapt to the new world in which they are resurrected, and by implication the futility of simple commonsense as well as the intellect, which these two characters clearly represent respectively, in trying to resist time, although it cannot be said that either of them has put up much of a struggle. Even Mishlinya, who is the last to give up the struggle, eventually goes back to the cave, defeated and heartbroken. But, as we have seen, in the end, just before he dies, he recovers his hope: he discovers that his love for the young Princess is real and he even prefers her to his original sweetheart. Young Prisca, in her turn, is capable of falling in love with Mishlinya who, she knows, is more than three hundred years older than she is. Admittedly, she is fully aware that she cannot join him here and

now but only in the timeless world of death and that is why she postpones going into the cave for a whole month, to make sure that he is no longer alive. But the way al-Hakim concludes his play makes his point abundantly clear: only love and the heart can conquer time (35).

Even though the play contains philosophical meditations upon man and time, some commentators have seen a political significance in the play. Al-Hakim's 'message,' we are told, is 'to lift the people of Egypt out of their disastrous habit of dwelling in the past' and Prisca 'the girl who buried herself alive with Mishlinya, the man from the past whom she loved' is meant to be "a symbol of the fruitlessness of the mood from which his compatriots were suffering" (Isma'il 185). However, this was dismissed by Paul Starkey ('Theme' 60), who sees that "the essence of the play is in the sleepers' inability to adapt, not Prisca's." However, Starkey himself has no doubt that al-Hakim "intended the play to relate to Egypt's current situation, as the country awoke from centuries of stagnation to face the challenge of the twentieth century and Western civilisation." But he fails to point out the exact nature of this relation. Instead he quotes Mishlinya's words: 'Our time is past; now we are the property of history. We wanted to return to time, but history is taking its revenge': he argues that these words are intended to relate to Egypt's current situation at the time of writing *Ahl al-Kahf.* And it may not be far-fetched to detect in them a trace of the mood of pessimism which seems to have overcome al-Hakim on his return to Egypt from Paris (63). But we must remember that these are not Mishlinya's last words in the play and that he dies convinced of the victory of the heart and of love over time. Nor does Mishlinya in the end doubt the reality of his experience, as Starkey claims: he and Marnush are no longer in any doubt that they had

been resurrected. Despite its pathos and Prisca's deliberate act of suicide, al-Hakim's play ends on a rather positive, hopeful note. In this sense, it cannot be described as a tragedy, though al-Hakim seems to have intended it to be an 'Egyptian tragedy' portraying 'the terrible struggle between man and time' (al-Hakim, *Taht* 108).

Furthermore, because of their supernatural or fantastic framework, the events are inevitably distanced from us, with the result that they lose something of the emotional intensity normally created by the impact of immediate happenings. Another factor that mitigates against this intensity is the humour which, as has been pointed out, the play contains. This helps to emphasise the intellectual quality of the work at the expense of its pathos. But the pathos is not entirely absent; here ideas, such as the puzzling relation between dream and reality, the subjective/relative nature of truth, fact and fantasy, sanity and madness, intellect and heart, which can render a gap of three hundred years no more significant than that of one day, are capable of exciting imagination and rousing emotion, just as in the work of Pirandello. One enthusiastic critic once wrote: 'There can be little doubt that [*The Sleepers in the Cave*] is a play which, not only in relation to the Arab theatre of its day [in terms of which it is a miracle] may properly be called great' (Long 36). In short, this play is a work of abundant originality, written with considerable elegance and exquisite sensitivity. If produced properly on the stage it can afford an exciting dramatic spectacle.

Shahrazad (1934) is a shorter play in seven scenes. As its title suggests it is inspired by the *Arabian Nights*. However, unlike the earlier dramatic attempts in Arabic, it is not based on any one tale or group of tales from the book. The opening scene sets the tone of the play. We are shown a desolate road with one single isolated house on a

dark night; a lamp outside the door gives just sufficient light to enable us to see the action. The strains of distant music coming from the city can be heard in the background. A magician is seen leading a somewhat reluctant young woman to the house:

MAGICIAN. What did that wretch say to you?

MAIDEN. He wanted to know why the city is celebrating tonight. I told him it's a festival the maidens hold in honour of Queen Shahrazad.

MAGICIAN. But why do you tremble so?

MAIDEN (*whispering*). I don't know.

MAGICIAN. Didn't I warn you not to go anywhere near this old slave? There is a wicked leer in his eyes.

MAIDEN (*whispering*). He's not old...

MAGICIAN. Don't talk to yourself like someone demented. Come, give me your hand and let's go in. Perhaps he's scared you with his ugly face.

MAIDEN (*whispering*). He's not ugly...

(*They enter the house; the* SLAVE *appears and follows the* MAIDN *with his eyes.*)

SLAVE. Oh what a lovely virgin! A perfect refuge her body would be!

VOICE (*from behind him*). Refuge for what? Satan or perhaps the sword?

SLAVE (*turning round*). Oh! It's you.

EXECUTIONER (*appearing*). You obviously recognised me.

SLAVE. Where's your sword, Executioner?

EXECUTJOER. With its price I purchased dreams.

> SLAVE. Now I understand.
>
> EXECUTIONER. Understand what?
>
> SLAVE. Why you were so generous in Abu Maysur's tavern last night. (al-Hakim, *Shahrazad* 15)

It is difficult to imagine a more appropriate setting to create an air of romantic mystery, an exotic world with strongly menacing undertones. In the course of the dialogue we are given the necessary background information: King Shahriyar, who having surprised his first wife in bed with a black slave, slew them both and to avenge himself on women decided to marry a fresh virgin every night and then put her to death. He continued to do so until he married the daughter of his former vizier, Shahrazad, who managed to escape the fate of her predecessors by entertaining her husband, telling him stories all night, making sure that by breaking off' her narrative at the right moment she kept him constantly in suspense, anxious to hear the sequel the following day.

The action of the play begins after Shahrazad has apparently cured Shahriyar of his murderous habit. When the Slave learns that the King has no further need for an executioner, he exclaims with obvious lustfulness what a body Shahrazad must have! But he is promptly corrected by the Executioner who explains that it is not because of the physical pleasures Shahrazad provides that the king has turned away from slaughtering his brides, but rather because his mind is diseased: he now spends the night gazing at stars in the sky and visits the Magician under cover of darkness in the hope of finding answers to strange questions that trouble him. The Slave is warned by the voice of the Maiden to flee in the darkness, for fear of being punished by death if the King sees him, for the King, she says, is still a child: 'he hasn't yet learned not to kill slaves' (16). But

before he departs the Slave asks the Maiden if she could tell him something about Shahrazad, whom he is dying to see; he has in fact travelled a long way in order to catch a glimpse of her. The Maid's cryptic answer is 'she is everything and yet nothing is known of her' (16). She also tells him that the Magician keeps in the house a man whom he has pickled for forty days in a pot of sesame oil, fed only figs and nuts till his flesh has gone and only his veins and mental faculties have remained, in the hope that he may be able to answer the questions the King will put to him. With a woeful moan she disappears, asking him to remember her, if he sees a green cloud forming, for then (her) light will be put out. Before long, the King and the Magician arrive and enter the house, while the Executioner hides in an opening and the scene ends with the alarmed Executioner and Slave rushing away, having heard a strange moan as if coming from the depths of a tomb and seen a green cloud announcing the sacrificial death of the Maiden, Zahida.

Scene ii takes place in the palace, the stage direction being simply, 'a hall with a marble basin in its centre.' The time is around midnight: Queen Shahrazad insists that Qamar, her husband's vizier and close friend, should keep her company until the King returns from his visit to the Magician. Qamar, who clearly adores Shahrazad, gives in to the Queen's request. Shahrazad is not unaware of Qamar's feelings about her and does not hesitate to use her seductive charms to obtain from him something approaching a confession. When he tells her that he thinks she managed to redeem Shahriyar from being a barbarian, a mere body without a heart, because of her love for him, as she is 'a great heart,' she replies by saying that he (Qamar) only sees her in the mirror of his soul. Qamar objects saying that he sees 'the reality,' a remark which brings a strange smile to

her lips. Qamar withdraws when Shahriyar arrives, having been told by him that the Queen wishes to see him. By turns Shahrazad teases, provokes and seduces her tormented husband, who claims that he has had enough of the material world of senses and of the heart and now aspires to live in the world of the intellect. Consumed by his restless search for the truth, he finds in Shahrazad an unsolvable intellectual riddle. Like nature herself, Shahrazad challenges his insatiable curiosity without providing him with satisfactory answers to his ceaseless questionings. He has even tried magic, but found that it failed him. In vain does Shahrazad endeavour to make him realise that in his attempt to free himself from the body and from the heart he risks losing his very humanity. Like Qamar, he too 'sees her in the mirror of his soul' when he finds in her 'a great intellect.' Exhausted and unfulfiled, he is lulled to sleep by the gentle music and soft singing which she orders to soothe his tired brain.

Scene iii is the only one that does not take place in the night. It is set in the King's Hall against the background of faint music from outside and the morning sun filling the whole area. The King, now resolved to go away alone on a journey of quest for knowledge, is making his final preparations for his travels. The Queen, who has come to bid him goodbye, expresses to him her doubts about his ability to achieve anything by his intellect. Shahriyar tries, but fails, to make Qamar stay with the Queen in order to look after her; Qamar, though reluctant to leave her, decides to join his master on his journey. In Scene iv we find the King and his Vizier in an open space at sunset in the desert. The silence and desolation of the desert is emphasised by the melancholy atmosphere of the setting sun. Qamar, anxious to return to the Queen, tries to persuade the King to go back home, but the latter insists on their marching on.

In Scene v we return to the King's Hall where Shahrazad is lying down on a couch at night and is surprised to see the Slave climbing in through the window. Contemplating her, he exclaims 'How lovely you look! You're nothing but a beautiful body!' (111), to which remark she tells him that even he 'sees her in the mirror of his soul' (112). When he accuses her of plotting to have him slaughtered by the King, she denies the charge, saying that the King has changed into a person who wants to flee from everything material and bodily, 'that he has left the earth and hasn't reached the sky and is therefore suspended between earth and sky' (112). She also tells the Slave that she is anxious to keep him alive in order to satisfy her dark passion for him, aroused by his 'ugliness and humble origin' (112).

Scene vi is set in Abu Maysur's tavern, an opium den where customers forget their bodily existence by means of narcotics and drink. The King, disguised and accompanied by the reluctant Vizier, goes in: they find the Executioner in a state of ecstasy induced by drugs. They also notice the Executioner's sword hanging on the wall and are told that he has sold it to Abu Maysur in part payment of a debt, so Qamar, who calls it the sword of fate, since it has torn apart so many bodies, buys it. While they are in the tavern they hear the Executioner bragging about his friend, the Slave who, he claims, has been the Queen's pampered lover since the departure of the King from the city. Enraged, Qamar makes a move to attack the Executioner and his companions, but is stopped by the King. Incredulous at the King's calm reaction to the charge of the Queen's infidelity, he accuses him of pretending to be superhuman, while at the same time the thought that Shahrazad could stoop so low reduces Qamar to tears.

The final (seventh) scene opens with Shahrazad in her boudoir, with the Slave

sitting beside her. When the King, who has just returned with his Vizier, knocks at the door, Shahrazad quickly hides the Slave behind a black screen in the room. Qamar who has been casting his eyes all around the room in search of the Queen's lover is told by the King to set his mind at rest, since "Shahrazad's body has not been possessed by a slave" (152). When offered a kiss by Shahrazad, the King suggests that it should be granted to Qamar instead. The latter disappears in embarrassed disapproval. Jaded and disappointed that his travels have led him nowhere, the King is advised by Shahrazad 'to forget what is beyond his life, to contemplate the surface of the cloak and not to worry about what is inside it' (162). He replies indifferently that he is not interested in whatever lies behind the screen. At this point, misunderstanding the King's metaphorical expression, the frightened Slave suddenly comes out from behind the screen. To the Slave's consternation the King lets him go unpunished. Horrified that he has not killed him or her, Shahrazad exclaims: 'You are a doomed man!'(162). But all at once a fearful cry is heard from outside and the terrified Slave returns to announce that Qamar has just killed himself with the Executioner's sword on seeing the Slave coming out of the Queen's chamber:

> SHAHRAZAD. *He* was a man.
>
> SHAHRIYAR. Yes, he was a man.
>
> SHAHRAZAD. But you, Shahriyar?!
>
> SHAHRIYAR. I? What am I?
>
> SHAHRAZAD. You are someone suspended between earth and sky, anxiety eats away at you! I've tried to bring you back to earth ... but the attempt has not succeeded.

SHAHRIAR. I do not wish to return to earth.

SHAHRAZAD. I've already told you, Shahriyar, There's nothing but the earth…

SHAHRIAR. (*moving away*): Farewell, then, Shahrazad. (167)

Shahrazad reflects a much more poetic and sombre work, in which humour is kept to a minimum, restricted to the penultimate tavern scene, where it borders on the surreal and revolves round the meeting ground of reality and fantasy, sanity and insanity, wisdom and folly. The first striking feature of this play is that the characters express themselves in extremely short speeches, highly rhythmical poetic utterances interspersed with powerful imagery, often with mystical associations (Hutchins, 3-4). To compensate for the relative paucity of external action, the dramatist resorts to a cunning use of sound effects, music, singing, a mysterious moan or a haunting screen in the depths of the night, as well as light and darkness and natural settings such as a desert road or desert sunset, all adding to the air of mystery enveloping the whole play, in keeping with the 'mysterious' nature of the main character, Shahrazad. Divided not into acts but into seven scenes of unequal length, it is the nearest thing to the so-called 'theatre of the mind.' In the preface to his *Pygmalion,* al-Hakim explains what he means by his theatre of the mind: 'I set up my stage inside the mind, making my actors ideas moving in the region of abstract thought, but dressed as symbols. It is true that I retain the spirit of *coup de theatre* but the theatrical surprises are not so much in the incidents as in the thoughts' (10). There is hardly enough action in *Shahrazad* to make it easily actable on the normal stage, despite Qamar's suicide at the end, a typically al-Hakimian *coup de theatre.* But the work has a powerful and haunting poetic atmosphere which, given a sensitive

production with appropriate stage and lighting effects, could render its performance on the stage a worthwhile aesthetic experience.

Generally the play is more a dramatic prose poem in dialogue form than a drama proper. It is written in a concise language in which some implications, dramatic irony, or premonition and some significant parallelism are indirectly reflected. For example, in the opening scene of the play, which has already been quoted above, so much is given in so few words. The Maiden's reluctance to go with the Magician inside the house is due to her premonition of her death by the sword, which will soon take place. The presence of the Magician suggests that her death will be related to the world of magic; unlike the death of Shahrazad's predecessors which were motivated by Shahriyar's desire for revenge, hers is to be brought about as part of the King's unsuccessful search for knowledge through magic. There is irony in the fact that while in the city the maidens are celebrating the festival in honour of Queen Shahrazad, who by her ingenuity managed to save maidens from death, this one Maiden is being led by the Magician to her slaughter, which is hinted at by the Executioner when he wonders if she is going to be 'a perfect refuge of sword.' This also suggests that the King after all has not been cured, as the world around him may have at one point assumed. The ambiguity, which is a reflection of the King's damaging spiritual and mental uncertainty, is further emphasised by the fact that the Executioner has sold his sword (he is now unemployed, since the King has no need for him to punish maidens) and with its price he has 'purchased dreams' for himself, i.e. a good time to be had on drink and drugs in Abu Maysur's tavern. But although the Executioner's job is officially ended, another maid is in fact going to be sacrificed tonight.

At the same time, the replacement of action (killings) by dreams parallels the cause of the King's malaise or spiritual sickness, brought about by his turning away from the external world of reality into the inner world of the mind. The fact that the helpless Maiden refuses to obey the instruction of her master the Magician not to talk to the Slave, whom she finds neither old nor ugly but in fact desirable, lends some credibility to Shahrazad's readiness to bestow her favours on this Slave, even if it is only to suit her own purposes. The Slave's sensuality is shown both in his words and in the lustful look he gives the young girl. All this is imparted in a dialogue that approaches poetry in the degree of its concentration and of its use of a minimal number of words, and is best illustrated in the following:

> SLAVE. Where's your sword, Executioner?
>
> EXECUTIONER. With its price I purchased dreams. (15)

In fact, this poetic quality of the language leads the reader to react on a deeper, almost unconscious level, to certain prominent motifs (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 41). For example, the first question the Slave asks the Executioner relates to his sword, thus giving the Executioner's sword an obvious prominence (although it is the Executioner himself who mentioned the word 'sword' first): it is with the Executioner's sword that one of the leading characters of the play, the Vizier Qamar, who dearly loves and idealises Shahrazad, puts an end to his own life, when he is led to believe that by indulging in sexual pleasure with the Slave she had not lived up to the standards of his own image of her. Qamar the 'dreamer' 'purchased' the sword from the inn-keeper to whom the Executioner had sold it in return for drinks and drugs.

Like much poetic plays, *Shahrazad* has been subjected to diverse interpretations,

particularly on account of its relative obscurity and its patent symbolism, professedly a feature of al-Hakim's theatre of the mind. Al-Hakim himself was among the first to explain its symbolical significance, although later he seemed to shift his position. Just as *The Sleepers in the Cave* deals with man's struggle with time, al-Hakim at first stated that *Shahrazad* represents man's struggle with space: Shahriyar's attempt to escape from place (and his body) ends in failure and in his return to his starting point (*Taht* 109). Later he found a sentence by Maurice Maeterlinck: 'Man will reach a moment when he will reject life, unless he can return to carnality,' an apt comment on the character of Shahriyar who 'had reached such a degree of mental abstraction ... that he was separated from humanity' (qtd in Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 41). Al-Hakim explains how Shahriyar has passed through all the stages of life known to man, the 'flesh' stage when he had a virgin delivered to him for his gratification every night only to be slain in the morning, the 'heart' stage when he fell in love with Shahrazad, and finally the 'mind' stage through which we see him going in the play that of the 'intellect' brought about by her conversation. Consumed by an overwhelming desire for knowledge almost to the point of insanity he first tries discursive reasoning, then, dissatisfied, he turns to magic, which fails to quench his thirst and sends him back to science. Convinced that his body ties his thoughts to the earth he rebels against it and sets out on his travels hoping to free himself from its prison. But he soon realises that travel does not bring him the desired freedom from the body which he carries around 'with him wherever he goes, and he finds himself at last returning to his point of departure.' He then makes a pathetic attempt to seek escape from the body in the forgetfulness of smoking hashish in Abu Maysur's den. Al-Hakim writes:

> Throughout all this, Shahrazad was watching over him with affection and dismay. She knew he was a dying man. He had left the earth but not reached the sky. He was suspended between earth and sky and sapped by anxiety. She began to plot a treatment for his malady.... She had to bring Shahriyar back to earth if he was to live. She used the Slave to help revive the animal perishing in the depths of Shahriyar. The attempt, however, was not successful. Shahriyar had to disappear from the theatre of existence (*Taht* 110).

This detailed explanation by al-Hakim is important in so far as it shows the central position Shahriyar is meant to occupy in the play. Adham (120-21) also assumes that on one level of reading the Slave and Qamar are found to be not so much independent characters as facets of Shahriyar, the Slave symbolising Shahriyar in the first stage of his development when he represented animal lust, while the Vizier Qamar stands for the second stage, during which Shahriyar's heart was filled with his love for the beautiful Shahrazad. As for Shahriyar as we find him in the play, he represents, in Adham's view, the last stage, namely, 'intellect.' Mandur also argues that the problem al-Hakim treats in his play is 'whether or not man can live by and for the intellect alone or can devote his life to the search for truth throughout the world, ignoring utterly the call of the heart and of the body throbbing with life' (58). Likewise, concentrating on the character of Shahriyar, Isma'il more crudely writes about his 'inability to establish an equilibrium between the world of reality and the world of dreams' (55), and asserts even less convincingly that al-Hakim's motive in writing the play is 'to arouse the Egyptians out of their habit of day-dreaming and to make them adopt a realistic approach' (55).

However some other critics, such as Paul Starkey, have different interpretations. According to Starkey 'the central figure seems to be Shahrazad rather than Shahriyar and that it is around the other characters' differing interpretations of her that al-Hakim's play revolves.' Shahrazad is portrayed as a mysterious woman who is interpreted by each of the other characters 'according to his disposition, but whose nature remains a mystery to the end of the play. She is an embodiment of the unknowable particularly in relation to Shahriyar for whom, to quote Starkey's remarkable comment:

> She is a mystery defying all knowledge; in an almost mystical way. She represents for him the unfathomable secrets of the universe. Shahriyar's journeying springs from his inability to accept the limits of his understanding: but his quest for 'reality' is hopeless: he is condemned to return to his point of departure, only to set out once again. Shahrazad firmly resists all attempts to penetrate her veil, and the King is exiled by his own obstinacy to a no-man's land which is neither heaven nor earth. ("Theme" 67)

Indeed al-Hakim at times states that Shahrazad is a personification of nature and that the movement of the three main characters around her is 'the movement of all mankind around nature' (Long 31). In the play Shahriyar himself draws an analogy between the two (78). However, in the preface to the third edition of the play al-Hakim expresses his wish that the individual reader should feel free to interpret the play as he likes.

This diversity of interpretation is, certainly, an attribute to the play's complexity and rich texture. It must be emphasised that unlike Qamar, the Slave and to some extent even Shahriyar, who are largely personifications of abstract ideas, Shahrazad, despite her

symbolical significance, remains a vivid character, indeed one of al-Hakim's most memorable female creations: she is obviously a further development of an earlier portrait, that of Inan in *Expulsion from Paradise.* Compared with the earlier character, she is a more sensitive and poetic embodiment of al-Hakim's quintessentially romantic conception of the 'mysterious woman.' Because she seems to be al-Hakim's favourite character, 'his ideal woman,' as one critic puts it, some commentators have tended to idealise her, disregarding her coquettish treatment of Qamar and her sensuality with the Slave, describing her as 'a desirable and faithful wife' (qtd in Long 134), thereby unintentionally flattening her character despite the evidence of the text. This seems to be a serious mistake, for Shahrazad is meant to be sensual, loving and intelligent all at once. It is no accident that, despite the different interpretations given to the play, al-Hakim is generally regarded as having attained in *Shahrazad* the zenith of his achievement in the literary art of drama.

Pygmalion (1942), another popular play, is claimed by al-Hakim to have been written, not for the stage but for the 'theatre of the mind' (*Pygmalion*, Preface 10-11). However it was performed apparently successfully in Cairo in 1963. It has been described by one scholar as 'perhaps Hakim's most flawless gem – an exquisite, poetic, imaginative and economical play enrobed in a fine, exotic atmosphere' (Long 51). In fact the play is a neat, well constructed work in which the author's ideas come across clearly enough, even though its neatness may be a contributory factor to its attenuated pathos (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 44). The plot is fairly straightforward: it is based on the Greek legend of Pygmalion of Cyprus, who fell in love with a statue, later to be known as Galatea (according to Ovid, made by himself). In response to his prayer to Aphrodite

to give him a wife resembling his statue, the goddess gave the statue itself life and Pygmalion married it. Al-Hakim's interest in the legend, he says, was first aroused by Jean Raoux's painting 'Pygmalion et Galatea' at the Louvre, and was later revived by the film based on Shaw's *Pygmalion* (*Pygmalion*, Preface 15). Unlike Shaw, al-Hakim did not choose a modern setting for his play but placed it within the framework of the original legend. He did, however, depart from the traditional story in certain important respects in order to give expression to his own main preoccupations. Although the scene remains the same throughout the four acts of which the play consists, namely, a hall in Pygmalion's house, with a large window revealing a wood in which 'strange and exotic trees and flowers' (17) can be seen, subtle and powerful changes are introduced by means of stage lighting and sound effects. Furthermore, the dramatist makes use of spectacular visual devices, such as the descent from the sky of Venus and Apollo in Venus's gilt chariot drawn by two swans while the wood is dramatically lit up by a 'heavenly light' flooding the casement by which the god and goddess enter the house.

Significantly, the action begins on the night of the feast of Venus when the goddess of love and Apollo, the god of art, descend to earth in order to look at the perfect statue of Galatea, which the sculptor Pygmalion has created. Pygmalion makes a passionate plea to Venus to breathe life into his statue, with which he has fallen in love, treating it as if it were a real flesh-and-blood woman, to the amusement of his neighbours, who consider him mad. Taking pity on him, Venus responds to his prayer, to his amazement and delight. However, the unhappy Pygmalion comes home to find that the living Galatea has absconded with Narcissus, his handsome young attendant and companion. Disgusted at the kind of life Venus has put into what was once his perfect

work of art, he rails at the goddess:

> Look, Venus what you have done to me and Galatea.... You have placed in my masterpiece the soul of a cat, the inconstant, easily bored soul of a woman. You have turned that marvellous work of art into a trivial being, a foolish woman who runs away with a foolish young man! (*Pygmalion* 69-70)

Hearing his cry, Apollo taunts Venus with her imperfect work, but is made by her to intervene on Pygmalion's behalf and bring Galatea back to him. She is now full of love and admiration for Pygmalion, having repented of her folly in running away with the foolish Narcissus. Unseen, Venus and Apollo watch the happy couple retire to a hut in the wood to enjoy the pleasures of love.

Nevertheless, their bliss does not last long, for Galatea soon becomes no more than an ordinary, caring and loving wife, who is anxious to keep her house clean and tidy and to perform her domestic duties properly. But the sight of his Galatea, his perfect work of art, with a broom in her hand, fills Pygmalion with disgust and the thought that his perfect immortal achievement has been replaced by a living but decaying body, a body that will grow old and then turn into dust and ashes, is enough to drive the angry Pygmalion to blaspheme against the god and to call upon them to take away his wife and bring him back his statue instead. Once more, his prayer is answered and Galatea is changed back into a lifeless statue. Far from being satisfied, however, Pygmalion misses the warmth and affection of his wife, neglects the statue, visits nightly the hut where he made love to his wife, and is generally full of remorse for having killed her. His health deteriorates but, undeterred by his illness, he insists on going out to the hut in a wild

night, collapses on the way and is brought back by Narcissus, utterly wretched and lonely. Feeling sorry for him, Venus suggests bringing Galatea back to life, but Apollo advises her not to do so because that would only lead to the same result as before. Pygmalion goes up to the statue, places a broom in its hand, then snatches it and in a frenzy smashes its head and is only stopped by Narcissus, who immediately puts him to bed and to whom he explains that he has destroyed the statue because it no longer represents what he ought to make and that he will soon make a better one. Narcissus is unconvinced and tells Pygmalion that he is no longer capable of anything. Soon after, Pygmalion dies.

Generally speaking the theme of the play is twofold: the relative importance of art and life, the need to choose between them, as W.B. Yeats once put it:

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
>
> Perfection of the life or the work. (qtd in Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 45)

It is a familiar theme in the work of al-Hakim: we have already seen a romantic statement of it in *Expulsion from Paradise,* although in *Pygmalion* the consequences are more disastrous, arising from the artist's constant indecision, his inability to come down once and for all either on the side of life or of art. The result is that he both smashes his work of art and destroys his life. The other related theme is the Pirandello-like confusion of art and reality. Did Pygmalion kill his wife or, as Narcissus tells him was it all in his imagination? (al-Hakim, *Pygmalion* 152) This is also a recurrent theme in al-Hakim's work. One final observation on *Pygmalion* is related to the way al-Hakim makes the gods not only watch the actions of the mortals but intervene at certain crucial moments to

direct the course of events. While this at times provides amusing scenes in which the god and goddess squabble and taunt each other in a petty fashion reminiscent of the human sex war at which al-Hakim is adept, and no doubt symbolising the quarrel between art and life. It robs the human agent of a certain measure of his will-power or stature, reducing him to something approaching a pawn on a chess board, although it must be admitted that on the two occasions when they actively intervened the gods did no more than respond to Pygmalion's own express wishes. Great as he is as an artist, the mere presence of the gods in the background renders Pygmalion a puny figure by comparison. That, together with the somewhat bold manner in which the legend is directly presented, the inevitably distancing effect of the supernatural or supra-rational turning of a statue into a living being and vice versa, makes it difficult to identify with Pygmalion sufficiently for him to become a tragic figure (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 46).

It is significant that when Mandur saw the play on the stage he described it as 'a dramatic poem' (36) rather than as a tragedy. It is interesting that in all three plays al-Hakim seems to be deliberately distancing his dramatic world from us by recourse to improbable events, folktales, myths and legends. No doubt this is both a cause and a symptom of that feature of al-Hakim's drama which many critics have noted, namely al-Hakim's relative lack of interest in concrete human situations and characters, compared with his obsession with ideas. It is no accident that al-Hakim has often felt the need to explain his intention in writing his individual plays, and the intention is often the desire to illustrate a general observation or a universal truth, such as man's struggle with Time (in *The Sleepers in the Cave*) or with Place (in *Shahrazad*) or the need of the artist to suffer or to be free from the bondage of ordinary life ties, such as love or marriage (in

Pygmalion). In fact, one often feels that al-Hakim's starting point is a general truth or a thesis which he deliberately sets about illustrating in the form of a play, thus forcing the action to develop and the characters to behave only in so far as they directly and strictly help to define his thesis. The result is that, despite their marvellous dialogue, al-Hakim's plays often strike us as rather contrived intellectual constructs, somewhat lacking in spontaneity (Mandur 36).

The other plays which belong to this group of 'the theatre of the mind,' but are decidedly less popular than the three works discussed, will be briefly commented on, as it is obvious that in the work of a prolific playwright such as al-Hakim, who has written more than seventy plays, not every play can be discussed here in detail. *Mohammad* (1936), a dramatisation of the life of the Prophet in more than ninety scenes, was obviously not meant to be acted: apart from his failure to conceive the events dramatically, al-Hakim imposed absurd constraints upon himself with the result that the work may be interesting in some way but certainly not as drama.[4] In *Praxa* or *The Problem of the Government* (1939), a play in three acts, he indirectly attacks the failure of democratic government in Egypt; he also presents a more biting criticism of corrupt Egyptian politics. The play was published first in a French translation in 1954, and then in the original Arabic in 1960. *Praxa* is based on Aristophanes' comedy *The Ecclesiazusae,* in which Praxagora leads a successful feminist seizure of power in Athens. In the beginning of his play, al-Hakim follows this source so closely that it become almost a free translation of Aristophanes' work, in which for obvious reasons the sexually explicit bits are omitted from the dialogue, but he soon departs from it: instead of the hilarious 'communism' of the Greek comedy, al-Hakim makes the plot of his play

[4] For a discussion of *Mohammed* see Badawi's *Modern Arabic Literature and the West* 55-58.

end cynically in a dictatorship by the lover of Praxa, after he has created for himself several opportunities to give vent to his misogyny and to poke fun at women in power – one of his favourite themes. Al-Hakim's play shows the bankruptcy of dictatorship and ends with a call upon the people to rise and assume government themselves.

3.2.4 Theatre of Society

In 1950 al-Hakim published a collection of his plays under the title *Masrah al-Mujtama'a* (*Theatre of Society*) or (*Plays on Social Themes*), twenty-one in all, mostly one-act plays which originally appeared in the newspaper *Akhbar al-Yawm* between 1945 and 1950 and that is probably why they were written in classical Arabic. They vary in quality, ranging from perceptive but journalistic comment to sensitive, well-constructed dramatic statements of some aspect or another of contemporary Egyptian and Arabic society. What they have in common, though, is lively dialogue coupled with keen observation of the social problems confronted by Egypt in the period immediately after the Second World War. This collection, if further proof needed, refutes the charge that al-Hakim the writer lived in an ivory tower, divorced from contemporary social and political reality, a charge that was made on the basis of his refusal to join any of the political parties of the day – of which he did not entertain a high opinion. Al-Ra'i does not exaggerate when he says that these plays provide a panorama of life in Cairo and indeed in the whole of Egypt immediately after the war (*Tawfiq* 62). In this respect they are comparable to the work of the distinguished novelist Najib Mahfuz.

Generally, these plays deal with social or political themes. Moreover, in most of them al-Hakim's main target is to criticise corruption in politics such as sudden changes of government with, the inevitable accompaniment of new appointments of favourites to

civil service posts, resulting in rampant hypocrisy in individuals in their competition for favours (e.g. *Bayn Yawm wa Layla*; translated as Overnight) and cheating and abuse of power in government offices. In *A'mal Hurra* (Private Enterprise), men working as civil servants during the day are illegally employed in the evening by a private firm whose job is to supply equipment to the self-same government offices where they work so that the civil servants receive during the day what they themselves have dispatched the previous evening. Their senior colleagues, their pockets lured with ill-gotten gains, deceive their wives and chase expensive women of loose character. *Miftah al-Najah* (The Key to Success) lashes at opportunism, favouritism, and corruption among senior government officers: a fawning, dishonest hypocrite is rewarded whilst a man of integrity is punished and relieved of his office on the grounds of being non-cooperative. *Al-Rajul alladhi Samad* (The Man who Withstood the Current) underlines the difficulties faced by men of integrity in high positions: the Chairman of the Finance Committee of the House of Senates, who is under considerable pressure from his wife and daughter to raise money to meet the expenses of the daughter's forthcoming wedding and the necessary trousseau, is offered a large sum (a camouflaged bribe) by an old-acquaintance financier; but he is too honest to accept the bribe and, again for the sake of his principles also declines a lucrative membership of a firm's Board of Directors, much to the disgust and incomprehension of his family and all around him.

Clearly, it is the materialism of post-war Egyptian society, the product of wartime inflation and war profiteering, the sudden appearance of money-grabbing opportunities, the ugly face of unbridled capitalism, which more than anything else designates the butt of al-Hakim's criticism, particularly where marriage is concerned (Badawi, *Modern*

Arabic Drama 50). In several plays young men propose to women solely or largely for the material advantage that may accrue to them. For instance, in *Imarat al-Mu'allim Kanduz* (Mr. Kanduz's Property) al-Hakim produces his most telling and biting satirical treatment of this theme. Kanduz, a newly rich butcher who owns a block of flats purchased with the large fortune he amassed during the war, manages to secure husbands for his three daughters by making it known that he has made a gift of his property to each daughter in turn, and then going back on his word once her marriage has taken place. Eventually he is reported to the police, who intervene, but in the end the matter is amicably settled to everybody's satisfaction. It is a hilariously funny play, full of earthy humour arising partly from the character of Kanduz himself, trying to squeeze his Falstaffian belly into the trousers of his European-style suit, to which he is not accustomed but which he has to wear in order to impress the suitor who is coming in connection with his remaining unmarried daughter. He has no compunction about deceiving his sons-in-law who are after easy, instant wealth: unlike them he at least was prepared to work hard for his money. Another source of humour, which seems to be one of al- Hakim's favourite devices, is mistaken identity: a young man arrives, accompanied by his mother, to look at a vacant flat in Kanduz's block but is mistaken for the expected suitor and ends up with both a flat and a wife. One memorable character puts in a very brief appearance: it is the suitor who, having overslept, turns up too late and therefore misses his golden chance.

An element of exaggeration is also to be found in the plays which embody al-Hakim's view on women as in *Urid Hadha al-Rajul* (I Want this Man), where al-Hakim makes a semi-serious plea for women's equality and for their right to propose to men, or

al-Na'iba al-Muhtarama (The Honourable Lady Member of Parliament), where he attempts to show that it is impossible for a female MP to reconcile her job with her duties at home as a mother and wife. Al-Hakim's somewhat cynical view of marriage is expressed in a rather contrived manner in two plays: in *Urid an Aqtul* (I Want to Kill) the hypocrisy underlying the spouses' proclamation of love and readiness to sacrifice themselves for each other is exposed when they are faced with a situation in real life in which they themselves have to choose which of them is to die. Likewise, in *Ashab al-Sa'ada al-Zawjiyya* (The Happily Married), couples are shown to be disastrously ill-matched: they find their partners either too dull or too irrational. The determined and ruthless hunt for husbands by women – another favourite theme of Al-Hakim's, in which Shaw's influence is a apparent – is illustrated also in *Sahira* (The Enchantress), in which a young woman resorts to an ingenious device in order to make a man propose to her. A not particularly flattering opinion of women (obviously from a wholly masculine point of view) is expressed in *al-Jiya'a* (The Hungry Woman): a lover learns that his mistress (who is his friend's wife and who has failed to turn up in time for his dinner invitation in a restaurant) has been seen by her husband dining at another restaurant with another man, who happens to be his friend. When she eventually arrives she finds out that in disgust her lover has let a poor youth in rags sit down at the table to eat her food. The 'hungry' of the title denotes both the literally starving poor (for the play depicts, albeit incidentally, the appalling gap between the overfed, extravagant rich and the deprived and destitute poor) and metaphorically society women who are not satisfied with only one extra-marital affair.

Not all of the plays in this collection are satirical in intention. *Ughniyyat al-Mawt*

(Song of Death) depicts a serious Arabic and Egyptian social problem: the perpetuation of blood revenge. It is one of the most convincing and moving statements of the clash between the values of traditional peasant society and those of the educated urban classes, a variation on the theme of the conflict between tradition and modernity, which is surely one of the major themes of modern Egyptian and Arabic literature. It is the most satisfactory one-act play in this collection which is set not in a city but in a remote village. Despite its brevity, *Song of Death* is probably the nearest thing to tragedy in Arabic drama. It has the tragic intensity of J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, with which it also has other features in common, such as its timelessness, its primitive atmosphere, its force of elemental passion and its depiction of the utter powerlessness of the individual in relation to a deeply entrenched age-old way of life – features which are also reminiscent of the work of Lorca (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 53).

The play's action takes place in an unidentified village in southern Egypt. Alwan, the only son of a murdered man in a village in Upper Egypt is secretly taken to Cairo by the widow, Asakir, who plans to have him apprenticed to a butcher so that he can remain there until he is old enough to come back quietly to the village to avenge his father's death, making full use of the skill he will have learnt in handling a knife. In the mean time, in order to mislead her enemies she puts about the story that he has died in an accident in his childhood. But in Cairo the youth gets the chance of education at the theological University of Al-Azhar. As a result he is filled with a passionate desire to improve the appalling conditions of life in his native village. When he returns to the village, his mother anxiously expects him to proceed to kill his father's murderer at once. But to her bewilderment he talks to her instead about his programme of reform and his

intention to bring light and life into the village, and even suggests that the business of punishing the murderer had better be left in the hands of the police. She is horrified to hear him utter such words, and in shame and indignation disowns and curses him and even orders him to clear out of her home. When communication between them proves impossible, Alwan, now utterly defeated, yet still retaining his dignified calm, decides to take the next train back to Cairo; however the mother has, in the meantime, managed to get her nephew, Sumeida, to kill him before he boards the train in order to 'wipe out' the shame and dishonour his continued life would otherwise bring to the family.

Song of Death is arguably the best constructed play in the whole corpus of al-Hakim's work. At the beginning we are given an astonishing amount of background information in an indirect, natural way and in a very short space of time, in the course of a conversation between Asakir and her sister-in-law, Mabrouka. The play opens with these two women dressed in black, sitting on the floor of a peasant hut near the entrance, their heads bowed down in silence, a calf and a kid feeding on hay and dried clover close to them. The silence is broken by a train whistle, announcing the arrival of the train which they have been anxiously awaiting: they hope it will be bringing Alwan to them, as he told them in a letter which the village school teacher has read out for them; but they are not absolutely sure that he will be on it, as he says that he will come only if his circumstances allow. Sumeida has gone out to meet him at the station and he has promised to let the women know at once of his arrival by singing a song. An atmosphere of expectancy is therefore built up by the women straining their ears to hear Sumeida's song. They have waited for seventeen years for this day to come, the day when the honour of their family will be restored by Alwan's avenging his father's murder – a day

of supreme importance in their lives, particularly in that of the obsessed and fearfully single-minded widow, Asakir, who has been in mourning for the whole time and whose every thought and action have been directed to it.

The singing is heard, to the women's relief: Sumeida arrives, accompanied by Alwan. He then retires with his mother Mabrouka, leaving the jubilant Asakir alone with her son. However, Asakir's joy does not last long. From now on events move fast. She offers him food and drink which he declines, saying that he has come for a momentous matter - meaning the implementation of his programme of village reform. She, on the other hand, assuming that he means his father's revenge, plunges straight into the subject, bringing before him the saddle bag in which she found the mutilated corpse of his father and the knife with which he had been murdered and which she has kept for him to use in his revenge. In vain does Alwan try to find out the cause of this senseless and ancient family feud. When it dawns upon her that he does not intend to kill, she is beside herself with incredulous rage. She loses control and screams at him repeatedly the words, 'the blood of your father' and 'seventeen years,' and falls into a faint. When she recovers awareness of her surroundings she asks him:

> ASAKIR (*rousing herself a little in his arms*). Who are you?
>
> ALWAN. Your son Alwan. Your son.
>
> ASAKIR (*coming to her senses and shouting*). My son? My own son? No, never, never!
>
> ALWAN (*taken aback*). Mother!
>
> ASAKIR. I am not your mother. I do not know you. No son issued from my belly.

> ALWAN. Try to understand, Mother.
>
> ASAKIR. Get out of my house. God's curse be on you until the Day of Judgment. Get out of my house.
>
> ALWAN. Mother!
>
> ASAKIR (*shouting*). Get out of my house or I shall call the men to put you out. We have our men, there are still men amongst Azizis, but you are not one of them. Get out of my house. (88)

As soon as Alwan's departs for the station, Sumeida comes in to find out the cause of Asakir's screaming. Asakir, now having fully regained her self-control, asks Sumeida, who has already offered to avenge his uncle's murder himself, to kill his own cousin instead. Shocked at her suggestion, Sumeida tries to bring her back to her senses, but she prevails upon him, using the most powerful argument she could think of: the great shame in which he will be held in the village when it becomes known that his cousin Alwan is alive and has not avenged his father's murder:

> ASAKIR: If you're a man, Sumeida, don't let him dishonour the Azizis! After today you will not be able to walk like a man amongst people; they will whisper about you, will laugh up their sleeves at you, will point to you in the market places saying 'A woman hiding behind a woman!' (90)

Sumeida rushes off to catch up with his cousin, telling Asakir that if she hears him singing she is to assume that he has been able to despatch him. Mabrouka then arrives with a plate of anchovy for Alwan only to be told by Asakir of his shameful behaviour and his departure to catch the evening train back to Cairo. Once more the train whistle is

heard and Asakir strains her ears to listen to Sumeida's singing. When at last she hears it, despite her stoicism and the enormous effort she makes in order not to break down, she lets slip a suppressed faint cry, 'my son' (94).

The play's tension, which comes to its climax in the final scene, is created by Asakir and Mabrouka training their ears to listen for 'significant' sounds. The play opens and closes with the sound of the train whistle, followed by Sumeida's singing. The first singing is heard in the first scene, whereas the second is anxiously awaited for nearly the whole of the last scene of the play. In fact, Asakir's psychological struggle in the fourth scene sets the whole scene in contrast with the first scene. While the first scene indicates the great hopes she places in Alwan's arrival, the fourth scene emphasises her growing fears mixed with a faint hope for her son's escape. But whereas her hopes are renewed at the end of the first scene when she hears Sumeida's song announcing his death crushes her hopes. According to Badawi, this parallelism gives the play a neat circular shape and that the contrast between beginning and end has a powerful effect (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 55). Moreover, Sumeida's singing the same song helps to unify the play. The train's whistle heard from the station has the same connotations of Sumeida's song off-stage. Thus al-Hakim uses off-stage sounds to symbolise and dramatise the states of life and death. For instance, sounds off-stage in the first scene indicate Alwan's arrival from Cairo and hence the revival of Asakir's hope for new life, while the same sound in the last scene imply death for her son as well as for herself. In the final scene Asakir appears as both 'victim and victimiser' (A. Said 84). It is the only scene in which she is endowed with a sympathetic humane touch and her struggle becomes the main emphasis of the whole scene.

Al-Hakim, Furthermore, employs some other elements such as imagery, tragic irony and premonition that help to keep the unity of the play. Clothing images occur frequently, at Alwan's arrival Asakir cries jubilantly: 'Has he come? Has Alwan come? Today I'll rend the garment of shame and put on the robes of self-respect' (*Song* 81). After his departure she says to Sumeida, 'Would that he were dead – we could have lived with our excuse and we would not have had to clothe ourselves in shame' (89). Alwan's religious dress is both a mark of distinction and an outward sign distinguishing him from the rest of the peasants, stressing his different scheme of values. When she visited him in Cairo Asakir found Alwan looking awe-inspiring in his religious garment and at one point suspects Mabrouka of jealousy because, unlike Alwan, her son Sumeida wears the clothes of a common peasant. Looking at his own dress, Alwan asks his mother, 'Am I to do this deed in these clothes?' to which Asakir replies, 'Take off those clothes of yours, I have an aba (a cloak) of your father's. I've kept it for you' (85), and she moves into the inner stage to fetch it. The two women are dressed in black to emphasise their state of mourning. Instances of premonition, irony and tragic irony, sometimes arising from characters talking at cross-purposes, abound in the play. Mabrouka finds a bad omen in the fact that as a boy Alwan ran away from the butcher's shop. Alwan has come back to the village to bring life into it but ends up with meeting his death. The knife with which her husband was murdered and which Asakir has jealously guarded is in fact used in the killing of her son. When asked by Mabrouka where Alwan has gone, after his departure Asakir says with grim irony: 'Gone to whence he came' (92), meaning that he has gone back to dust from which he came, while Mabrouka innocently understands that he has gone back to Cairo.

The sharp contrast which is presented in this play makes the four characters clearly distinguished from one another. Mabrouka is somewhat more sceptical than the single-minded Asakir, partly because she is less immediately involved. Yet Asakir is not a flat character, devoid of any complexity: on the one hand, she is proud of her son when she sees him in Cairo looking awe-inspiring in his religious garments (which are a symbol of status in a traditional village); on the other, she expects him to behave like a common peasant loyal to the traditional values of honour, and shame, and wishing to avenge his father's murder. She incites her nephew to kill her son, but at the end she displays the feelings of a mother, uttering the poignant words 'my son,' when she realises that he has been murdered. She visits the mosques and shrines of holy men, praying to God that her husband's murderer may be kept alive until her son is old enough to kill him. Here al-Hakim seems to say that religious piety does not affect traditional values and age-old customs. Asakir's horizon is limited to the village, though she has been to Cairo. Similarly, Sumeida has seen Cairo where he visited the mosque of al-Hussein on the occasion of the birthday of the Saint, but he remains committed to the old ways. Different from these illiterate peasants is Alwan, the educated Azharite who is obviously an outsider among his people: Mabrouka says of him 'he doesn't belong to us nor we to him' (93). It is interesting, perhaps, to find some symbolical significance in the names of these four characters. Etymologically Alwan stands for sublimation (hence progress), Sumeida for rock-like steadfastness and imperviousness to change; Asakir denotes soldiering, with the connotations of vigilance and endurance, while Mabrouka means 'blessed' in the sense that, unlike Asakir whose son proves a source of shame, she has been blessed with a son who restores honour to the family.

Perhaps the most striking feature of *Song of Death* is the masterly economy with which it is written. Every detail is functional (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 56). Even the calf and the kid are not there just to create the appropriate Egyptian village atmosphere: Asakir has kept them in order to slaughter them when the time comes for the proper funeral rites for her dead husband to be performed, after his murder has been avenged. The dialogue is rich in references to various aspects of Egyptian village life, which not only strengthen the impression of a village, but also constitute a means of further characterisation, giving more substance to the peasant characters and rendering them more vivid and convincing. In the first couple of pages we are either shown or told about the peasant hut, the women squatting on the floor next to their animals, the water-wheel well (where Alwan was alleged to have drowned as a child), the village market where gossip and rumours are heard, the milking of shrivelled-up cows, the bags in which ground corn is carried, farm dogs, shepherds and owls in ruined buildings. In general, *Song of Death* is a highly esteemed play. In his article "Tawfik al-Hakim: Leading Playwright of the Arab World," Paul Starkey claims that it is 'the most successful' of the plays of the *Theatre of Society* (qtd in A. Said 87).

Theatre of Society, moreover, includes three full-length plays: *al-Liss* (The Thief), *al-Ush al-Hadi* (The Peaceful Nest) and *Law Araf al-Shabab* (If Only the Young Knew), later named *Awdat al-Shabab*, (Rejuvenation). *The Thief*, which was written in 1948, is a frontal attack on unprincipled capitalists and businessmen and their corrupting influence on the moral life of the nation, particularly the young. It was performed on the stage in the same year, but apparently after the censor had removed passages condemning capitalism as a system (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 57). Hamid, an exploited young

manager of a small bookshop and publishing firm who has had to discontinue his university education because of lack of finance, has recently been dismissed by his illiterate boss for allegedly overpaying a deserving author. He breaks into an expensive villa in the middle of the night, in a desperate attempt to obtain capital to start a business of his own. He finds himself in a bedroom, where he is disturbed by noises; he hides behind the curtains and overhears a conversation between Khayriyya, a young woman, and her stepfather, a rich Pasha, who is intent on seducing her. When she manages to get rid of him momentarily, Hamid reveals himself to Khayriyya, who turns out to have seen him in the bookshop. He explains the reason for his unlawful behaviour, offers to save her from her stepfather and rather unconvincingly they agree to marry. He is caught and shot in the garden by the Pasha, who assumes he is Khayriyya's lover and threatens to report him to the police. Khayriyya, however, convinces the Pasha that he had better let them marry so that she can more easily grant the Pasha her favours in the privacy of her own married home. The Pasha agrees to the marriage, sets Hamid up as a manager of one of his firms which is engaged in shady dealings, and provides the young couple with a comfortable and luxurious home. Resolved to carry out his plan of enjoying Khayriyya, he instructs her husband to go to Alexandria on business in order to have him out of the way. In the meantime, Hamid has been warned about the illegal financial transactions in which the Pasha had involved his managers, by Shukri, his predecessor in the firm, who had been made a manager once so that the Pasha might enjoy his sister as his mistress but was subsequently dismissed after he had grown tired of her. Suspecting the Pasha's motives, Hamid does not go away. Khayriyya asks her mother, to whom at long last she has confided her stepfather's intentions, to stay with her in order to protect her. The

Pasha is confronted by them while visiting Khayriyya, becomes angry at the frustration of his plan, threatens to report Hamid to the police, and leaves, only to be shot dead by Shukri who has been waiting for him outside.

Critically speaking, the play is clearly an old-fashioned melodrama; it has obvious defects, such as weak characterisation, the unconvincing behaviour of Hamid and Khayriyya in their encounter in her bedroom; over-emotional confrontations between the Pasha and his two female victims; some surprising and sensational events, and the somewhat facile realisation of poetic justice at the end. However, despite that, it is a damning criticism of the excesses of capitalism and its total lack of principles in the pursuit of wealth and worldly pleasures, represented in the person of the irredeemably corrupt and lustful Pasha, whose public image bears such little relation to the reality of his private life that he is regarded as a pillar of society and is elected president of the 'Society for Promotion of Virtue.' Furthermore, there is some subtlety in the author's title, for as the play progresses it becomes increasingly clear that 'the Thief' of the title does not really refer to the young burglar of the opening, Hamid, but to a much bigger and more dangerous thief, the Pasha himself.

The other two plays do not primarily deal with social or political issues such as the lack of social justice or the corrupting power of money. *Rejuvenation* deals with the question of time, already encountered in *The Sleepers in the Cave*, while in *The Peaceful Nest* al-Hakim returns to the problematic attitude of the artist to the exigencies of daily social living, represented in marriage, a subject which he has also dealt with, albeit in a more solemn manner, in *Pygmalion*.

3.2.5 Plays after the 1952 Revolution

In 1954 al-Hakim published *al-Aydi al-Na'imah* (Soft Hands), which represented his first response in drama to the Egyptian army-led Revolution of 1952. It is claimed that al-Hakim's plays of social criticism written after the Revolution are clearly distinguished from his earlier work because they reflect a more positive attitude to work. *Soft Hands* is generally regarded as marking a new stage in the development of al-Hakims plays: a stage which Mandur calls 'drama with a message' (123), the message being a political one, in keeping with the revolutionary political awareness of the time. Al-Ra'i regards this new stage as characterised by a marriage between theatre of the mind and the popular theatre (*Tawfiq* 82); from now on al-Hakim will write plays with the idea of stage production very much in his mind, and indeed many of these have been produced on stage.

Soft Hands deals with two main themes: reconciliation between the different social classes and the value of work. The 'soft hands' of the title refer to those of a prince of the former royal family, Farid, who finds himself without a meaningful role in the new society, a position in which he is joined by a young academic, Hammuda, who has just finished writing a doctoral thesis on the uses of the Arabic preposition *hatta*. The play explores in an amusing, yet rather obviously didactic fashion, the ways in which these two apparently useless individuals set about identifying roles for themselves in the new socialist context. The play opens with Farid and Hammuda who strike up a friendship. Although Farid is a prince of Turkish extraction, he is now impecunious and his palace has been confiscated by the revolutionary government. He is the father of two girls,

Mirfat, the older one who ran away from home to marry Salim, an enterprising garage mechanic, now a rich entrepreneur; and Jihan, the younger one, now living with her sister. Because of this unequal marriage Farid has not forgiven his daughter and will have nothing to do with her or her sister. Despite his poverty, Farid retains his old domineering manner and maintains the outward appearance of aristocracy such as cigar smoking. He accepts Hammuda's invitations, first to a corn cob purchased from a street hawker who ekes out a difficult living with the help of his family, then to a semolina cake bought from another hawker who, we learn, has managed to see his children through university. (They have now joined the army of the unemployed graduates, yet they regard helping their father in his lowly job as beneath their dignity).

In response to Farid's advertisement and attracted by the idea of living in a house with a garden, a retired civil servant, Abd al-Salam, and his widowed daughter, Karima, come forward and agree to share the palace with Farid and Hammuda, having accepted the condition that, in lieu of rent, which Farid is not allowed to charge, they will feed and look after him and his friend. They all live together like one happy family for some time, during which Farid falls in love with Karima. A tea party is given, at which the guests are none other than Jihan, Mirfat and Salim, for the old man turns out to be Salim's father. When Farid asks him for his daughter's hand he says it is up to Karima to decide and, to Farid humiliation, Karima informs him that she will accept him subject to the approval of her brother, Salim, who is now regarded as the head of the family. In the meantime, Hammuda also proposes to Jihan, who lays down the same condition. After much deliberation, Salim expresses his approval, provided the two men find honest jobs from which they can earn their living: he himself secures employment for them in

organisations under his control. The play ends happily with the marriage of the lovers, despite their social differences, and with the employment of the men without work.

Soft Hands has an obvious symbolic significance: Salim stands for Abd al-Nasser, the leader of the new revolutionary regime, and the family represents the whole of Egypt. Al-Hakim is making a plea for the social classes to sink their differences and live in harmony, putting an end to the rule of the idle rich and regarding work as valuable in itself. The idea that work is important for one's integrity and peace of mind is highlighted by the dramatist, who is paying homage here to the slogan raised by the revolution: "Work is right, an honour and a duty." But the way he does it is both convincing and deliciously comic. Farid and Hammuda are a couple of good-for-nothings; both penniless, they soon become little more than two vagabonds, living outside the pale of respect and enjoying the immense freedom their lives give. Their childish bickering, their continuous attempts to offload responsibilities onto each other's shoulders soon turn them into a comic duet. Al-Hakim is once more the same master of the comic whom we have met in some of his earlier plays. However, here he shows his astuteness in turning an essentially serious theme into a matter of real comedy, without allowing the message of the play to be in any way belittled or made fun of (al-Ra'i, "Tawfiq" 378). It is the balance between thought and entertainment for which the dramatist has been working and which has led to this happy result. Because of its didactic message, *Soft Hands*, the performance of which was incidentally attended by President Abd al-Nasser himself, was enthusiastically received by socialist critics such as Mandur and al-Ra'i. No wonder the play was a box-office success and was subsequently turned into a film.

Like *Soft Hands*, *al-Safqa* (The Deal, 1956) had greater success on stage. It

derives its events directly from life in the countryside before the 1952 Revolution in Egypt. A Belgian company plans to sell by auction some of its landholding in a village, but persuaded by the cashier Shinuda, the manager agrees to sell it instead directly to the local peasants on condition that they pay a quarter of the asking price in cash and the rest in instalments covering a period of twenty years. The play opens in the village square, with Shinuda checking the list of subscribing peasants and the amounts paid, and the peasants anxious to celebrate the conclusion of the deal by which they will cease to be exploited labourers and become landowners for the first time in their lives, by slaughtering a cow and holding a feast with music, singing and merrymaking. Spotting a notorious big landowner, Hamid Bey and his bailiff at the railway station, the local company store-keeper, Khamis, hastily assumes that they have come to buy the land, unaware of the true reason for their presence, namely, the breakdown of their car while they were on their way to Cairo. He rushes off to the assembled peasants, to warn them, and after much deliberation they decide that their best course of action is not to kill Hamid Bey (despite offers from several men to do so), but to buy him off by entertaining him lavishly and paying him a certain amount in return for his giving up his intention to bid for the land himself. They form a procession and march to receive him formally at the station with music and welcoming speeches.

Much humour arises from the characters misunderstanding one another and talking at cross-purposes. Hamid Bey has no idea why he is receiving VIP treatment from the peasants, who compete with one another as to who should approach him on this sensitive issue, no one being able to explain the matter to him. He is totally nonplussed when he is thanked profusely by them and finds one of them slipping into his pocket a

huge sum of money. At first he thinks they have gone mad, but as soon as the matter is revealed to him he changes his attitude completely. He decides at once to buy the land himself, but when discouraged by his bailiff (who has secretly received a bribe for helping the peasants) he lays down stiff conditions: not only does he want more compensation money but he insists that the attractive young woman, Mabrouka, for whom he has developed an un-controllable lust, accompany him to Cairo, supposedly as a nanny to his son. To the astonishment of the scandalised peasants, Mabrouka agrees to accompany him, in order to save the land deal. In Cairo she tricks him by pretending to be suffering from cholera, with the result that she is whisked off to hospital while he and his family are kept in quarantine for the crucial period of time necessary for the peasants to sign and seal their deal with the Belgian company. Mabrouka is brought back to the village in triumph by her fiancé, Mahrous, and the entire village celebrates their victory, with the village undertaker/usurer being made to atone for his misdeeds by making a gift of the money he has lent to the villagers and even by agreeing to finance the wedding of Mabrouka and Mahrous, whose parents have spent on the deal all the money they have been carefully saving for their children's marriage ceremony.

The play is carefully structured and makes good use of visual and aural effects. Act I begins with the peasants' preparations for their festivities and ends with their noisy procession as they make their way to the railway station to the accompaniment of tambourines and reed pipes. Act II opens with the same procession returning from the station, with Hamid riding a horse and his bailiff on the back of a donkey, and ends with the uncelebrated departure of Mabrouka and Hamid for Cairo. The sound of keening over the death of Tuhami's grandmother and the procession of the mourning women mark the

beginning of Act III, but the Act and the whole play end with singing and merrymaking to celebrate at long last the successful conclusion of the deal. The song, the theme of which is the peasants' delight in owning their own land, which is rudely interrupted by the rise of the main obstacle to the sale at the beginning of the play, is sung again at the end, thus giving the play a neat and rounded shape (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 66).

Despite al-Hakim's sympathetic attitude, the picture of the Egyptian village in *The Deal* is not idealised beyond recognition. On the contrary, few dramatists depict the picture of Egyptian village life as skilfully, or describe it with the same degree of authenticity as the author of *The Deal*, which is extraordinarily rich in realistic details. In their desire to possess the land they have been tilling with such toil and dedication, the peasants present a remarkable spectacle of solidarity and self-denial: they sell their few precious possessions, even their wooden coffers and brass trays, in order to raise the necessary capital. Awadayn and Sa'dawi give up the money they have been saving for their children's wedding and Tuhami even steals his grandmother's life-savings. However, not everyone in the village is delighted at these goings-on. While the older generation thinks the land purchase offers them the chance of a lifetime, the young couple, Mahrous and Mabrouka, whose marriage has to be postponed as a result, regard it as an unmitigated disaster. Furthermore, far from being models of responsible social behaviour, the peasants are not devoid of foibles and moral weakness: they stop at nothing in order to bring about the sale. Many are prepared to consider seriously the possibility of murdering the rich landowner, to get him out of the way.

The fact that the action of the play in all three acts takes place in the open air – the village pubic square, without any further specified scenery – is a significant trait of

the play. It proves beyond doubt that al-Hakim is now writing plays to be performed and not merely to be read. In the postscript to the play, al-Hakim says that in *The Deal* he attempted to offer an 'experimental' solution to four main problems, which continue to beset the Arabic theatre: language, theatre, the public and folklore, and realistic acting. Because of the diglossia of modern Arabic, al-Hakim here chose to write not in either the classical Arabic or the Egyptian dialect, but in what has been described as 'a third language' (*al-Safqa* 160), a language that at first sight looks as if it were the colloquial but in fact follows the rules of classical Arabic 'as far as possible' on the stage (160). Actors therefore could turn the dialogue into the spoken language, thus sounding less artificial than they might otherwise, while on the printed page the text could be understood anywhere in the Arab world. As for the second problem, namely the lack of theatres in many parts of the Arab world, al-Hakim tackled it by making it possible to perform *The Deal* anywhere: the play 'requires neither stage scenery, nor costume' (161). The third problem is, in al-Hakim's view, not confined to the Arabic stage. It consists in the tendency of playwrights to address themselves only to a small section of the community. In *The Deal* he tried to write a work that would appeal to a wide audience of different intellectual standards, by introducing as integral parts of the structure of folkloric elements such as the peasants' festivities and the procession of mourning women. No doubt this, together with the use of 'the third language,' has contributed to the success of the play on the stage. The final problem is the difficulty of achieving realism in Arabic acting, since Arabic drama tends to be either farce or melodramatic. To solve this problem, al-Hakim has chosen as the subject of his play events, situations and characters from everyday life which can be interpreted in a

realistic manner without the usual theatrical exaggeration. Al-Hakim concludes his postscript with the remark that there are no final solutions in art or literature and that writers will experiment ceaselessly all their lives.

Al-Hakim was thinking primarily of himself when making this last statement, for there is no doubt that the most striking thing about his career as a dramatist is his ceaseless experimentation. His next experimental popular work, *al-Sultan al-Ha'ir* (The Sultan's Dilemma, 1960) deals with more than one theme. However the dramatist manages to weave them together skilfully into a tighter work, which has proved to be one of al-Hakim's most notable stage successes. In prefatory note we are told that it was written in 1959 while the author was in Paris, inspired by the great tension in the international situation, the fear and anxiety caused by the inability of world leaders to decide whether the solution to world problems is to be sought in arbitration by the sword or by the law, in resorting to the atom and to hydrogen bombs or to the United Nations. 'They cannot tell which of these alternative courses requires greater courage and which exposes mankind to the graver danger' (Manzalaoui 89). Although al-Hakim chose to present 'this problem of choice in a historical oriental setting,' his intention was clearly not to write a historical play but very much a modern drama dealing with the contemporary world situation.

The Sultan's Dilemma is, however, about much more than that. The action takes place in Cairo in an unspecified period of Mameluke[5] history, although one of the incidents, namely the public auction of a Mameluke prince, is based on a historical

[5] Mamelukes are soldiers of slave origin. They appeared in the ninth century A.D. and became a powerful military caste in various Muslim societies particularly Egypt and Syria. They held political and military power and in some cases they attained the rank of sultan, while in others they held regional power as amirs or beys.

event that took place in the thirteenth century (Mandur 153). The play opens with a condemned man tied to a post in a city square just before dawn, trying to find out from his sleepy Executioner the time at which his death sentence will be carried out. Impatiently and reluctantly the Executioner tells him that as soon as the call to the dawn prayers is made by the Muezzin his head will be struck off, according to the Vizier's instruction. From the dialogue, however, we sense that we are here in a topsy-turvy world in which the Executioner asks the Condemned Man to treat him to a glass of wine in order to raise his morale, the specious reasoning being that unless he (the Executioner) is in the right mood he will not be able to cut off the Condemned Man's head in one stroke of his sword. Wine is bought at the nearby tavern, which is kept open because it caters for those who visit the supposed Courtesan in the opposite house. The Executioner, now drunk, sings a song of his own composition inspired by the Condemned Man's situation, making such a loud noise that the Maid of the supposed Courtesan tells him off for disturbing the peace: this leads to an amusing quarrel scene, in which the lively Maid has the upper hand. The Courtesan herself appears to demand an apology from the Executioner, recognises the Condemned Man as a leading slave merchant, learns his predicament and is appalled to hear that he is to be put to the sword without a fair trial. Just at that moment the Muezzin arrives and, in an attempt to put off the execution, she persuades him to go up with her to her flat to have a hot drink before making the call to prayers. The exact nature of the crime of which the Condemned Man is accused is not disclosed because he is not allowed to talk about it.

The Vizier appears surrounded by his guards, and is shocked and angry to find

that the Executioner has not carried out the sentence, although it is long past the dawn prayers. The Executioner pleads that he is still waiting for the Muezzin to make his call, but when questioned by the Vizier, the Muezzin falsely claims that he has already done so and his story is corroborated by the Courtesan and her Maid. In the meantime the Sultan, who has received a petition from the Condemned Man, arrives, accompanied by the Chief Justice, in order to look into his case and give him a fair trial. Only when the trial proceeds do we discover the nature of the accusation: the Condemned Man is reported to have spread a rumour that the Sultan has not been manumitted by the deceased Sultan and, being still a mere slave, has no right to rule. We learn that the Condemned Man is the very Slave Merchant who sold the Sultan when he was a mere youth to the monarch and that his story is true: due to negligence the Vizier had not been able to secure the present Sultan's freedom from the departed Sultan before he passed away. The Chief Justice insists that the correct legal procedure is for the Sultan, who technically was owned by his predecessor and is now the property of the Exchequer, since his owner died heirless, to be put up for public auction, on a condition that 'the person whom he is sold to will thereafter manumit him. In this manner the Exchequer is not harmed or defrauded in respect of its property and the Sultan gains his manumission through the law (al-Hakim, *The Sultan's Dilemma* in Johnson-Davies 34).

The Vizier, who has unsuccessfully tried to hush the matter up by unscrupulously ordering the death of the Slave Merchant, now tries in vain to persuade the Chief Justice that they should avoid this scandalous and humiliating treatment of the Sultan by both privately paying a ransom for him and then freeing him .When he realises that the Chief Justice is resolved not to be a party to this compromise, which he regards as a plot

against the law, the Sultan at first decides to settle the matter by the sword but is advised by the Vizier against making a martyr of the Chief Justice and eventually, after some agonising thought, opts for the legal solution, convinced by the Justice's words that 'the sword will impose your will but expose your person, but the law, although it defies you, ultimately protects you' (36).

The preparations for the public auction of the Sultan which is attended by a huge crowd of citizens take place. An unknown bidder acting on behalf of somebody else buys the Sultan, but refuses to free him, on the grounds that he has not been empowered to do so. Threatened by torture he is forced to reveal the identity of the person who has delegated him and to the shock of all it turns out to be none other than the supposed Courtesan, who argues successfully with the Chief Justice about the illegality of being obliged to free the Sultan, a thing which would be tantamount to her having to give up what she has just purchased. The Justice admits defeat, and so the Vizier resorts to intimidation, which she valiantly resists. In the meantime, watching in almost ironic detachment the bankruptcy of the solutions attempted by the Chief Justice and the Vizier, the Sultan decides to swallow his pride and let the law take its course, throwing himself on the mercy of the woman whom all regards as a prostitute. She finally agrees to free him, on a condition that she keeps him for one night in her house: she promises to sign the manumission document when the call to the dawn prayer is made the following day.

Now, we see the Sultan being entertained with music and dancing by the Courtesan in her house and we learn that, far from being a prostitute, the Courtesan is in fact a virtuous widow who desired the Sultan's company not for sexual gratification but for a polite conversation. Her late husband used to hold a regular salon in his house

to which friends were invited to listen to poetry, music and singing and to engage in intellectual discussions, in order to be able to continue these activities which she so much enjoys after his death, in a society that frowns on unmarried women entertaining strange men. She did not mind the bad reputation she inevitably acquired by inviting men to her house. Naturally, assuming the worst, the Chief Justice decides to release the Sultan from the company of such an immoral woman as soon as possible, by ordering the Muezzin to make the call to the dawn prayer at midnight, to the surprise and confusion of the people. The Sultan comes out to investigate the matter and angrily reprimands the Justice for playing about with the law and acting so dishonestly. He prepares to go back to the house, but the lady says she understands why the Justice is so anxious to save his monarch and she signs the necessary document at once. The grateful Sultan removes an invaluable and highly cherished sapphire from his turban and gives it to her as a parting present, having ordered the Vizier to repay her the money she has paid out and having commanded that the entire city show her the great respect that is due to a noble lady.

Even though the play seems to deal with the question of law versus force in resolving world problems, it is relevant to the contemporary political situation in Egypt, which was still ruled by the military junta. It was al-Hakim's call to Abd al-Nasser and the army to return to the barracks and seek legitimacy by resorting to the rule of law, constitution and parliament (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 72). The play also probes the nature of law: it presents two views of the law, by juxtaposing the formal structure of the law to its spirit. It ridicules the former in several ways: the Chief Justice is so intent on applying the letter (i.e. the formal structure) of the law that he goes to the

absurd lengths of wishing to put up the ruler of the land for public auction. At one point he seems to be the embodiment of belief in the sanctity of the law. For the sake of principle, he declares, he is prepared to sacrifice his own life. He tells the Sultan he cannot bring himself to accept him as the legitimate monarch once he has discovered that he is not a free man and therefore not entitled to rule over a free nation. Yet from the action of the play it is clear that he has known all along that the Sultan has not been freed since we are told that if there was a manumission document it would have been in his possession, as he is the keeper of the archives. It is more likely that he is motivated by expediency and fear for the authority of his profession: he cannot allow the Sultan to continue to govern in the full knowledge that he is flouting the law; but he seemed to be content as long as the Sultan was not aware of his illegal position. In the legal argument he had with the Courtesan over the question of the legality of the condition of the auction, whereby whoever bought the Sultan would have to free him, she had no difficulty in showing up the absurdity and contradiction of his position by forcing him to concede that what he propounded was tantamount to saying that 'in order to possess you must not possess' (al-Hakim, *The Sultan's Dilemma* in Johnson-Davies 54). The final instance of his commitment to the letter of the law occurs in his instructing the Muezzin to make a call to dawn prayers at midnight, a dishonesty which is quickly spotted by the Sultan, who seems to acquire through painful experience a genuine respect for the true spirit of the law.

The Sultan, in fact, seems to be the only major character in the play that shows some development. At the beginning he is painted as the embodiment of heroic virtues: a successful army general who has just won a war against the enemy, a man of strong

personality, loyalty and courage who was the departed Sultan's right arm and is held in great esteem and affection by his people. When he first appears he impresses us by his dignity and firmness. Even his perplexity, to which the author refers in the title (which in Arabic means 'The Perplexed Sultan'), is to his credit, for it is due to his growing awareness of the complexity of the issue facing him. Had he proceeded to solve the problem by the sword, as indeed he was tempted (and able) to do at one point, we would have had a strong, albeit unimaginative ruler, but not the 'ideal ruler' whom al-Hakim is intent on painting; for the play is really about the education of the ideal ruler, just as much as it is about the choice between the sword and the law. It is al-Hakim's recipe for a 'complete' ruler, no doubt designed for the ears of Abd al-Nasser, the leader of the Revolution of 1952, who was a young and popular army officer. Besides military courage and statesmanship, the ideal ruler should also learn to have a deep respect for the spirit of the law, even though that may cost him much humility, if not humiliation. He has to subject himself to the rule of law, just like lowliest of his subjects. But, says al-Hakim, that is not enough, or the play would have ended with Act II, when the Sultan agreed to accompany the Courtesan to her house as her slave for one night and she promised to set him free the following day. The ideal ruler has also to be exposed to the civilising influence of the arts, here clearly represented by the woman and her artistic environment and her flouting of the social conventions in pursuit of a higher freedom of spirits. That is why the Sultan emerges from her house at the close of the play as a much more sensitive, dignified, and civilised potential ruler than the strong, dominant and reputedly arrogant victorious general we saw in the beginning.

The Sultan's Dilemma is therefore a parable about good environment. It is a

didactic play in which characters are given offices but no individual names: we have the Vizier, the Chief Justice, the Muezzin, the Executioner, and the Wine Seller. Apart from the Sultan whose character, as we have seen, develops, they have not much complexity, except perhaps the Courtesan (who turns out to be other than she seems and proves a formidable opponent, more than a match for the Vizier and the Justice) and to a lesser extent the Chief Justice, whose subsequent behaviour could not have been easily predicted. The Vizier, on the other hand, represents ruthless, unprincipled executive power, whose aim is the stability of the state at any cost, even if that means the liquidation without a fair trial of anyone who is likely to be a source of trouble, and the concoction of false charges of treason for 'awkward' citizens. Because of the lively dialogue and the fast tempo of events, the main characters engage our attention, instead of remaining mere puppets in the author's hands. Thus, despite the light and easy-going manner in which the events develop, the message is easily put across; a ruler should not only have a deep respect for the spirit of law but he also has to subject himself to it. This is perhaps the last of al-Hakim's political plays to end on a cheerful note.

3.2.6 Theatre of the Absurd

Al-Hakim is the most experimental playwright of the post-Revolution era. He is the first to bring the Theatre of the Absurd into Egypt and the Arab world in 1962, when he wrote, *Ya Tali' al-Shajara* (The Tree Climber, 1962), which is an even more experimental drama than anything, he had written before. Al-Hakim says that he became familiar with the Theatre of the Absurd during his sojourn in Paris in 1959 (*Ya Tali' al-Shajarah*, Introduction. 14). From now on, al-Hakim shows an almost obsessive preoccupation with dramatic form and technique, a preoccupation which is

always present in his work.

The play opens with Bahadir, a retired railway ticket inspector who has reported to the police the disappearance of his wife, Behana, a childless widow of about sixty, to whom he has been married for nine years. The detective questions the old Maidservant, from whom he learns that her mistress has gone out to buy a skein of wool with which to knit a little dress for her daughter Bahiyya (who incidentally was never born and whom she had to abort during her first marriage on account of poverty), and that she has not been back for three days. Asked if her mistress has had any quarrel with her husband, the Maidservant says that they get on extremely well and she asks him to see and judge for himself, pointing to a part of the stage where, as it were in a flashback, the husband and wife are seen conversing – the husband having come into the house carrying gardening tools and the wife in a green dress, which she never changes. Their dialogue is an extreme example of the type of talking at cross-purposes which al-Hakim has perfected; there is, however, a strange kind of communication between them: each relates what the other says to his or her own solipsistic world: the wife is thinking solely of the daughter she never had and of her green dress, while the husband is completely preoccupied with his orange tree in their little garden and the lizard he calls Lady Green living in a little hole at the foot of the tree.

Amazed at the strange conversation he overhears, which the Maidservant says is the way they always talk together, the Detective turns to the husband, who has been busy in the garden, to question him further. Before the Detective could put to him any questions, the husband tells him about something extraordinary that has happened,

namely, the disappearance of the lizard, Lady Green, of whom he is now extremely fond, even though at one time he thought of killing her. The Detective, realising how much more the husband seems to care about his lizard and his tree than about his wife and struck by the oddity of their conversation, begins to suspect that he may have killed her. When asked if he has ever felt a desire to kill his wife, Bahadir's reply is 'Naturally,' he assumes that any husband must do so sometimes and he asks the Detective to guess where he would have buried her body if he had killed her, adding that the ideal place would be under the tree so that her whole body would be turned into an excellent fertiliser for the tree. The Detective's suspicion grows stronger and the husband proceeds to defend himself against the charge of murder, saying that he is a happily married man, who is never worried, although in the past he used to be disturbed by the whistle of a train. Then he suddenly cups his ear to listen and points to a part of the stage from which he says the train is approaching. The Detective looks in that direction and confirms what the husband says.

Then in another flashback (although the husband and the Detective are still on the stage) we see from the back a figure meant to be the husband, younger and dressed as railway ticket inspector, at work on the train, reprimanding his Assistant, from whom he learns that only one passenger, a Dervish, has been caught travelling without a ticket, but that all the others have tickets – including a group of school children, who are heard singing a nursery rhyme about a tree climber (from which the play derives it title). When the Dervish is challenged by the Inspector, he first produces his birth certificate saying meaningfully that it is his ticket for the journey, but when pressed for a proper railway ticket he stretches his hand out of the window

into space and produces not one but ten tickets, which he hands to the inspector. Impressed by the Dervish's miraculous powers, he asks him about the future and is told he will have in his suburban garden a tree which in winter produces oranges, in spring apricots, in summer figs and in autumn pomegranates, as well as the venerable Lady Green. He also asks the Dervish to save him from a person who upsets and frightens him and who he fears will lead him astray one day. At this point the Detective asks the (present) husband who that person is, but the latter is unable to answer. Assuming that the Dervish knows the identity of that person, the husband summons him, and the Dervish rises from his place and goes out of the carriage to join the husband and the Detective, leaving behind him the disappearing train with the surprised Inspector on it. When asked if he has any information about the wife's disappearance, the Dervish simply says 'either he has killed her or else he has not yet killed her.' Relying on the Dervish's evidence, the Detective has the husband arrested and put in jail on a murder charge and the act ends with the Detective ordering someone to dig under the tree to remove the body, to the horror of the husband who screams 'Murderers! They'll kill the tree' (124).

Now we see the Detective supervising the digging, but there is a knock on the front door and, to the terror of the Maidservant who opens the door, the wife appears and is herself shocked to hear of her husband's arrest. The Detective apologises and orders the husband's immediate release. His prison experience seems to have changed him and when left alone with his wife he asks her to tell him where she has been for the past three days. She refuses to tell him and is surprised that he attaches so much importance to the matter.

HUSBAND. Tell me, then, where were you?

WIFE. I was somewhere.

HUSBAND. Naturally. Inevitably you were somewhere, because you cannot be nowhere. But where was this somewhere? At the house of one of your relations?

WIFE. No.

HUSBAND. At the house of one of your acquaintances?

WIFE. No.

HUSBAND. A hotel?

WIFE. No.

HUSBAND. A hospital?

WIFE. No.

HUSBAND. A sanatorium?

WIFE. No.

HUSBAND. A prison?

WIFE. No. (145-146)

To his repeated questions, the only reply she consistently gives is a simple 'No,' and in a fit of anger he strangles her. Horrified at what he has done, he rings the Detective to confess his crime, but the latter does not give him the chance to explain his action fully and, assuming that the wife has once again disappeared, he tells the husband not to worry, for she is bound to come back again. While the husband prepares to bury the body in the hole dug by the police, there is another knock on the door, the Dervish appears, obviously knowing what has happened, but refuses to help him carry the body, saying that the fact

that he knew he was going to murder her does not mean that he approved of it. The husband goes to where he left the body, but is alarmed to discover that it has disappeared. He looks for it in the hole under the tree, but he finds instead the lizard, Lady Green, lying there, dead. The Dervish says that he is going to the Post Office to send him a telegram of condolence and disappears. The play ends with the stage empty, until suddenly it is filled with the sounds of a party celebrating childbirth, the sound and whistle of a train, and the sound of schoolchildren singing the nursery rhyme about the tree climber, sounds that have been heard separately at different points in the course of the play, but are now blended together.

The Tree Climber seems to be an intriguing play which has raised a hot debate and, therefore, has been interpreted differently by several critics. Some have found in it a development of certain themes from earlier plays: in particular the theme of the conflict between art and the practical demands of life used in *Pygmalion* – the husband being the artist trying to produce the perfect work (the tree), while the wife is solely preoccupied with the child that was not born; and the husband preferring Lady Green to his wife, although both art and life are ruined at the end. Also destructive thirst for knowledge which is treated in *Shahrazad* is seen in the husband's compulsive insistence upon getting an answer from his wife and the frustration of this desire for knowledge ends in his strangling her. However, without having to resort to ingenious interpretations, it can be enjoyed simply as an ironic statement (possibly of devastating proportions): the husband and wife enjoyed a happy, at least a working relationship, as long as there was no conventional communication between them – or rather, as long as they could communicate only *indirectly*, using language *tangentially* as a means to reconcile back

on, and to develop, their individual separate inner worlds. Once the husband aspires to more than that, i.e. when he asks a direct question to which he expects a direct answer, trouble sets in. The only direct answer which the wife feels able to give him is 'No' to every question, which in the end is no answer at all. Hence his utter frustration drives him into a frenzy and consequently to murder her. In other words, al-Hakim seems to say that intellectual communication in intimate human relations is impossible to achieve for true communication occurs at a non-logical or even non-verbal level, the level of instinct and deep emotion; or the message of the play may simply be that each man is an island, and any attempt to break into this solipsistic world spells disaster. Again, al-Hakim does not treat his theme in a tragic manner, even though the play ends with a murder; the issue remains highly intellectualised although sometimes poetically presented. As Johnson-Davies remarks, al-Hakim's final comment on life is 'an amused chuckle rather than a fist raised in angry defiance against the heavens' (qtd in Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 77).

When *The Tree Climber* was published, al-Hakim agreed with the critics who classified it as belonging to the Theatre of the Absurd. Those critics believed that the parallel dialogue between husband and wife discloses their inability to meet and communicate was enough to term the play absurd. However, according to Al-Ra'i, the play has nothing of the absurd in it. He adds, 'it is a philosophic work very cleverly using the detective technique to secure the attention of its audience and readers and to probe the problem of knowledge, which has always interested al-Hakim' ("Tawfiq" 382). Clearly, various methods of trying to acquire knowledge are presented in the play; for instance, the police officer uses cross-examination method in order to know why and where the wife has disappeared before her subsequent murder. Bahadir tries to achieve knowledge

by something like black magic rituals. The title which al-Hakim uses for his play is taken from a folkloric song with symbolic undertones. The relation between song and content of the play is not easy to decide: it can only be guessed at. Moreover, the playwright deliberately leaves many questions unanswered. Is the Dervish, an obviously symbolic character, appearing when the husband summons him, meant to stand for his conscience? What is the mysterious connection between the Wife and Lady Green? How does the Wife's body disappear? That is why the play is considered by some critics as almost 'a sombre intellectual puzzle' (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 77).

Al-Hakim also wrote *al- Ta'am li kul Fam (Food for Every Mouth*, 1963) which is a much simpler play. In it the humdrum life of a disgruntled married couple is made more exciting and meaningful as a result of their seeing a damp patch on the wall of their flat turning into a picture of three people enacting their own drama, a technique in some ways reminiscent of the shadow theatre. One of the characters in the drama on the wall (which is virtually a play within a play, ending abruptly when the picture crumbles to pieces) is engaged in a university scientific project in which he has proved that it is possible theoretically to eliminate poverty and hunger from the world, and he inspires the couple to dedicate their lives to the realisation of this dream. Al-Hakim seems to suggest that science may achieve an abundance of food and thus eliminate hunger from the world. The play defends the concept of production, and points out to a bright future. It is a loosely constructed play, with unconvincing characters behaving in a naive manner, in no way comparable with *The Tree Climber* (78).

In some ways closer to the Theatre of the Absurd are the two one-act plays published in the following year (1964): *Rihlat Sayd* (A Hunting Trip) and *Rihlat Qitar* (A

Train Journey). In the former play, which is set in a jungle, a dying hunter, having dropped his gun, lies sprawling on the ground, totally unaware of his surroundings and even of the roaring of a lion close by, which is intermittently heard throughout the play. He wonders who he is, and where the strong stench and the hot breath come from. A series of blurred images that gradually become distinct, faces of people from his past, flit through his mind, projected on a screen for the audience to see – a technique again reminiscent of the shadow theatre. From the conversation he holds with the people whose faces appear before him we learn about his life and character, his present occupation as director of a hospital. The images he sees come from his subconscious mind, a mixture of important and trivial incidents which occur in no particular chronological order: they belong to his childhood, his student days, his love affairs, his courtship and marriage and his brilliant medical career. He emerges as a complex character, ambitious and daring to the point of rashness, capable of great acts of unselfishness as well as of unspeakable cruelty. He once gave his own blood to save the life of a car-accident casualty, despite his colleague's warning that he was risking his own life; but he also, on another occasion, refused to attend to a dying child because its mother could not afford to pay his fees. Although in his youth he played practical jokes on his fellow students, as a hospital director he was a harsh disciplinarian. He has a dynamic view of life, which makes him restless, feeling that man is on a continuous hunting trip. Ironically, until the very end he deludes himself into thinking that the struggle is still on.

At the end of the play he is again confused, just as he was in the beginning, uncertain about his identity and the source of the stench and hot breath. Only the gunshots and the cries for help, 'Quick! Quick! The doctor's in the mouth of a lion,'

make it clear that all along he has, in fact, been in the mouth of the lion. This is a well-written play in which the protagonist who is 'reaching back into the subconscious in the search for identity' has been said to have something in common with the work of Samuel Beckett, particularly *Krapp's Last Tape,* where a man relive his past in a desperate search for self. The analogy is, of course, imperfect, because in the case of al-Hakim's protagonist the search for identity accompanies what is generally believed to be the involuntary act of reviewing the past at the moment of dying (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 79).

A Train Journey is an obviously symbolic play, with political implications. An old, improperly maintained train, 'still going by a miracle', is puffing its way slowly along towards the station when the Engine Driver and the Fireman disagree on the colour of the signal, the Driver thinking it is green while the Fireman claims that it is red. The train is stopped and the passengers are asked to look, but they turn out to be equally divided in their statements. While the train is stationary, the passengers engage in amusing conversation, in the course of which their individual characters are briefly sketched: the Musician and the Financier, both anxious to reach their destination in time, the former for his wedding and the latter for his divorce; incidentally, the Musician thinks the signal is green, while the Financier is convinced it is red. The latter thinks of buying the train as scrap to use in his toy factory. A mature, overdressed, heavily made-up woman has designs on him, whereas a romantic young woman who works in a boutique is enchanted by the beauty of the scenery with the surrounding fields bathed in moonlight, etc. The lively atmosphere of the train, with its passengers from all classes of society, including the soft-drinks seller hawking his Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola, is

successfully created in an amusing manner. The Driver declares that they cannot afford to stand still because of the express train that is due to follow them, and so he and the Fireman walk to the signal box in order to consult the Signalman. They find nobody there and that the box, together with the signal, has been destroyed in the storm of the previous day (so clearly everyone has imagined the colour he swears he has seen!). They come back to find the passengers noisily enjoying themselves, singing and others dancing. Despite the fact that he thinks he can hear the sound of the approaching express train, the Financer decides to go on dancing and not to warn anybody, partly to avoid the panic that might ensue, partly in the hope of being able to buy the train cheaply, a scrap, once it has been damaged. However, weighing the risk of stopping against that of continuing to the station, the Driver decides to resume the journey.

Despite the light-hearted manner in which al-Hakim deals with his theme, *A Train Journey* is clearly a serious political comment on the situation of contemporary Egypt, the train with its multifarious passengers standing for Egyptian society, pursuing an obscure path, fraught with dangers, with a leadership that has to take momentous decisions despite grave risks and uncertainties. Gone is the facile optimism and uncritical faith in the Revolution which marked earlier works, such as *Soft Hands*. There is also a future metaphysical dimension to *A Train Journey*, arising from the use of the train as a metaphor of life (as al-Hakim had done before in *The Tree Climber*). The play expresses a pessimistic, philosophical view of life, where certainty has gone but man has to soldier on despite real dangers along the road.

In *Shams al-Nahar* (Princess Sunshine, 1965), a full-length play in four acts, al-Hakim returns to the themes of the value of work (as in *Soft Hands*) and of the education

of the ideal ruler (treated in *The Sultan's Dilemma*). Like *The Sultan's Dilemma*, it is set in the fantasy world of the *Arabian Nights*: a Sultan's daughter refuses to marry any of the distinguished princes chosen for her by her father and insists on allowing anybody, who wishes to, to come forward to ask for her hand in marriage, the condition being that those who fail her test at her gruelling interview are punished by being whipped. Only a mysterious commoner stands her test, but declines to marry her until he has made sure that she can live like a commoner and learn to work. This is only one of the strands in the complicated plot of a rather unsatisfactory play. However, its interest lies in the development of al-Hakim's political attitudes in his drama. In the preface to this play, al-Hakim admits that his aim is frankly didactic: the world of the two kingdoms in which the action takes place is full of corruption and bribery and moral disintegration, but the author has not given up all hope: he still believes in the possibility of reform through the moral regeneration of leaders. Formally the play is of the episodic variety, the action being unilinear, betraying in the influence of Brecht, to whom al-Hakim refers in his Preface. While Badawi (*Modern Arabic Drama* 80) maintains that in this play there is no attempt to produce any of the features of the Theatre of the Absurd; it is obvious that setting marriage to "absurd" conditions of both the parties concerned contradicts this opinion.

The following year (1966) witnessed the appearance of no fewer than three interesting works, a remarkable achievement for a man approaching the age of seventy: *al-Warta* (The Dilemma), *Masir Sarsar* (The Fate of a Cockroach) and *Kull Shay fi Mahallih* (Not a Thing Out of Place). *The Fate of a Cockroach*, the most impressive of the three, expresses cynicism and disenchantment with the Socialist revolutionary regime

under Abd al-Nasser, which al-Hakim was later to denounce in his devastating account, *Awdat al-Wa'i* (The Return of Consciousness), published in 1974. It is three-act play often performed on the Egyptian stage as two separate plays. Badawi argues that 'Act I can easily stand by itself, and the other two acts constitute a detachable whole which can be understood without reference to what goes before' (*Modern Arabic Drama* 81). However the play's two parts are linked by four themes: the war of sexes, the social and political standing of contemporary Egypt, the absurdist notions of the meaninglessness of being, and the failure of language to function as a means of communication.

Like *A Train Journey*, Act I in *The Fate of a Cockroach* is an indirect, bitter satire on Egyptian society and its leadership, this time in the form of an allegory, or rather a fable, with cockroaches and ants as characters. The action takes place at night on the bathroom floor of a flat belonging to an Egyptian married couple, who are the protagonists of Acts II and III. The King and Queen of the cockroaches are seen bickering from the moment they rise from their sleep, the Queen having the upper hand, the King accusing the Queen of undermining its authority and the Queen complaining of the King's lack of respect for the Queen. The King is a vain, brainless creature which, by looking at its face in a drain one day was delighted at the length of its whiskers, and regarded that a sufficient reason for immediately proclaiming itself King. One day its Minister announces unpleasant news that its son has been killed by the ants. All cockroaches have been expecting a solution from the King to the ants' continuous aggression. Goaded by the Queen, the King, in an effort to do something, turns for advice to the Minister which suggests fighting the ants with their own weapons, namely a well-organised army. To the King's objection that 'the ants know the discipline of forming

themselves into columns, but we cockroaches don't know discipline' (al-Hakim, *Fate* 9), the Minister's reply is that perhaps this may be achieved by learning and training. When they turn to the Scientist for help with the ant-problem, the Scientist merely shrugs its shoulders, saying that it is a political problem which does not fall within the province of science or scientists; but when pressed to do something about it, after much unhelpful talk the Scientist finally asks to be given time to examine the matter. When the King goes off with the Scientist to have a look at the lake (i.e. the bath) the Scientist has discovered, the King's foot slips and it falls into the lake and the Scientist shouts for help, warning that only a miracle can save the King, because the walls are too slippery. So they all (including the Scientist) end up by praying to God to save their King.

Acts II and III transpose the action to both a larger and a smaller plane simultaneously. We now move to the world of human beings, referred to by the cockroaches as 'moving mountains,' yet the issues treated are not national, but interpersonal; al-Hakim returns to his old subject, the war of the sexes, only his approach here is more embittered and the female in both is immeasurably stronger than the male. Critically speaking, there are deliberate parallelisms between the two parts of the play: both begin with a bickering couple at the moment they rise from sleep, the cockroaches at night and the humans in the daytime. Just as the cockroaches are viewed as human beings in the first part, in the second humans are likened to cockroaches. The scene is in Adil and Samiya's bedroom: they are both graduates of the same university and employed by the same firm, and they have just got up. Clearly there is a tug-of-war between them and Adil resents being made to do things for his wife; but he comforts himself with the delusion that he obeys her orders not because her personality is stronger than his, but

because she is one of the weaker sexes, whose feelings he does not wish to hurt. They fight over who goes to the bathroom first; she wins and issues orders to him to hand her things for her bath, and to make breakfast.

In his frustration he rings a friend to complain to him, but has not the courage to explain fully the situation to him so early in the morning, and his incoherence leads the friend to believe that he is ill. Samiya screams when she discovers the cockroach in the bath and asks Adil to get rid of it for her. Unwilling to dirty the bath by killing it, they wait for a while, watching the insect, hoping that it will come out by itself. It tries countless times, but each time as soon as it reaches a certain point on the wall it falls down again. Mesmerised by the scene and struck with admiration by the cockroach's constant struggle without giving up, Adil wishes to remain there to see how it will end. When Samiya impatiently goes to fetch the insecticide from the kitchen, Adil locks her out of the bathroom, despite her screaming at him. In the meantime the firm's Doctor, who has been informed by the friend, calls to visit the patient, is told by Samiya what has been happening and that he has been behaving oddly all morning, refusing to do as he is told. The Doctor assumes that it is due to overwork, since Adil is writing a doctoral thesis in his spare time, but then he suspects that because Samiya is the stronger personality he must have identified himself with the cockroach and that is why he did not wish her to kill it. They agree to reassure him about the cockroach and to build up his self-confidence, Samiya telling him that the cockroach for which she has great admiration, had a much stronger personality than herself.

Finally the Doctor explains his diagnosis. Adil at once tells the Doctor that he could not possibly liken himself to the cockroach, which is infinitely superior and whose

powers of struggle against great odds are stupendous. He drags the Doctor to the bathroom to watch for himself and, to Samiya's astonishment, the Doctor too, the sane and mature doctor, begins to be mesmerised. However, in the meantime, the Maid arrives, and runs the bath, drowning the cockroach, which she shoves to one corner of the bathroom while the others are having coffee in the sitting-room. At once the dead cockroach is assailed by an army of ants which proceeds to carry it to a crack in the wall, a spectacle which is watched with fascination by the two men; but again the Maid soon brings a bucket and rag and removes the insects. The Doctor goes, having already given Adil a day's sick-leave. Samiya prepares to go to work, but before leaving she sternly orders Adil to make good use of his day off by tidying up the wardrobe and sorting out her clothes. The play ends with the defeated Adil shouting to the Maid to 'bring the bucket and rag and wipe him out of existence!' (*Fate* 76) thereby confirming the total identification between himself and the cockroach.

Due to its unusual structure, various views have been written on *The Fate of a Cockroach*. One scholar wrote of it, 'it is remarkable for little other than for being one of the most blatant examples of the tendency … to lack of unity in Tawfiq al-Hakim's plays: indeed the work can almost be regarded as two plays rather clumsily stitched together' (Starkey, "Theme" 332). This may be unfair judgment of one of al-Hakim's most celebrated plays. It is obvious that we are faced here with two plays. Surely even al-Hakim would have seen that he has in effect written two plays, not one, and in fact they have been produced separately on the stage. It is perhaps fairer to start by regarding the work as two plays, and then ask ourselves why al-Hakim is so anxious to make us think of them in such close proximity. The savagery of the political satire in the first play and

the energy and manic hostility in the quarrels over trivial details of married life in the second should be sufficient reason for us to take *The Fate of a Cockroach* seriously (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 84). Apart from the obvious links between them, the two plays are meant to be juxtaposed. The cockroach King meets its end not in the first play but in the second and only when the down-to-earth, practical-minded Maidservant drowns it. We must remember that, even in the world of the humans, the cockroach did arouse admiration, not only in the academic (though henpecked) husband, but also in the medical doctor, both of whom were mesmerised by it. Similarly al-Hakim tells us in *The Return of Consciousness* that he and the intelligentsia were bewitched by Abd al-Nasser. Furthermore, al-Hakim seems to say that it is precisely in the grotesque political world of Act I that we find the absurd human relations that mark the personal world of Acts II and III where rationality does not operate in the macrocosm one must not expect to find it in the microcosm either (85). A society ruled by a cockroach will end up by making its individuals feel like cockroaches. The cockroach of the title, whose fate is decided in the second play, is not only the cockroach King, but Adil, the human cockroach, as well.

Bank al-Qalaq (Bank of Anxiety, 1967) is another experiment in form, published just before the June Arab-Israeli War (1967). It is described by al-Hakim as a *masriwaya* (i.e. play-novel). It is an interesting hybrid, consisting of ten narrative chapters alternating with ten scenes of dialogue, which is probably the product of the author's aesthetic boredom. *Bank of Anxiety* in no way contributes seriously to the formal development of Egyptian and Arabic drama. Al-Ra'i, however, views the experiment more favourably finding in it an approximation to the 'total theatre' (*Tawfiq* 141). But, in

fact, it is quite possible to extract the ten scenes to obtain a self-sufficient play, regarding the narrative part (i.e. the ten novelistic chapters) as no more than expanded stage directions, which are not essential to our understanding of the action. The theme of *Bank of Anxiety*, however, is interesting in that it shows al-Hakim's overwhelming awareness of a dangerous malaise: it is his unheeded warning against the impending and cataclysmic disaster of anxiety from which Egyptian and Arabic societies suffer (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 85).

Adham is a penniless, unemployed man of thirty-six, intelligent and talented, despite not having completed his law studies at the university. He is a minor journalist, with socialist ideals which led to his imprisonment before the 1952 Revolution. A day-dreamer and a social misfit, he now drifts along, lacking a sense of direction or purpose, vaguely believing that private ownership in any sphere of life is the root of all evil, and above all suffering from anxiety. He comes to the conclusion that the most common disease from which Egyptian and Arabic societies suffer is anxiety. He, therefore, decides to set up with the help of an ex-fellow-student at the law school, an anxiety bank offering treatment for a fee, their advertising slogan being: 'If you suffer from anxiety, come to us and we'll cure you. If you don't, come and cure us' (al-Hakim, *Bank* 24). Time-serving ex-feudalist, now working as an intelligence agent, learns from a friend about their mad scheme and at once tries to make use of them for his intelligence activities. He sets them up in a luxury flat in which he has placed a bugging device to record the conversation of politically dangerous clients. The book ends inconclusively, with the founders of the bank discovering the truth about their benefactor, but feeling too scared to report him to the police because they do not know for whom he is working.

A gloomy picture of the Egyptian society of the time is portrayed in a mixture of satire, farce and nightmarish vision. The play vividly presents the various ills of Abd al-Nasser's pseudo-socialist experiment, what al-Hakim describes as Egypt's 'bourgeois society in socialist dress' (*Bank* 147): the total absence of idealism (111), and of any sense of responsibility or individual commitment to doing a job well (126), the dominance of hypocrisy, paying lip-service to socialist slogans, of opportunism and pursuit of self-interest, the dictatorship, the oppressive atmosphere, stifling all opposition and criticism of government, the lack of freedom of speech and the ubiquity of the secret police, together with the disturbing manifestations of psychological insecurity brought about by the pressures of modern life. In short, the play expresses indignant denunciation of the false values and disintegration of Egyptian society in particular and Arabic society in general.

Until the end of his career as a dramatist, al-Hakim has continued to experiment with form, constantly endeavouring to break new ground. In *Qalabuna al-Masrahi* (Our Theatre Mould, 1967), he retold through a narrator and a pair of actors the plots of several plays by European authors, ancient and modern, such as Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Chekhov, Pirandello and Durrenmatt, a bizarre undertaking designed to bring some part of the world drama closer to the unsophisticated Arab audience, without much dramatic value but expressing al-Hakim's restless spirit. Another manifestation of this spirit is his short sketch *Harun al-Rashid and Harun al-Rashid (*1969). Interestingly, it is based on the same episode from the *Arabian Nights* dramatised by the father of Arabic drama Marun al-Naqqash, in *Abu'l Hasan al-Mughaffal*.[6] His last full-length play is *al-Dunya Riwaya Hazaliyya* (The World is a Farce, 1971), a fantasy consisting of a

[6] See Marun al-Naqqash, chapter two of this thesis.

number of loosely connected scenes within the framework of a dream experienced by a bored, underemployed minor civil servant. Some of the scenes are serious and others farcical, some treat historical personages such as Antony and Cleopatra while others discuss contemporary topics like the need to destroy all atomic weapons in order to save the world. But all contain observations on the human comedy and the follies and vagaries of men and women.

In the exposition and discussion above it has been shown that al-Hakim is a prolific dramatist who has contributed a lot to modern Arabic drama. His dramatic output is classified into different categories and stages: early experimentation with drama, theatre of variety, theatre of the mind, plays after the 1952 Revolution, and theatre of the absurd. These stages in al-Hakim's dramatic career reflect gradual growth in Arabic theatre, a kind of growth that derived its momentum from both the Arabic-Islamic milieu and Western theatrical canon. In other words, al-Hakim's plays do not reflect one particular tradition, but rather two different traditions: Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) as well as Western. In this sense, al-Hakim's plays can be described as 'hybrid.' The next chapter deals in some detail with the hybridity of al-Hakim's plays.

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Chapter Four

Hybridity of Al-Hakim's Plays

Tawfiq al-Hakim's plays are characterised as hybrid texts: they are construed within "a liminal space" (Bhabha, *Location* 5) or what Homi Bhabha terms the "Third Space" (*Location* 54). This chapter attempts to explore and evaluate the hybridity of al-Hakim's plays and the ways in which al-Hakim interweaves the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) tradition with the Western tradition(s). In al-Hakim's plays, hybridity can be examined at three different levels: textual (or intertextual), stylistic and linguistic. Aware of the fact that drama as a literary genre is new to the Arabic literary tradition, and also of its significance and impact on the lives of the masses as a tool of change and amelioration, al-Hakim has successfully manipulated such aspects of hybridity to bring about improvement in Egyptian and Arabic drama. He dexterously welds Western forms with Arabic-Islamic issues in order to orient his views, criticism and ideas indirectly on the one hand, and to lend an invaluable hand to the growth of the much needed dramatic genre in Arabic literature on the other.

4.1 Bhabha's Hybridity and the Third Space in Postcolonial Discourse

Hybridity refers in its most basic sense to mixture. The term originates from biology and was subsequently employed in linguistics and in racial theory in the nineteenth century. Its contemporary uses are scattered across numerous academic disciplines and is salient in popular culture. The history of hybridity has caused some to consider the employment of the concept as problematic, indeed, offensive (Mitchell 533-53). In colonial discourse, hybridity is a term of abuse for those who are products of miscegenation, mixed-breeds. It is imbued in nineteenth-century eugenicist and

scientific-racist thought (Meredith 2). Despite its historical past, Papastergiadis reminds us of the emancipative potential of negative terms. He poses the question "should we use only words with a pure and inoffensive history, or should we challenge essentialist models of identity by taking on and then subverting their own vocabulary?" (258)

Today the term 'hybridity' has become one of the most recurrent conceptual leitmotifs in postcolonial cultural criticism. It is "celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweeness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference" (Hoogvelt 158). Moreover, it commonly refers to "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation" (Ashcroft, et al. *Postcolonial* 118). The term 'hybridity' has been most recently associated with Homi Bhabha. In his piece entitled 'Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences,' Bhabha stresses the interdependence of coloniser and colonised. Bhabha argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the 'Third Space of Enunciation' (*Location* 54). In accepting this argument, we begin to understand why claims to the inherent purity and originality of cultures are 'untenable.' Bhabha urges us into this space in an effort to open up the notion of an international culture "not based on exoticism or multi-culturalism of the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (qtd in Ashcroft, et al. *Postcolonial* 209). In bringing this to the next stage, Bhabha hopes that it is in this space "that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this 'Third Space,' we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (209). So as Mudrooroo suggests, embracing the hybridised

nature of cultures steers us away from the problematic binarisms that have until now framed our notions of culture (Laragy, Internet).

This new mutation replaces the established pattern with a 'mutual and mutable' (Bhabha, 'Frontlines' 269-72) representation of cultural difference that is positioned in-between the coloniser and colonised. For Bhabha it is the indeterminate spaces in-between subject-positions that are lauded as the locale of the disruption and displacement of hegemonic colonial narratives of cultural structures and practices (Meredith 3). Bhabha posits hybridity as such a form of liminal or in-between space, where the 'cutting edge of translation and negotiation' (Bhabha, "Cultures" 32) occurs and which he terms the *third space.* This is a space intrinsically critical of essentialist positions of identity and a conceptualisation of original culture:

> … the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity … is the 'Third Space,' which enables other positions to emerge. (Rutherford 211)

Thus, the third space is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a *productive*, and not merely reflective, space that engenders new *possibility*. It is an 'interruptive, interrogative,' and 'enunciative' (Bhabha, *Location* 10) space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established categorisations of culture and identity. According to Bhabha, this hybrid third space is an *ambivalent* site where cultural meaning and representation have no 'primordial unity or fixity' (Bhabha, *Location* 55).

The concept of the third space is submitted as useful for analysing the enunciation, transgression and subversion of dualistic categories going beyond the realm

of colonial binary thinking and oppositional positioning (Meredith 3). Despite the exposure of the third space to contradictions and ambiguities, it provides a spatial politics of inclusion rather than exclusion that "initiates new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha, *Location* 1). The *hybrid identity* is positioned within this third space, as 'lubricant' (Papastergiadis 257-81) in the conjunction of cultures. The hybrid's potential is with their innate knowledge of 'transculturation' (Taylor 60-74), their ability to transverse both cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and difference within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion. They have encoded within them a counter-hegemonic agency. At the point where the coloniser presents a normalising, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy opens up a third space of/for re-articulation of negotiation and meaning. (Bhabha, "Cultures" 34).

4.2 Al-Hakim's Hybridity and its Categorisation

In this sense, Al-Hakim's hybrid plays are located in the 'liminal' 'third space' in which two different traditions are reflected: the Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) tradition as well as the Western tradition. It has been mentioned above that in al-Hakim's plays, hybridity can be examined at three different levels: textual (or intertextual)[1], stylistic and linguistic. Textual hybridity can be seen as the appropriation of a text or theme from the Western tradition and reshaping it into the Arabic-Islamic context, such as *Al-Malik Odib* (Oedipus the King, 1949), *Praxa aw Mushkilat al-Hukm* (Praxa or the Problem of the Government, 1939) and *Pygmalion* (1942). Textual hybridity is also related to intertextuality and how a text can lead or refer to some other texts. For al-Hakim, the past and the present are inseparable. He adopts the literary works of the past writers to reflect

[1] For more information on "intertextual" or "intertextuality" see Graham Allen's *Intertextuality* 11-35.

upon Arabic and Egyptian contemporary life. Stylistic hybridity involves the employment of an Arabic or Islamic text or theme in a Western form or style as in *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1933), *Ughniyyat al-Mawt* (Song of Death, 1956), *al-Sultan al-Ha'ir* (The Sultan's Dilemma, 1960), *Ya Tal'i al-Shajara* (Tree Climber, 1962) and *Bank al-Qalaq* (Bank of Anxiety, 1967).Linguistic hybridity shows al-Hakim's artistic and linguistic talent in employing what is called "third language": a combination of the standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect. *Al-Sqfqah* (The Deal, 1956) and *al-Wartah* (The Dead Trouble, 1966) are interesting examples of the use of the "third language."

4.2.1 Textual (or Intertextual) hybridity

Textual (or intertextual) hybridity is explored in three plays: *Praxa aw Mushkilat al-Hukm* (Praxa or the Problem of the Government), *al-Malik Odib* (Oedipus the King) and *Pygmalion.* Al-Hakim's *Praxa* is an adaptation of Aristophanes' *The Ecclesiazusae*. It shows that Aristophanes' comedies appeal to Arab audiences as they appeal to Western audiences; they deal with universal themes (political and moral) which address all men whether Arabs or Europeans. According to al-Hakim, the Greek play, *The Ecclesiazusae*, portrays a serious problem in the world, that of government. Obviously he has in mind the Arabic political situation as the following synopsis of the play demonstrates.

Clad in their husbands' clothes, and led by Praxa, the women of Athens win the vote in the parliament. Praxa becomes the new leader of the state. She decides to be democratic and allows her people to do whatever they want. The state becomes chaotic as the rich want to eat up the poor, and vice versa. Therefore, she chooses two men as advisors: the philosopher Epicrat and the commander of the army Hironymus. However, the latter overthrows her.

Hironymus imprisons the Philosopher and makes the people worship him. He engages his country in war with the Macedonians. Later he puts Praxa in jail when he overhears her criticising him. But things are not going well for Hironymus; his army is defeated, and he is threatened with execution. He decides to kill himself. However, before committing suicide, he seeks the advice of the Philosopher and Praxa. The Philosopher suggests that Blepyros, Praxa's husband, be appointed king, for what the people want is a change of government. The trio can then rule the state using the stupid Blepyros as a stooge. Of course, Blepyros is surprised at this idea (he does not know that they are using him), and the people welcome this change.

But Blepyros uses his new power to revenge himself on his wife, who was false to him, the Philosopher, and Hironymus. Urged on by his confidante, Praxa's former confidante, and Chremes, he imprisons the trio and later puts them on trial with Chremes serving as a judge. Chremes accuses Praxa of adultery, and Hironymus of wrecking the marriage of Blepyros. He does not accuse them of political corruption. The Philosopher tells the people that it is Chremes and Blepyros who exploit them. He suggests that the people should rule themselves. The play ends with the people applauding the Philosopher, and charging at the state palace shouting, "rule for the people" (165).

This summary indicates that al-Hakims' play is similar to Aristophanes' play in many aspects. In both plays, the women don men's clothes and win the majority of the votes for women's rule. Praxa leads them and gives the speech at the parliament. The first act of al-Hakim's play is almost a free translation of Aristophanes' play. For example, in al-Hakim's play, Praxa rehearses the speech which she will deliver at the parliament. She scolds one of the women for not perfecting her role as a male. All these incidents appear

in the Greek play. In both plays, Blepyros wears his wife's dress because she has sneaked out of his bed wearing his clothes. Chremes wears his wife's dress for the same reason. The conversation of these two characters in al-Hakim's play is a free translation of its counterpart in the Greek play.

Both plays demonstrate that a state run by women is an impossibility. Aristophanes' play attacks an ideal state (Plato's) in which women have equal rights with men, and communism flourishes (Al-Shetaiwi 102). The play also satirises the ascendance of women, and portrays the consequences when the ordinary conditions of society are reversed. The scene of the three hags quarrelling over a young man shows the lack of altruism necessary to make communism possible. In al-Hakim's play, Praxa is democratic; she allows her people to do whatever they wish. But this idealistic democracy becomes chaotic because people lack altruism; they want to exploit each other. The merchants ask her to prosecute their debtors who refuse to pay their debts. The latter ask her to prosecute the merchants for asking for their credits.

Despite these similarities, al-Hakim's play differs from Aristophanes' comedy. The Greek play is full of indecency and sexual jokes which are not tolerated by Muslim audiences. Al-Hakim, in his play, eliminates what he views as offensive in the Greek play to the Arabic audience. All laws concerning sex such as common marriage and the safeguards to secure the sexual rights of ugly women disappear in the Arabic play. Moreover, al-Hakim not only uses the three main characters of Aristophanes' play: Praxa, Blepyros and Chremes, but he also introduces new characters such as the philosopher, Epicrat, and the military leader, Hironymus. While the Greek play presents a communist

state run by women, al-Hakim's play uses the same plot to raise a delicate issue; who should rule the state?

Praxa and Hironymus represent different political ideologies: democracy and dictatorship, respectively. Neither of these political systems succeeds. When Praxa rules, she follows democracy. But she fails because her people are not satisfied with each other. She also fails because she falls in love with Hironymus (thus she becomes unfaithful to her husband), who exploits her love to take over the state. When he succeeds he imprisons the philosopher for criticising him, and later sends Praxa to prison for censoring him. Hironymus fails too. He engages his country in war and uses the resources of the people to achieve victory. When his army is defeated, he seeks the advice of the Philosopher and Praxa. Thus the play seems to suggest that dictatorship does not work either.

Furthermore, al-Hakim's play seems to suggest that not every political ideology can give social justice to every individual. He sees a "possible" solution in socialism (Al-Shetaiwi 103). For instance, while Praxa, Hironymus and the Philosopher are on trial, the Philosopher tells the people that Blebyros and Chremes are corrupt; they do not care about the welfare of the people. The people realise the corruption of their government and ask the Philosopher to advise them. He tells them to seize the state and rule themselves by themselves. The play ends with the people charging at the palace chanting "rule for the people" (165). The play seems to suggest that socialism is the appropriate form of the governance. Yet the play ends in chaos: the people rush to the palace without guidance.

Al-Hakim adapts the Greek play to deal with an issue central to Arabic political life; what kind of political system is appropriate for the Arabs. For many years, Arab countries have been plagued with ruthless regimes and *coups d'etat*. Each leader promises major political and economical reformations but proves to be worse than his predecessors. The play also introduces several characters that represent specific moral powers that are engaged in a constant dialogue and conflict throughout the play (Khoury 199). These powers can be classified into two categories: the power of executive work and the power of the intellect. The power of work is represented by the politicians who take over the government, headed by Praxa (as a symbol of beautiful freedom) and then Hironymus (as a symbol of tyranny and oppression). The power of the intellect is represented by the character of the Philosopher. The power of work and action tries to destroy the power of the intellect by drawing it and including it into its 'lines' once, or suppressing it, imprisoning it, and isolating it from society. Whereas the power of the intellect directs the people to revolt against the tyranny and oppression. It is no wonder then that al-Hakim's play was censored in 1939. It was not allowed to be staged or published in its entirety until 1960.

Thus, al-Hakim's play is hybrid in the sense that it captures the spirit of its Greek model and the Arabic political dilemma. Although al-Hakim's play is not as great a comedy as Aristophanes' play, it is, nonetheless, a good political treatise which exposes modern Arabic politics. Al-Hakim has successfully integrated elements from the Greek comedy to serve his purpose. By eluding to the Greeks (hence the Romans), a symbol of democracy in the Western tradition, al-Hakim dexterously attacks democracy, and manages to use the 'ambivalent' nature of his play as a strategy of 'resistance' to debunk

the hegemonic political regime prevalent at a specific moment of Arabic political history. Historicism, here, is also seen as a strategy of resistance. Therefore, the elements of ambivalence and historicism turn al-Hakim's play into a hybridised form of resistance, acquainting the Arab audience with the intrigues of politics and the ruthless nature of their rulers.

In *al-Malik Odib* (Oedipus the King, 1949), al-Hakim presents a new interpretation of the Western model. In the introduction to his version of *Oedipus Rex*, al-Hakim explains that he rewrote the Greek play in order to bring it into line with Islamic thinking and to explore his metaphysical theme of "truth" versus "reality" (42-52). The play follows Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* except in these points: first, Oedipus has never been destined to kill his father and marry his mother; second, Tiresias is coincidentally responsible for the downfall of Oedipus; third, Oedipus asks his wife-mother to remain in wedlock with him even after he has known the terrible facts about his parenthood; fourth, there is no Sphinx. Tiresias made up the story of the Sphinx in order to frighten the Thebans. Oedipus killed a lion but he is made to tell the Thebans that he killed the Sphinx.

After seventeen years of ruling Thebes, and after having four children by Jocasta, al-Hakim's Oedipus now seems to feel conscious-stricken at deceiving his people, and accepting the machinations of Tiresias. At the same time, he is worried about the plague which is devastating his city. In an encounter with Tiresias, Oedipus threatens to reveal how he deceived the Thebans; Tiresias has convinced them that a Sphinx killed the passers-by whereas in fact it was a lion which Oedipus killed.

Creon and the High Priest have just returned from consulting the Delphic oracle. They tell Oedipus that he is the murderer of Laius, and unless he is removed from the city the plague will continue. Oedipus becomes angry with them and decides to put them on trial, accusing them of conspiring with Tiresias in order to overthrow him and appoint Creon in his place. Jocasta interferes on behalf of her brother. She says that the oracles are wrong, for Laius was killed by a group of bandits at a three-way intersection in Phocis, and not by his own son as the oracles predicted. Oedipus is shocked when he learns the place where the murder took place. He admits that he killed an old man at that place at about the same time when Laius was reported to be killed.

Oedipus pursues his investigation, and forces the only survivor of Laius' guard to tell the truth. He confesses that it was Oedipus who killed the late king. At the same time, a messenger comes from Corinth informing Oedipus that he should go back to take over the throne of Polybus, who has just died. He says that he never imagined that Oedipus would become a king in his native place Thebes, from which he was banished as an infant. Oedipus decides to investigate this matter to the end despite Jocasta's scepticism and protestations. He forces the old shepherd, who originally was commissioned to leave Oedipus on the mountain, to tell the truth. The shepherd admits that Laius was forewarned by Tiresias against a son who would kill him and marry Jocasta. Therefore, he decides to destroy his male children. When the truth is revealed, Oedipus tries to convince Jocasta to accept the situation as such and leave with him and his children to live in another city. She hangs herself instead. Oedipus gouges out his eyes with her brooch in order to mourn her and not to lament his fate. He leaves Thebes guided by his daughter, Antigone.

According to al-Hakim, man is not predestined to suffer. That Oedipus should be punished for a crime he never planned to commit but was predetermined to commit seems inhuman and foreign to Islamic thinking (Al-Shetaiwi 108). To humanise the struggle in the play, al-Hakim gets rid of the element of divine interventions, the Delphic oracles, in Oedipus' fate, and replaces it with the struggle between Oedipus and other human beings. Removing the 'un-Islamic' element from the play does not, however, mean that Arab playwrights cannot stage plays that are incompatible with Islam. In fact, what al-Hakim means by bringing the Greek myth in line with Islamic thinking is that removal of divine interventions can help him better portray Oedipus, Creon, Tiresias and the High Priest as human beings involved in political strife.

Sophocles' play, al-Hakim thinks, suggests that Oedipus is not to blame of his crimes. He has to struggle against a fate which had already predestined him to kill his father and marry his mother. However, al-Hakim wants to portray Oedipus as free and God as innocent of determining the course of Oedipus' life. That is according to Islamic philosophy: man is free and should be well aware of his actions. God does not trap man into committing a crime or a sin for His pleasure (108). Al-Hakim's Oedipus killed his father coincidently, and not as a result of a divine oracle. Hence, there is no struggle between Oedipus and the divine fate.

Moreover, al-Hakim's play seems to suggest that it is man who tends to hurt his fellow men for one reason or another. In al-Hakim's play Tiresias is responsible for the tragedy of Oedipus. He exploits the Thebans' veneration for him to make them believe that he receives the oracle from God. He fabricates the story of the oracle in order to make Laius get rid of his son because he wants to finish off Laius' dynasty in Thebes.

Therefore, he uses his power and prestige as a religious seer to inform Laius that the gods warned him against a forthcoming son who would kill him and marry Jocasta. To avert such disaster, Laius orders his shepherd to expose Oedipus on the mountains. Thus al-Hakim's play shows that the evil-minded Tiresias assumes the role of Fate to meddle with the destiny of human beings.

In order to control the Thebans, Tiresias made up the story of the Sphinx which kills any passer-by who fails to answer her riddles correctly. (The riddle is the same as that of Sophocles' play.) Actually, the Sphinx is a lion which attacks the travellers at night. Oedipus kills the lion, but is made to tell the Thebans that he has killed the Sphinx by answering her riddle. Oedipus lies to the Thebans in accordance with the instructions of Tiresias, who wants to help him ascend the throne of the recently murdered Laius and to marry Jocasta. Tiresias, however, does not know that Oedipus is the son of Laius. He wants to give the throne to a non-Theban so that he can control him as well.

Obviously, the play depicts Oedipus as an ambitious man who wants to be a king by any means. Therefore, he collaborated with the evil-minded Tiresias. This is contradictory to the Greek myth which depicts Oedipus as demigod who rescues the Thebans from the Sphinx. When Sophocles' play opens we see the Thebans imploring Oedipus to help them get rid of the plague. In al-Hakim's play Oedipus allows himself to be regarded as a hero for a deed he never did. In order to become a king and marry the widowed queen, he agrees to share Tiresias deception of the Thebans.

Also in the Greek play, Oedipus has never been in doubt of his greatness until the truth dawns on him. His pride appears when he insists on finding the killers of Laius and insults Tiresias. Al-Hakim strips Oedipus of all his majestic characteristics and presents

him as a man torn between his love for his family and his search for truth. Oedipus, after seventeen years of ruling Thebes, regrets that he lied to the Thebans and to his family about the story of the Sphinx. He feels pain whenever his children boast of his heroic fight with the Sphinx. He, however, succumbs to Tiresias because he wants to keep his family happy. The play seems to suggest that Oedipus agreed to collaborate with Tiresias and live in deception despite his love for truth (in fact he left Corinth in search of his identity) because as a young man full of fire and ambition, he might be justified in collaborating with Tiresias in order to achieve his personal ambition to become a king. But why does he agree to live in deception for seventeen years? The play seems to suggest that though Oedipus is aware of his hypocrisy and deception to his people and family, he accepts his situation because he does not want to break the happiness of his family, for if the truth is known that he is not a hero after all, his family will be greatly disappointed and may become resentful of his action. In fact, al-Hakim focuses on Oedipus as a family man who loves his wife and children in order to explain his behaviour and to justify the ending of the play.

Some Arab critics note that the end of the play fails to comply with Islamic thinking. For example, Hasan Muhsin argues that the ending of the play is incompatible with Islamic philosophy (181-85). He adds that the audience would treat Oedipus with disgust rather than sympathise with him. Al-Hakim divests the Greek play of its mythological background, but fails to make the ending acceptable to Islamic and Arabic tradition when he makes Oedipus insist on remaining in wedlock with his mother (185-90). After knowing that he is guilty of incest and patricide, Oedipus is supposed to break

off his incestuous relationship with his mother or to harm himself as Sophocles' Oedipus does.

However, critics who claim that *al-Malik Odib* does not follow Islamic ideology and Arabic tradition see in the play a religious treatise, which is not the intention of the author (Al-Shetaiwi 111). When al-Hakim says that he wants to make the play agree with the Islamic thinking, he means that Oedipus should become a simple man, not a mythical hero as in the Greek play. Besides, Oedipus is free to choose and determine his fate. That man is free is the very essence of Islam. In fact, Oedipus' insistence on remaining in wedlock with his mother comes at the very end of the play. Al-Hakim could have ended the play the way Sophocles did and saved himself the trouble of being misunderstood. But he ends the play the way he does intentionally because he wants to explore his theme of "truth" and "reality." Al-Hakim indicates that he sees in the Greek myth a conflict between "truth" and "reality." He means by "truth" the fact that Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. The "reality" of Oedipus means that he is living happily with his mother-wife and his children.

The idea that truth may be destructive is manifested in Sophocles' play. Oedipus, who thinks of himself as a man of truth, realises too late that he is the man being hunted. At first he refuses to accept this truth, and accuses Tiresias and Creon of conspiracy against him. As a proud king he never imagines that he could be a killer. Oedipus finds out that truth, if known, may become harmful. Al-Hakim also reiterates the same theme. As Starkey indicates, "al-Hakim seems to imply that looking for the truth is not only a waste of time but is actually positively dangerous" ('Philosophical' 144). To accept "truth," al-Hakim's Oedipus has to destroy "reality," his happiness and his family.

Thus by divesting the Greek myth of the divine interference in the life of the protagonist, the Sphinx and divinity of Oedipus, al-Hakim produces, or rather creates an Arabic-Islamic play. He depicts a man torn between "truth" and "reality"; the truth that he did not kill the Sphinx because it never existed, and the reality that he does not want to destroy the ideals of his family; the truth that he has coincidently killed his father and married his mother, and the reality that he is having a happy marriage. The truth that he should break the wedlock of incest and follow the dictates of 'reasonable thinking,' and the reality of his wanting to remain in marriage with the one who is his mother and thus maintains free will. Al-Hakim's play raises concerns about truth and reality. By revealing the tension between Oedipus' attempt to maintain a happy family and his implacable pursuit of truth, al-Hakim raises a fundamental question: why should one run after truth if it can be destructive? Is it worth sometimes pursuing truth at any cost? Al-Hakim, though diverted somehow from the purpose and techniques of the original play, has managed to hybridise the play to suit the Arabic, Islamic milieu, in his own way, stressing mainly on man's freedom of choice and the value of truth vis-à-vis reality.

Similarly, al-Hakim's *Pygmalion* (1949) is a hybrid play which is an adaptation of the original myth. Taking the plot of *Pygmalion* from both Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Virgil's *Aeniad*, al-Hakim develops a play that thematises the struggle between art and life. The plot is fairly straightforward: it is based on the Greek legend of Pygmalion of Cyprus, who fell in love with a statue, later to be known as Galatea (according to Ovid, made by himself). In response to his prayers to Aphrodite to bring life to his statue, the goddess gave the statue life and Pygmalion married it. Al-Hakim's interest in the legend, he says, was first aroused by Jean Roux's painting 'Pygmalion et Galatea' at the Louvre,

and was later revived by a film based on Shaw's *Pygmalion* (*Pygmalion*, Introduction 15). Unlike Shaw, al-Hakim did not choose a modern setting for his play but placed it within the framework of the original legend. He did, however, depart from the traditional story in certain important aspects in order to give expression to his own main preoccupations and to produce his play in a new dramatic form.

The play begins at a climactic moment in Pygmalion's life. Pygmalion has just finished an artwork of absolute beauty that even arouses the wonder of the gods themselves, Apollo and Venus, who are omniscient voyeurs in the play:

> APOLLO. What you behold now is much more beautiful than a woman, and much more perfect than a woman....
>
> VENUS. I cannot believe that this is a work of a mortal! (34-35)

The reference to Pygmalion as possessing a godly gift is stressed over and over throughout the play. Sometimes, too, he surpasses the gods. At least Pygmalion is able to transcend his human confines and go beyond the prison-house of the body through art, whereas the gods by virtue of their end-point divinity cannot over-step their own transcendence. Art to al-Hakim is thus an uplifting of human condition. Pygmalion in al-Hakim's version falls in love with his own creation and makes a passionate plea to Venus to breathe life into his statue so that he might consummate his love to Galatea. To this Venus responds by breathing life into Galatea's body, and both creator and created, artist and his work, enjoy each other's company for some time.

Not for long after Galatea is 'womaned' by Venus that she escapes to the forest with Narcissus, Pygmalion's handsome attendant. Pygmalion, shocked at this act of betrayal, goes back to Venus and begs her to give him back his work of art and take away

the woman. After a thoughtful deliberation, both Venus and Apollo decide to bring Galatea back to him. Now Galatea appreciates the accomplishments of her husband and worships him. She has become an obedient and grateful servant of her creator. Pygmalion, pleased with the change, enjoys a life of conjugal fidelity for a while until he sees Galatea holding a broom in her hands and sweeping the floor. Only then does he come to realise his loss: "You are not my work of art.… I did not create a woman with a broom in her hand" (115). Saddened by the image of Galatea's decaying beauty, and the thought that his perfect immortal achievement has been replaced by a decaying body, Pygmalion calls upon the gods to take away his wife and bring back his statue instead.

Once more, his prayer is answered and Galatea is changed back into a lifeless statue. Far from being satisfied, however, Pygmalion misses the warmth and affection of his wife, neglects the statue, nightly visits the hut where he made love to his wife, and is generally full of remorse for having killed her. Feeling sorry for him, Venus suggests bringing Galatea back to life, but Apollo advises her not to do so because that would only lead to the same result as before. Pygmalion goes up to the statue, places a broom in its hand, then snatches it and in a frenzy smashes its head and is only stopped by Narcissus, who immediately puts him to bed and to whom he explains that he has destroyed the statue because it no longer represents what he ought to make and that he will soon make a better one. Narcissus is unconvinced and tells Pygmalion that he is no longer capable of anything. Soon after, Pygmalion dies.

Apart from the different ending he has introduced to the story, al-Hakim brings in a subplot, consisting of the love Ismene bears for Narcissus, Pygmalion's young companion whom he found in his infancy in the woods and brought up as his child. We

are shown how Ismene managed to 'create' Narcissus, to turn him into feeling and thinking human being by the sheer force of love for him, just as Pygmalion created Galatea by his art (108-111). However, the happiness enjoyed by Ismene and Narcissus proves to be short-lived and in Act IV we find that they have quarrelled and no longer live together. Obviously, the subplot here echoes the equally short-lived happiness of the married Pygmalion and Galatea in the main plot, thus universalising the idea that sexual love is bound to come to an end. There are moments, however, when Narcissus seems to be a separate character, but, as his name suggests, he is an aspect of Pygmalion, standing for the artist's self-love and egoism while at times he seems to represent Pygmalion's alter ego (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 45).

Clearly the theme of the play is twofold: the relative importance of art and life and the need to choose between them. The play reflects Pygmalion's constant indecision, his inability to come down once and for all either on the side of life or of art. The result is that he both smashes his work of art and destroys his life. In fact, the play projects al-Hakim's internal conflict; he did not get married till late stage in his life. His personal conviction that there is a sharp opposition between art and life, and that in order for art to survive, serious artists must do away with women – agents of dissuasion – so as not to be distracted from their works (Salama 231). The other related theme is the Pirandello-like confusion of art and reality. Did Pygmalion kill his wife or, as Narcissus tells him, was it all in his imagination? (al-Hakim, *Pygmalion* 152)

Another observation on *Pygmalion* relates to the way al-Hakim makes the gods not only watch the actions of the mortals but intervene at certain crucial moments to direct the course of events. While this at times provides amusing scenes in which the god

and goddess squabble and taunt each other in a pretty fashion reminiscent of human sex war at which al-Hakim is adept, and no doubt symbolising the quarrel between art and life. It robs the human agent of a certain measure of his willpower or stature, reducing him to something approaching a pawn on a chessboard (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Dram.* 46), although it must be admitted that on the two occasions when they actively intervene the gods did no more than respond to Pygmalion's own express wishes.

Al-Hakim's *Pygmalion* is a hybrid play in terms of intertextuality. Al-Hakim has appropriated the plot from the original Greek myth and reshaped it in his own way. Here al-Hakim produces this hybrid play in order to show the inseparability of the past and the present. He adopts the story of the past in order to reflect upon an issue of the present. The dramatist presents an issue that deals with the conflict of art and life and the need to choose between the two. He expresses his anxiety about the artist's creativity and about the death of his art as a result of its attachment to real life. However at the end of the play, there is a glimpse of hope that a reconciliation of the two sides could be the ideal solution.

Thus, by writing intertextual hybrid plays, such as *al-Malik Odib*, *Praxa*, *Pygmalion* and other historical plays such as *Ahl al-Kahf* and *The Sultan's Dilemma* which will be discussed in the next section, al-Hakim establishes "counter-narratives" and "counter contexts" which refute 'the misguided belief that colonised people do/did not have a history [or drama] of their own' (Gilbert and Tompkins 110). In their *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*, Gilbert and Tompkins argue that:

> Many plays [of colonised people] stage aspects of the pre-contact past in order to re-establish traditions, to lay claim to a heritage or territory, and

> to recuperate various forms of cultural expression … By establishing counter-narratives and counter contexts which refute, or at least decentre, orthodox versions of history, marginalised cultures insist on a more equitable and representative starting point from which to negotiate a post-colonial identity. (111)

4.2.2 Stylistic Hybridity

Stylistic hybridity involves the employment of an Arabic or Islamic text or theme in a Western form or style. With this in mind, three plays by al-Hakim are explored here – *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1949) *al-Sultan al-Ha'ir* (The Sultan's Dilemma, 1960) and *Ya Tal'i al-Shajara* (Tree Climber, 1962). Though the plots of many of his plays are derived from Eastern culture (Arabic or Islamic), al-Hakim employs several Western styles and techniques ranging from naturalistic and realistic, to the romantic, the symbolic and the surrealistic. The Shavian concept of a utilitarian drama of ideas of social relevance applies to many of his plays. Some of these plays even assume the Shavian formula of exposition, problem and discussion. This is evident in the elaborate discussions of the issues raised: conflicts between man and time in *The Sleepers in the Cave*, the use or abuse of power in *The Sultan's Dilemma* and the tradition of family or tribal revenge in *Song of Death*.

The Sleepers in the Cave reflects an influence of the Western "tradition of intellectual drama" along with the Eastern culture. *The Sleepers in the Cave*, al-Hakim claims, is intended to mix the Greek dramatic tradition (characteristic of ancient Greek myth of man's confrontation with higher powers) with an Islamic plot: "I made sure," he says, "that my source would be the Koran instead of the Greek myth" (qtd in A. Said 35).

However, al-Hakim's play appears in a completely new form so that "the source's influence is almost forgotten" (36). This was al-Hakim's technique in all his plays derived from other Eastern or Western sources.

Obviously, al-Hakim makes significant modifications to the Koranic version of the Christian legend of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus: young Christian men who seek refuge from the persecution by the pagan Emperor Decius in a cave and who miraculously sleep for three centuries, waking up in the reign of the Christian Emperor Theodosius II. Al-Hakim places the events in Tarsus and, following the Koran, he makes the period of their sleep last three hundred years. Whereas the original legend had seven characters, for reasons of dramatic economy al-Hakim has limited his characters to three (and a dog): the Emperor's (King's) two ministers: Marnush, secretly married, with a son by a Christian woman who was the cause of his conversion; Mishlinya, a younger man in love with the King's daughter, Prisca, who under his influence had undergone a clandestine conversion to Christianity; and the shepherd Yamlikha, who had helped them to find the cave and who was accompanied by his dog Qatmir.

The story begins with Marnush, Mishlinya and Yamlikha, who hide themselves in a cave to escape the persecution of a pagan king called Decius. They fall asleep and three centuries pass before they awaken in their hiding place. They resurrect in a future Tarsus where Christianity has been firmly established. From the moment they contact with the world outside the cave, it is only Yamlikha who realises that they have awoken at a time to which they do not belong. Marnush and Mishlinya, on the other hand, decide to adjust to the new age by changing their appearances. Both try in vain to relive the lives they had known in the past; Marnush searches for his family, only to find their torn down

tombstones, while Mishlinya sees in the King's daughter, Princess Prisca, the image of his ex-lover, with whom he hopes to reunite. Actually, the Princess happens to be her descendent who has inherited her name, spirit and looks. Upon realising that they cannot live in the new world, both Marnush and Mishlinya rejoin Yamlikha in the cave, and strangely enough, having fallen in love with Mishlinya, the Princess follows them into the cave and dies with them.

Al-Hakim shifts to the Eastern myth in his play in order to charge it with symbolic significance. In the introduction to his play, *Pygmalion*, al-Hakim states that myth allowed him to transform "actors into ideas moving in the absolute, dressed in nothing but symbols" (10). Myth, Ahmed al-Haggi argues, has always provided Arab dramatists with a means to deal symbolically with social and political issues in periods when freedom of expression was not allowed. In his book, *Myth in the Contemporary Egyptian Theatre*, al-Haggi discusses symbolism in al-Hakim's *The Sleepers in the Cave*. He argues that Tarsus (Ephesus) is symbolic of Egypt (303). The play's two main themes as well, man's struggle with time and resurrection, are symbolic of Egypt's continuous struggle with different forces throughout history. Al-Hakim's 'message,' we are told, is 'to lift the people of Egypt out of their disastrous habit of dwelling in the past' and Prisca 'the girl who buried herself alive with Mishlinya, the man from the past whom she loved' is meant to be 'a symbol of the fruitlessness of the mood from which his compatriots were suffering' (Isma'il 55). However, this was dismissed by Paul Starkey, who sees that 'the essence of the play is in the sleepers' inability to adapt, not Prisca's' ('Theme' 60). However, Starkey himself has no doubt that al-Hakim 'intended the play to relate to

Egypt's current situation, as the country awoke from centuries of stagnation to face the challenge of the twentieth century and Western civilisation' (63).

The play belongs to al-Hakim's 'theatre of the mind' for its intellectual quality. Influenced by Pirandello's dramas, al-Hakim chooses for his theme the idea of man's struggle with time. Thus, the play reflects a strong Pirandellian influence both in theme and technique. It dramatises Pirandello's conflict between dream and reality, fact and fantasy, sanity and madness, and intellect and heart. In Act IV, when Marnush, Mishlinya and Yamlikha return to the cave, they all lie dying. Mishlinya tells Marnush he has had bad dreams in which he saw the cave stormed by people in strange costumes who took them to the palace, where everything has changed. Decius was no longer reigning and Tarsus was so much altered that even Prisca no longer recognised him. When Marnush tells him it is not a dream but a fact, they turn to Yamlikha for confirmation. Reluctant to face reality they are all unable to decide whether or not they had the same dream. Even Yamlikha, who is the first to die from weakness and exhaustion, admits that he is dying not knowing whether his life has been a dream or reality (al-Hakim, *Ahl* 141).

In *The Sleepers in the Cave* various time dimensions develop through such dramatic devices such as characterisation, setting, dialogue, properties, and sound effects. Although the play takes place in the present, the past dominates the action. The action of the play's four acts dwells on the past, three centuries ago. On a few occasions, however, the present time interrupts the world of the past. Since there are hardly any stage directions in the play, al-Hakim relies on the dialogue as a means of suggesting staging. The present and past events, the portrayal of characters and their relationships are mainly

revealed through al-Hakim's successful dramatic dialogue. In Act I, for example, the conversation in the play's opening scene indicates a time lapse:

> MISHLINYA. Marnush.
>
> MARNUSH. Are you awake? What do you want?
>
> MISHLINYA. Where are you? I can hear your troubled voice but I can't see you. Oh! My back hurts.
>
> MARNUSH. Let me be. My body hurts too as if I slept for a whole year. (13)

Mishlinya's constant questions as well indicate their uncertainty about their situation:

> MISHLINYA. How long have we stayed here Marnush?
>
> MARNUSH. You are bothering me with your questions.
>
> MISHLINYA. I'm as nervous as you are. Marnush, how long has it been since we've been here?
>
> MARNUSH. A day or two.
>
> MISHLINYA. How do you know that?
>
> MARNUSH. Can we sleep more than that?
>
> MISHLINYA. You're right. [*silence, then suddenly*] I want to get out of this place. (13-14)

In *The Sleepers in the Cave*, al-Hakim introduces a few elements of Greek and Oriental mythology. The oracle, which predicted the young Princess' birth as well as her dream which comes true in Act IV, is reminiscent of Greek drama. Prisca's announcement of her dream that she was buried alive in the beginning of Act II prefigures her sacrifice for Mishlinya in Act IV. This early connection between

Mishlinya and Prisca is also suggested as Gallius, just after she narrates her dream, gives his news about the treasure found in the cave. Although Prisca's link with the past strengthens as she gradually falls in love with Mishlinya, for a moment in Act IV she also represents the future (eternity) as she promises Mishlinya to love him "for thousands of years to come" (175). Al-Hakim, furthermore, employs the Japanese myth of Urashima to serve his "love for eternity" theme (qtd in A. Said 46). He presents Prisca recounting the legend of the fisherman Urashima's return from the island of eternity as parallel to her circumstances. Urashima disappears for four centuries during which he was married to the daughter of the King of Oceans. As Urashima decides to go back home to visit his family, his wife gives him a box on condition he should not open it until he comes back to the island. Out of curiosity, Urashima opens the box only to let out white smoke which vanishes slowly towards the sea. At this moment, Urashima turns into a dying four-century old man.

As in other plays based on myth, al-Hakim wrote *The Sleepers in the Cave* in Classical Arabic. Thus, he could use some quotations from the Koran (written in Classical Arabic) for the dialogue especially in Act I. In spite of al-Haggi's criticism of a few speeches in the play such as Prisca's long narration of Urashima's story, and Marnush's speech on Egypt and eternity, still he praises the play as a whole. He also praises al-Hakim's artistic skill in creating dramatic dialogue. Similarly, Jaroslav Stetkevych states that the play is:

> … unmistakably a work where for the first time in the history of Arabic dramatic literature conceived and executed in the *fusha* [Classical Arabic], an effective fusion of dramatic action and language takes place. (159)

Some of the plays of this category, stylistic hybridity, are representational: naturalistic, as *Ughniyyat al-Mawt* (Song of Death), or realistic, as *al-Sultan al-Ha'ir* (The Sultan's Dilemma). Both the plays elaborately discuss social or political issues which reflect the influence of Shaw's drama of ideas on al-Hakim. Like Brecht and Shaw before him, al-Hakim believed in theatre as an instruction medium whose function is to raise the audience's awareness of the world in which they live by appealing to their critical faculties. Shaw's concept of the utilitarian drama is therefore evident in al-Hakim's plays depicting contemporary reality. The Shavian influence is also reflected in al-Hakim's definition of the role of the author in his book *Fann al-Adab* (The Art of Literature, 1952) in which he argues that:

> The duty of the author is not to convince the reader. His duty is to think with him…. Literature is a means to raise ideas…. Thus the reader's role should be complementary to that of the author…. The author who does not raise the thoughts of his readers in order to enhance the process of their development, is one who hinders the growth and betterment of his society. (181)

Song of Death (1960) is a one-act tragedy which thematises a serious Egyptian and Arabic issue: the perpetuation of blood revenge. This endless cycle of revenge controls and threatens the lives of the peasants in the rural areas in Upper Egypt. The play's setting is therefore representative of a southern village where poverty and ignorance prevail. The villagers in these areas are often blindly driven by what Andrew Parkin describes as "ancient codes of honour and revenge" (qtd in A. Said 76). The play is a call for repudiating such traditional habits for healthier modern concepts. To stress

this sharp contrast between the tradition and the modern, al-Hakim sets the village and the villagers against Cairo, and its 'educated' inhabitants. He therefore constructs his play on a repeated pattern of dualities which re-enforce the conflict between "tradition and modernity." All dramatic elements of the play, its structure, theme, character portrayal and setting emphasise this conflict. Al-Hakim uses the Shavian technique of raising social awareness to that issue.

This play is a well-constructed, one-act naturalistic play. It is divided into four French scenes grouped in pairs, each dealing with different tension. The tension in first two scenes arises at the opening moments of the first Scene and climaxes at the end of the second Scene. The second tension arises by the middle of the third Scene and snaps at the final moment of the play. Both tensions are connected, however, with the play's theme of revenge. Al-Hakim employs the naturalistic fourth wall; action is confined to a small room in the house of the play's heroine, Asakir. The opening scene between Asakir and her sister-in-law, Mabrouka, serves as exposition, providing background for the play's theme and characterisation. Conforming to the play's pattern of dualities, al-Hakim restricts his cast to four, with only two characters in each scene. The play's four characters are: the heroine, Asakir, her son, Alwan, a theology student at Al-Azhar University, his aunt, Mabrouka, and her son, Sumeida, Alwan's cousin.

In the first Scene Asakir places herself and her educated son aloof from Mabrouka and her peasant son. Ironically in the next scene, Asakir's passionate loyalty to tradition sets her world in contrast to her own son's. In the third Scene, Asakir and Sumeida, both belonging to the same world of the village, side together against Alwan, now considered an outsider. The last Scene, however, centres on Asakir's struggle, which is torn between

her loyalty to tradition and her feelings as mother. As usual in al-Hakim's plays, the exposition develops primarily through dialogue. Past events and the present circumstance in the life of Asakir emerge out of the conversation between Asakir and Mabrouka, laying the ground for the play's action. The opening sentences of the first Scene set the play's theme:

> ASAKIR. I hope, Mabrouka, you haven't told anyone he's my son.
>
> MABROUKA. Am I crazy? Your son Alwan was drowned in the well at the water-wheel when a child of only two years. The whole village knows that.
>
> ASAKIR. But they still can't swallow that story.
>
> MABROUKA. Who are they? The Tahawis?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> ASAKIR. Let them learn today that the son of the murdered man is still alive. There is no reason to fear for him now that he has attained manhood…. Bring him quickly, train, quickly, for I have waited so long! Seventeen years! I have counted them up hour by hour. (78)

The tension in this scene begins to arise as Asakir's confidence in her son's ability to avenge his father's death is shaken by Mabrouka's doubt. Since her son has been away for so long time, Mabrouka believes he could not possibly be interested in their affairs. She claims also that he might not be the right person to "know how to use the knife," for in his childhood when he had been sent as an apprentice to a butcher shop in Cairo, he rebelled and fled to Al-Azhar to get education. Mabrouka's observation shakes Asakir's firm belief in her son and she asks, "Do you think he won't come?" (81) This change in

her attitude introduces the play's first tension. However, the moment Sumeida's song is heard, announcing Alwan's arrival, Asakir's dying hopes are revived. Ironically, the opening moments of the following scene foreshadow the loss of these revived hopes.

In this Scene, both mother and her son appear to be speaking two different languages belonging to two different worlds. This lack of communication dominates the whole scene and foreshadows their final failure to reach each other. Each had a different dream, neither is realised. Where Asakir dreams of avenging her husband's murder, Alwan arrives in the village with a dream of social reform. He confronts his uncomprehending mother:

> I shall tell them (the villagers) what I have come to tell them … when will our people in the countryside live like human beings in clean houses?… When will their roofs be covered with something other than twigs from cotton and maize stalks, and their walls be painted with something other than mud and animal dung? When will the water jar be replaced by running water, and electricity take the place of lanterns? (86-87)

Unwilling to listen to his plan, Asakir remarks, "This bookish talk is something to chat about later on with Sheikh Mohammed al-Isnawi, who will understand it" (87). This is a reminder of the gap separating their worlds. Their failure to communicate is indicated in Alwan's constant evasions of his mother's pleas for hastening revenge and her recurrent misinterpretations of his remarks.

Alwan's reluctance to carry out his mother's commands and his questioning her about his father's murder rekindle Asakir's fears. Until this point in the scene, Alwan has kept his image as pacifist, a quality expected from a student of theology. The scene in

which he questions his mother about the murder is an attempt to dissuade her from her revenge, and stresses his balanced nature; it shows the rational in him:

> ALWAN. Who did all this?
>
> ASAKIR. Suweilam Tahawi.
>
> ALWAN. How did you know?
>
> ASAKIR. The whole village knows.
>
> ALWAN .Yes you told me that. You mentioned his name to me dozens of times whenever you came to visit me in Cairo…. What proof is there? Was the crime investigated?
>
> ASAKIR. Investigated?
>
> ALWAN. Yes. What did the district attorney's office say?
>
> ASAKIR. District attorney? For shame! Would we say anything to the district attorney's office? Would the Azizis do such a thing? Did ever the Tahawis do such a thing?
>
> ALWAN. Didn't the district attorney's office question you?
>
> ASAKIR. They asked us and we said we knew nothing and had not seen a body. We buried your father's (corpse) secretly at night.
>
> ALWAN (*as though talking to himself*). So that we might take vengeance into our hands. (83-84)

Their confrontation climaxes in the final moment of the scene with Alwan's announcement, "I won't kill." The emotional outburst of Asakir which follows contrasts sharply with Alwan's attitude as he calmly tries to appease his mother's rage. The scene

is a culmination of their failed attempt to communicate. It emphasises their inevitable separation:

> ALWAN. Try to understand, mother.
>
> ASAKIR. Get out of my house. God's curse be on you until the Day of Judgment. Get out of my house.
>
> ALWAN. Mother!
>
> ASAKIR [*Shouting*]. Get out of my house or I shall call the men to put you out. We have our men, there are still men amongst Azizis, but you are not one of them… (88)

Asakir then disowns Alwan, producing the play's second tension which dominates the following two scenes. In the second and third Scenes, tension centres on Asakir's decision to get rid of her son in an attempt to regain the family's honour. Now, Asakir, Sumeida and Mabrouka represent a unified force against Alwan. In fact, the play's structure also fulfils this imbalance of the three characters against one. Only in the scene does the world of the city, represented in Alwan, intrude on the world of the village. The play's three other scenes are totally dominated by the villagers and their codes. This new relationship highlights the play's duality; however, in the third and fourth Scenes Sumeida stands as an opposite extreme to Alwan. Unlike his cousin, Sumeida shows readiness to act once Asakir asks for his help, as the nearest of kin, to regain the family's honour:

> ASAKIR [*taking up the knife from the saddlebag*]. Kill him with this knife!
>
> SUMEIDA. Kill who?

ASAKIR. Alwan. Plunge this knife into his chest!

SUMEIDA. Kill Alwan? Your son?

. . . . . .

ASAKIR. If you are a man, Sumeida, don't let him dishonour the Azizis! After today you will not be able to walk like a man amongst people; they will whisper about you, will laugh up their sleeves at you, will point to you in the market places saying: "A woman hiding behind a woman!"

SUMEIDA [*as though talking to himself*]. A woman?

. . . . . .

SUMEIDA [*stretched out his hand resolutely*]. Give me the knife! (90)

The play's second tension builds up to its climax in the final Scene as Asakir, now conscious of the gravity of the matter, fights against her fears for her son and hopes for his escape from Sumeida's knife. Asakir's psychological struggle in the fourth Scene sets the whole scene in contrast with the first Scene. While the first Scene reflects the great hopes she places in Alwan's arrival, which is only disturbed for a few moments by Mabrouka's doubts, the fourth Scene emphasises her growing fears mixed with a faint hope for her son's escape. But whereas her hopes are renewed at the end of the first Scene when she hears Sumeida's song announcing Alawn's arrival, in the fourth Scene, the same song which announces his death crushes her hopes. The train's whistle heard from the station has the same connotations of Sumeida's song off-stage. Thus, al-Hakim employs off-stage sounds to symbolise states of life and death. Sounds off-stage in the first Scene indicate the arrival of Alwan from Cairo and hence the revival of Asakir's hope for a new life. While the same sound in the last scene implies death of her son as

well as of her hopes: Asakir's last "fainted suppressed cry" then, contrasts sharply with her cry of joy, "Today I'll rend the garment of shame and put on the robes of self respect" (81) on hearing the song in the first Scene. In the final Scene, Asakir appears as both "victim and victimiser." It is the only scene in which she is endowed with a sympathetic humane touch and her struggle becomes the main emphasis of the whole scene.

The play's settings are also indicative of the play's duality. The fourth wall principle gives off-stage domains important roles in the development of the play's tensions. The room in Asakir's house in which all action takes place is symbolic of the hardness of the world of the village. It is in this room that decisions and plans to carry out murders are made. Cairo, on the other hand, is the opposite extreme. It stands for enlightenment reinforced by the education of its institutions, represented in the play by Al-Azhar University. This obvious contrast between the village and Cairo is implied in Mabrouka's statement: "How far our village is from Cairo! Can the voice of blood reach to the capital?" (80) The train station in itself has a dual nature of its own: in the first Scene, it symbolises birth and renewal of hope, while in the final Scene it symbolises death and the end of that hope.

In like manner, costumes reflect the same relationship of opposites. The peasant's costumes are set in contrast with those of the sheikhs at al-Azhar, which are "symbol of status in a traditional village" (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 56). This is referred to in the first scene as Asakir confronts Mabrouka: "It hurts you that my son puts on a turban and gibba while yours goes on wearing skullcap and rough peasant gown" (79). Ironically, this placement of Asakir and her son against Mabrouka and Sumeida does not extend beyond this first Scene. The fragility of Asakir's association with her son is

evident from the opening moments of the second Scene. By the end of this scene their separation becomes complete.

The same idea of sharp contrast between the mother and son more generally between the villagers' world and his, also appears in the symbolic use of the names of the play's four characters. Alwan's name indicates sublimity reflected in his high aspirations and his refined mental and moral concepts. Asakir's and Sumeida's names, on the other hand, imply toughness of nature. Literally, Asakir means soldiering or soldiery – the name thus refers to her unrelenting, military nature. Her presence in the four scenes sustains the mood of rivalry throughout the play. Likewise, Sumeida's name implies firmness. His determination to get Alwan at the end of the third Scene emphasises this quality in him:

> SUMEIDA [*stretching out his hand resolutely*]. Give me the knife!
>
> ASAKIR [*giving him the knife*]. Take it – no, wait, I'll wash the rust and blood.
>
> SUMEIDA. Give it here – before he makes his escape on the evening train. (90-91)

Mabrouka's name, on the other hand, means "a blessed one." Al-Hakim seems to be ironically referring to the villagers' view of Mabrouka as being one blessed with the son who is to regain the family's honour. This idea is argued by Badawi in his book *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt* in which he states that:

> Asakir denotes soldiering, with the connotations of vigilance and endurance, while Mabrouka means 'blessed' in the sense that, unlike

> Asakir, she has been blessed with a son who restores honour to family. (57)

In *Song of Death*, al-Hakim deliberately avoids the use of the usual humour characteristic of most of his plays in order to stress the gravity of the issue he is dealing with. Badawi supports this view and hints that using humour would have been unsuitable to "the intensity and the height of emotional pitch which characterise it (the play) from beginning to end" (56). The play's tragic tone and imagery are therefore intended to make the viewer aware of the seriousness of the issue. The play's structure and mood, Badawi argues, give it some affinity to the plays of Synge and Lorca. Al-Hakim's play, he indicates, has

> ... the tragic intensity of J. M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, with which it has other features in common, such as its timelessness, its primitive atmosphere, its force of elemental passion and its depiction of the utter powerlessness of the individual in relation to a deeply entrenched age-old way of life – features which are reminiscent of the work of Lorca. (53)

In general, *Song of Death* is a highly esteemed play. In his article "Tawfiq al-Hakim: Leading Playwright of the Arab World," Paul Starkey claims that it is "the most successful" of the plays of the collection of plays entitled *The Theatre of Society*. Likewise, Badawi argues that it is the "best constructed play in the corpus of al-Hakim's works" and praises the "masterly economy" in which it is written which makes every detail "functional" (53).

Similarly, *The Sultan's Dilemma* (1960) is a hybrid play that amalgamates Eastern and Western elements. It is a comedy in which al-Hakim follows the formula Shaw

distilled from Ibsen's work of exposition, problem and discussion to deal with two major issues: first, the power of the law versus that of the sword and, second, the ideal notion of the law as a means for justice versus the twisted practices of the law in our daily lives. Having worked as a judge himself, al-Hakim was naturally aware of the various practices of the judicial system. This knowledge must have inspired him with the play's two themes. Al-Hakim adds to the Shavian formula the alienation device developed by Brecht, a playwright also very concerned with issues of justice. Al-Hakim uses various distancing devices to raise the audience's awareness of the two major problems, thus prodding them to consider the issues involved and to work to eliminate them from their society. Al-Hakim's recurrent distancing device in his work is historification. He sets his play, *The Sultan's Dilemma*, in a fairy tale-like atmosphere similar to that of the world of the *Arabian Nights*. Action takes place in an undefined period in the thirteenth century during the rule of the Mameluke Sultans in Egypt. This setting fulfils the epic quality of Brechtian theatre as well. The play's plot is believed to be based on an actual occurrence during this period in Egypt in which a sultan was put up for sale at an auction (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 70). The audience is thus aware that they are watching a story over and done with. *The Sultan's Dilemma* was written during al-Hakim's second sojourn in France in 1959. It was inspired by the cold war and the threat of atomic annihilation and by the,

> Great tension in the international situation, the fear and anxiety caused by the inability of world leaders to decide whether the solution to world problems is to be sought in arbitration by the sword or the law, in resorting to the atom and to hydrogen bombs or to the United Nations. (70)

Though in his introduction to the play al-Hakim claims the universality of the play's theme, still several parallels could be drawn between the world of the play and the political conditions in Egypt when ruled by the military junta following the revolution in 1952. In his book *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, Badawi argues that the play was obviously "al-Hakim's call to Abd al-Nasser and his army to return to the barracks and seek legitimacy by resort to the rule of law, constitutional and parliamentary life" (72).

This issue is raised in the first Act of the play which combines a Brechtian, a Shavian, and a touch of the absurdist styles. In what seems to be a historical play, al-Hakim employs the technique of the drama of ideas by fully exposing and elaborately discussing the play's major theme. By the third part of the first Act, all characters have been introduced; the problem has been raised, and discussed. Exposition occurs gradually through the three parts of Act I. It starts in the "surrealistic topsy-turvy world" of the opening farcical scene, which Badawi claims is probably an influence of the theatre of the absurd (74). He also argues that al-Hakim uses this comic scene as a distancing device to prevent the emotional engagement of the audience with the Sultan's predicament in the third part of Act I.

The scene is an encounter between a condemned man and his executioner. Both are awaiting the call for dawn prayer, the assigned moment for carrying out the death sentence. Ironically, it is the Executioner who seems to be in a bad mood. He occasionally asks the convict to entertain him in order to raise his spirits so that he can perform his job skilfully at the break of dawn. In this scene, the play's problem is held back from the audience as the Executioner does not allow that Condemned Man to reveal his crime. The suspense is sustained as well in the Act's second part. It is not until the

arrival of the Sultan in the third part of the Act that the issue is raised and fully discussed.

The opening scene is a comic treatment of the idea of human rights and freedom of speech in a society ruled by a totalitarian regime. It is in this scene that parallels could be drawn between the world of the play and conditions in Egypt under the military regime. Suppression of freedom of speech, convictions without trials and passing severe sentences that did not fit the nature of the crimes punished were common aspects of the Egyptian political life, especially during the 1960s. The Executioner in Scene i would not allow the Condemned Man to utter a word about the crime he committed and for which he is to die without trial, but at the same time wonders why the Condemned Man could not sing for him since his "larynx – thanks be to God – is perfectly free" (*The Sultan* 101). The same issue is more seriously raised in the second part of the Act as the Lady (presumably a prostitute) asks the Condemned Man:

> LADY. … but what crime have you committed?
>
> CONDEMNED MAN. Nothing much. All that happened was that I said ….
>
> EXCUTIONER [*shouting*]. Careful! Careful! Shut your mouth!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> LADY. Naturally they gave you a trial?
>
> CONDEMNED MAN. No. (107)

The exposition of the play's theme is complete by the Act's third part in which the Condemned Man is allowed to reveal his crime to the Sultan. The convict is accused of uncovering a serious truth about the Sultan; the late Sultan died before freeing the present Sultan from slavery. He is therefore not fit, the Cadi (judge) claims, to rule over a

free people. According to the state's law, he insists, the Sultan becomes a property of the state. He could only be freed if a citizen buys him in a public auction then sets him free. At this point of the Act, tension begins to rise as the controversy heightens between the Cadi, who insists on following the law no matter what it costs, and the Sultan and his Vizier who oppose the Cadi's resolution. The action gains momentum as the issue is debated among the three in which the play's main theme of "law" versus "force" is elaborately discussed:

> SULTAN. Listen, Cadi. This law of yours has brought me no solution, whereas a small movement of the sword will ensure that the knot of the problem is severed instantly.
>
> CADI. Then do so.
>
> SULTAN. I shall. What does the spilling of a little blood matter for the sake of the practicability of governing?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> SULTAN. I shall do everything I think necessary for safeguarding the security of the state and I shall in fact start with you. I shall cast you into prison. Vizier! Arrest the Cadi. (121)

The tension continues to build up with the Cadi's final advice to the Sultan to choose between "the sword which imposes and yet exposes you, and … the law which threatens and yet protects you" (125). From this point on, until the climactic moment of the Act, this statement is repeatedly emphasised as the Sultan contemplates the Cadi's words. The tension snaps in the Act's final statement as the Sultan announces decisively, "The law! I have chosen the law" (126).

Normally al-Hakim depends on dramatic dialogue to reveal present action and past events and to portray characters. In *The Sultan's Dilemma*, however, he uses stage directions with detailed descriptions of the settings. The opening scene of Act I reads as follows:

> An open space in the city during the time of the Mameluke Sultans. On one side there is a mosque with a minaret; on the other, a tavern. In the centre is a house with a balcony. Dawn is about to break and silence reigns. A stake has been set up to which a man, condemned to death, has been tied. His executioner is nearby trying to fight off sleep. (96)

Likewise, stage directions give a full description of the action taking place. In the third part of the first Act, as the convict reveals the Sultan's problem, stage directions read, "The Vizier, by a sign, orders everyone to move off with the Condemned Man, leaving only himself, the Sultan, and the Chief Cadi on stage" (116). Mood is similarly revealed through stage directions. Before announcing his final decision at the end of Act I, the Sultan is shown, "thinking hard as he walks up and down, with the other two [the Vizier and Cadi] waiting for him to speak. Silence reigns for a moment" as the Sultan, with "head lowered in thought" reflects on the matter.

Dialogue, nevertheless, serves to give details of the action taking place on stage. New entrances and exits or shifting attention to action taking place on the other side of the stage is often preceded or accompanied by an announcement by one of the characters. In Act III, the Shoemaker draws the Wine Merchant's attention to the suspicious encounter between the Vizier and the Executioner on the other side of the stage:

> SHOEMAKER [*turning to the corner of the square*]. Look! Over there!
>
> WINE MERCHANT. What?
>
> SHOEMAKER [*whispering*]. The Vizier and the Executioner. They look as though they're hatching some plot.
>
> WINE MERCHANT. Quiet! (163)

Similarly, a few minutes earlier, attention shifts to the interior of the Lady's house as a room in her house is lit followed by the Vizier's statement, "Quiet! A light in the window! Let's move away a little" (154).

Dialogue reveals past events as well. As the Sultan demands an explanation from the Condemned Man in Act I, the latter replies:

> CONDEMNED MAN. I did nothing at all except utter an innocent word in which there is neither danger nor harm.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> VIZIER. He said that His Majesty, the great and noble Sultan, is a slave. (112-3)

And later the Condemned Man reveals the story of the Sultan:

> CONDEMNED MAN. Twenty-five years ago, Your Majesty. You were a small boy of six, lost, and abandoned in a Circassian village raided by the Mongols. You were extremely intelligent and wise for one of your tender years. I rejoiced in you and carried you off to the Sultan of this country. As the price for you he made me a present of one thousand dinars. (113)

In the same manner, the Lady in Act III narrates her life story to the Sultan:

> LADY. I shall elucidate. When I was a young slave-girl of the same age as the slave-girls I have with me now, my master brought me up to love poetry and singing and playing on musical instruments. He used to make me attend his banquets and converse with his guests, who were poets and singers: they also included intellectuals and men of wit and charm. We would spend the night reciting poetry, singing and playing music and conversing, quoting and capping quotations from masterpieces of literature ... (157)

As the main theme is fully exposed and discussed in the first Act, so characters portrayal is almost complete by the end of the same Act. All characters taking major parts in the action of the following two acts are introduced and their personalities drawn in this Act. In this play as well, Al-Hakim uses the Shavian trick of trapping his audience into first impressions which are entirely reversed at the end of the play. This technique al-Hakim uses in his portrayal of the Lady, the Cadi, and to a lesser degree the Sultan. The major characters are the Sultan, the Vizier, the Cadi and the Lady living in the house occupying the centre of the stage. The position of the Lady's house is symbolic of the centrality of the Lady's role in each of the play's three acts. From the house the Lady appears in the first Act to save the life of the Condemned Man. She reappears from her house in Act II to buy the Sultan and refuses to sign the manumission, thus raising the play's tension. And her third appearance in Act III snaps the tension as she frees the Sultan in the climactic moment of the play.

The Lady's strength of character is evident from the moment she appears in the

balcony in the first Scene of Act I inquiring about the commotion raised by the drunken Executioner. She sustains this strength of character throughout the play, thus dominating the play's action, even in scenes where she does not appear on stage. In Act I she appears to be the logical, stubborn, unsubmissive person who defends her rights and helps others to get theirs. She is the first to inquire from the Condemned Man if he has had a fair trial and as she learns of the injustice inflicted upon him she takes a quick action to save his life. She distracts the Muezzin from giving his call for the dawn prayer by seducing him into her house, thus preventing the Executioner from carrying out the sentence. Likewise, she defies the Vizier and the Cadi in Act II as they attempt to deprive her of her right of winning the Sultan. She confronts the Vizier:

VIZIER. Then sign this deed.

LADY. What does this deed contain?

VIZIER. Manumission.

LADY. Does it mean giving up what I am in possession of?

VIZIER. Yes.

LADY. Giving up the chattel I bought at the auction?

VIZIER. That's it.

LADY. No, I don't want to give it up.

. . . . . .

VIZIER. You shall give it up, woman!

LADY. No.

. . . . . .

Cadi. Manumission – otherwise the sale itself becomes null and void.

> LADY. And what is manumission? Is it not the opposite of possession? Is it not yielding up possession?
>
> Cadi. Yes.
>
> LADY. Then, Oh Cadi, you make manumission a condition of possession, that is to say, that in order validly to possess the thing sold, the purchaser must yield up that very thing.
>
> Cadi. What? What?
>
> LADY. You're saying in other words, in order to possess something you must yield it up.... Or, if you like, in order to possess you must not possess. (141-42)

And in Act III she confesses to the Sultan that she was deliberately insolent to him at the auction in order to avenge his assumed sense of superiority; "Because I imagined you," she claims, "as an arrogant sultan, strutting about haughtily and giving yourself airs – like most sultans" (158).

Surprisingly, in Act III, the Lady appears to be a kind, sensitive woman and a lover of the arts. The reversal of her early image as a prostitute comes as a surprise for the audience as well as for the Sultan who approaches her sarcastically until she reveals her true nature. The scene reemphasises the strength of her character. She admits to the Sultan that experience, and the various injustices inflicted upon her by society, taught her to follow her own rules. For, she declares in a statement reminiscent of Mrs. Alving's words in Ibsen's *Ghosts*:

> LADY. ... it is no longer in my interests to correct people's opinion. When one has crossed the ultimate boundaries of wickedness one becomes

> free, and I am in need of my freedom. (156)

Mrs. Alving's statement reads:

> MRS ALVING. I will not be bound by these responsibilities, these hypocritical conventions any longer – I simply cannot! I must work my way through freedom. (qtd in A. Said 96)

The theme of dishonest law practices conducted within the system of law also raises the question of whether real justice can exist. It has to depend on humans and they are corruptible. Tension rises in Act III as the Vizier plots against the Lady. This atmosphere of insecurity heightens as the Cadi joins him to plot for freeing the Sultan. Tension snaps with the Sultan's refusal to accept the Cadi's "shameful" plan.

A third issue, raised in the play is the need for group action in order to have a healthier society. This idea is enforced throughout Acts II and III by the recurrent loud voices of the people in the square. In these two acts, al-Hakim represents the crowd in a collective entity reflecting various points of view. In the Auction Scene, as the Vizier calls for the Lady's death, the people's voices rise, some in favour of the decision and others opposed to it. The masses' presence is emphasised by their gradual entrances throughout the act. Act III stresses also the power of the people with action and sound effects. As the Muezzin calls for the dawn prayer, the people's resentment foreshadows that of the Sultan later in the act:

> *The crowd makes their appearance in a state of agitation, astonishment, protest, and anger.*
>
> THE POEPLE [*shouting*]. The dawn? Now? It's still night – we're in the middle of the night. He's mad! This madman – arrest him! Bring him

> down, bring him down from on top of the minaret! Bring him down!
>
> VIZIER [*to the Cadi*]. The crowds will fall upon this poor fellow.
>
> CADI. Order your guards to disperse the crowds.
>
> VIZIER [*shouting to the guards*]. Clear the square! Clear everyone out of the square!
>
> *The guards chase the people away and clear the square, while the Muezzin continues with his call to prayer*. (167-8)

The fact that the Lady buys the Sultan and succeeds in keeping him for the night is an anti-totalitarian idea. Though she is set apart from the crowd throughout the play, she is still a citizen, one of the people.

Al-Hakim also uses the crowds to reflect on the good and evil in human nature. The opening scene of Act II emphasises selfishness versus selflessness in Act III. The comic conversation between the Shoemaker and the Wine Merchant over the issue of selling the Sultan reflects a materialistic outlook, opposed to the Lady's humane point of view in the end of Act III. The Wine Merchant claims that he would buy the Sultan to make use of him as a means for business profit. He informs the Shoemaker that:

> WINE MERCHANT. ... His mere presence in my shop would be enough to bring along the whole city. It would be enough to recount to my customers every evening the stories of his battles against the Mongols, the strange things that have happened to him, his voyages and adventures, the countries he has seen, the places he's been to, the deserts he's crossed – wouldn't that be valuable and enjoyable?
>
> . . . . . .

> WINE MERCHANT. If I were in your place I'd know how to employ him.
>
> SHOEMAKER. How? Tell me.
>
> WINE MERCHANT. I'd sit him down in front of the door of the shop in a comfortable chair. I'd put a new pair of shoes on his feet and a placard above his head reading: "Sultan's shoes sold here," and the next day you'd see how the people of the city would flock to your shop and demand your wares. (128)

This same notion of possession and profit is further emphasised in the Auction Scene in which all bidders compete to buy the Sultan for their personal needs. It is even satirically reflected in a child's plea for his mother to buy him the Sultan. In a short scene between the child and his mother, al-Hakim refers to worldly dealings as mere game of loss and profit:

> CHILD. The Sultan! Buy me the Sultan!
>
> MOTHER. Quiet! He's not a toy for you to play with.
>
> CHILD. You said they will sell him here. Buy him for me then.
>
> MOTHER. Quiet, child. This is not a game for children.
>
> CHILD. For whom then? For grown-ups?
>
> MOTHER. Yes, it's for grown-ups. (129)

The outlook of the Lady, on the other hand, is intended to reflect the opposite side of human nature. Though al-Hakim does not portray her as an ideal character, still she stands for the ideal refining influence of the arts which bring up the beautiful and humane in man's nature. Her refusal of the Sultan's offer to repay her for her kindness reflects

this idea as opposed to the notion of profit and loss emphasised in Act II:

> LADY. No, no, Your Majesty. Don't take this honour from me. There are no riches in the world, in my opinion, to equal this beautiful memory on which I shall live for the whole of my life. With something so paltry I have participated in one of the greatest events. (171)

Whereas dialogue and stage directions portray characters, reveal past events and describe present action, the play's segmentation determines the tempo of the action. The first two acts are divided into three major parts while Act III includes four parts. Each act begins with a slow rhythm in which a comic scene prepares the audience for what follows. Tension in each act begins to rise in the second part of the act and climaxes in the final moment of the last part. The segmentation is marked either by entrances and exits of some of the characters, or by sound and light effects. In Act I, the first segment ends with the song of the drunken Executioner followed by the loud protests of the Lady's maid in the balcony. The second part, which includes the encounter between the Lady and the Condemned Man, ends with the entrance of the Vizier followed by the procession of the Sultan. The third part extends until the fall of the curtain marking the end of Act I. In Act II the entrance of the crowds breaks up the conversation about the auction between the Shoemaker and Wine Merchant. The crowd's entrances, however, are further preparations for the auction that takes place in the following part. The act climaxes in the third part and ends with the Sultan's sudden announcement of his approval to join the Lady. As in the first Act, the curtain falls immediately after the Sultan's announcement. In Act III segmentation is marked with changes of light which shift locales of the action. Act III opens in the city square at midnight, with the people,

the Vizier and the Cadi gathered in the square facing the house of the Lady. The setting shows part of the mosque and part of the Lady's house. The inside of a room is visible. In the opening scene the centre of the action is the people occupying the square. The first part ends as the square darkens and lights go up in the Lady's room. This shifts action to the interior of the Lady's house. This part ends as the Lady and the Sultan leave for dinner accompanied by music while "the light in the house is extinguished and a dim light comes up in the square" (163). In the third Act tension does not rise until the third part in which the Vizier and Cadi plot against the Lady. This third part also ends with the voice of the Muezzin giving his call for prayer, which is interrupted by the commotion of the people protesting against it. This third Scene ends with the guards clearing the square while lights go on in the Lady's house as she appears in the balcony with the Sultan inquiring about the Muezzin's untimely call. As lights are extinguished in her house, she reappears with the Sultan at the door to start the fourth and final part of the act. The climactic moment of freeing the Sultan is accompanied by music as the Sultan's retinue moves off.

Whereas the occasional use of music, songs and dance in Acts I and III function as markers for segmentation, they also function, Badawi argues, as distancing devices to prevent the emotional involvement of the audience in the action. The dramatic effects of alienation including, Badawi states,

> The humour, the visual effects, the singing and dancing of the *Arabian Nights* world, together with the legal debates and trial at which Hakim with his legal training is adept, combine to make this well-structured play, with its ironic parallelisms and reversal of situations, one of the most

> entertaining and enjoyable works. (*Modern Arabic Drama* 74)

This play appears to have met with considerable success with the public in its first production in 1969. Richard Long cites examples of critical praise in his book *Tawfiq al-Hakim: Playwright of Egypt*:

> The critics were unanimous in their praise. Ghali Shukri thought the play [was] one of his finest and the one which revealed him as a truly modern playwright … Dawara had some reservations but overall gave it as his opinion that *The Sultan's Dilemma*, with its skillful suspense, 'precise, engineered,' symbolic framework, 'skill and charm of dialogue' and 'force and … sharpness of logic … [which] give the mind the shake,' has achieved [an] outstanding position among [Hakim's] other plays. (82-83)

Al-Hakim's second visit to France in 1959-1960 inspired him to try his hand in the theatre of the absurd. In his introduction to his first absurdist play, *Ya Tal'i al-Shajarah* (The Tree Climber, 1962), al-Hakim argues that, though the Egyptian theatre at the time was still in need for representational drama, it was also as important for its development to experiment with different forms and styles. "What we should fear," he warns, "is freezing our arts in one mould while world's arts are moving in various directions" (28). Yet, al-Hakim claims that though the ancient Egyptian and the more recent popular Egyptian arts, especially sculpture and painting, have certain qualities of the modern anti-realistic movements, still the notion of the meaninglessness and absurdity of life could not be adopted in the Arab world due to opposing Islamic beliefs. He elaborates on the same issue in an interview with Lucy Y'aqub, remarking:

> … in our religion … we do not believe that God has created the world meaninglessly. Rather, we believe that there is a wise purpose behind the creation of the world with all its harmony. (38)

This view, however, is not inconsistent with al-Hakim's use of such absurdist themes as man's physical and metaphysical confinement, the break of communication, and the sense of the disharmony in the human condition. Al-Hakim, however, indicates that his adoption of absurdism is more technical than thematic, for through this new style, he explains, he tried to present the "realistic with the unrealistic and the rational with the irrational" (qtd in A. Said 136). At the same time, he argues, it was necessary for him to mix this new Western style with elements from the Eastern culture. Thus by choosing a folk song as a source for his play and by introducing such characters as the Dervish, also inspired by the Egyptian folklore, al-Hakim claims that he was reviving folk arts in the same manner he treated the *Arabian Nights* stories. He then argues that the meaninglessness of the peasant folksong made it the most suitable source for a play written in the absurdist style. His main aim of *The Tree Climber*, he argues, was to present the play's themes in an unconventional manner by employing an absurdist style that deliberately deviates from a logical dramatic structure in the portrayal of characters and settings, in the use of dialogue and even in the choice of the title itself. "Why did I name the play *The Tree Climber*?" he says. "It is a meaningless title … [derived from] an illogical, incoherent song … often sung with no one ever searching for its logic" (qtd in A. Said 136).

To ensure absurdist irrationality in the play, al-Hakim employs a fluidity of all dramatic elements: time, place, events and characterisation. The opening moment of the

play suggests that the stage will be used in a neutral or abstract way:

> There are no sets in this play, nor are there divisions between times and places; the past, present and the future sometimes all being present at the same time and one person occasionally present in two places on the stage and talking in his own voice twice at the same time. Here everything interlocks with everything else. There are no fixed 'props': every character in the play makes his appearance carrying his 'props' and accessories and taking them out with him when he has finished. (qtd in Johnson-Davies *The Essential* 87)

To enforce this fluidity of time, space and action, al-Hakim recommends producing the play without special light or sound effects other than those indicated in the stage directions. In the play's introduction he states,

> What I aim at is getting out of the play what is and what is not expected from these contradictory situations of one person being in two different places without allowing light to separate these two places or allowing music to separate the different time dimensions. (qtd A. in Said 136)

This fluidity of time, space, action and characterisation calls for a similar free use of the stage itself. As the Detective arrives at the house of an elderly married couple, Bahadir and Behana, to investigate the sudden disappearance of the wife, the past lives of both husband and wife become alive on the stage in flashback scenes – flashbacks often take place on one side of the stage and at the same time action in the present time takes place on the other. Moreover, throughout the first Act past and present merge allowing

characters to move freely between the two time dimensions without any barriers. Often, before the enactment of a flashback scene, one of the characters explains what is taking place on the other side of the stage. As the Detective investigating the wife's disappearance questions the Maid, her description of the relationship between her master and mistress is exposed by a flashback scene. At this moment, past and present merge as attention shifts gradually to the other side of the stage:

> MAID. … Would you like to see with your own eyes how they live?
>
> DETECTIVE. Naturally, I would, but how can that be done?
>
> MAID. It's simple – just look over there and you'll see them.
>
> DETECTIVE. Where?
>
> MAID [*pointing*]. There – in that corner near the window overlooking the garden. That's my mistress Behana in her green dress which she never changes, seated in her usual chair.
>
> *At that moment the wife actually makes her appearance. She is about sixty; her hair is white and her dress is green. She carries her chair and sits down on it. She begins knitting at a dress.*
>
> WIFE [*turning to where the window is supposed to be*]. Come on, Bahadir! Leave your tree and come inside.
>
> HUSBAND [*He enters carrying gardening tools*]. I know. When it begins to turn chilly the venerable Lady Green goes into her sanctuary. (92)

A similar merger of past and present recurs in the second flashback scene as the Detective, suspicious of the husband, Bahadir, as having had a hand in his wife's absence, questions him about his past life. The flashback then shifts the play thirty years

to the past when Bahadir was then a young railway inspector. The whole scene presents workday in the past life of Bahadir in which he meets with the Dervish for the first time on the train. Another merger of past and present occurs as the Dervish leaves the flashback on one side of the stage to join the Husband and the Detective on the other side, engaging with them in the present time.

In like manner, the two sides of the stage are occasionally occupied by events taking place simultaneously in the present time of the action. While in the opening scene of the second Act the Detective is preoccupied in a conversation with a Digger supposedly searching for the Wife's corpse off-stage, the Maid is on the other side engaged in a conversation with an invisible Milkman through a window overlooking the road. Al-Hakim sustains this atmosphere of mystery throughout the play. Thus, the bewildering world of the onstage world extends to the off-stage domain which is kept beyond the reach of the audience throughout the play. He therefore does not allow either the Digger or the Milkman offstage to be heard or seen as an emphasis on the unfathomable quality of the outside world, a technique reminiscent of Beckett and Ionesco (A. Said 138).

The off-stage domain includes the garden where Bahadir's mysterious orange tree exists, and where the mysterious lizard, Lady Green, dwells. The uncertainty surrounding the tree and the lizard is symbolic of life's mystery. On various occasions throughout the play, Bahadir's tree is associated with life; it is particularly suggestive of Bahadir's own life. Very early in the play, al-Hakim makes clear this connection between Bahadir and the tree. Here, Bahadir strongly rejects the idea of having the police dig under the tree in search of the Wife's corpse. He confronts the Detective

angrily:

> HUSBAND. Do you wish to destroy my tree? Do you know what this tree means to me?
>
> DETECTIVE. I do.
>
> HUSBAND. To my whole life in fact?
>
> DETECTIVE. I do, but it's a question of a body and a case of murder.
>
> HUSBAND. It's my body … my own body and the spade which strikes at the trunk of the tree will be striking at my neck. Do you understand that? Do you understand?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> HUSBAND [*attempting to seat him*.]. You're killing me. You'll kill me – you're committing murder. (100-101)

As the Wife arrives in Act II to discover the hole dug under the tree, she reproaches the Detective:

> WIFE [*looking towards it*]. Why did you do that to it? He'll be extremely sad.
>
> DETECTIVE. It was inevitable. However, I don't believe any harm has come to it – its roots are intact.
>
> WIFE. I hope so, it's his life. (163)

Apparently, the four different fruits which the tree gives in the four seasons, if fertilised with a "complete body of a human being," refer to a year-long span. It also implies the cycle of life which includes both states of life and death. This process of repeated states of birth and rebirth, life and death is also alluded to in the second Act after Bahadir's

release from prison. He reveals then, to the Detective and his wife, the pleasures of experiencing imprisonment and release; he associates it with a new birth which gives one the feeling of "a foetus which has returned to its mother's womb, feeding and breathing from within, and waiting for a hand to drag it out at some time or another" (141).

The cycle of life becomes a major issue in the play. The play's imagery includes images of new births, of existential, earthly entrapment and mystery, and of death. The hole dug under the tree is strongly suggestive of the grave. The close connection between the lizard and the Wife throughout the play symbolises their body/soul relationship. At various moments in the play their inseparable relation is obviously indicated so that they become one and the same. Both the Wife and the lizard are associated with the green colour, in a reference to vegetation, camouflage techniques of deception and disappearance, and the constant renewal of life. The Wife's dream of having a daughter associates her with Mother Nature. The Wife always dresses in green and, in the flashback scene, she knits a green dress for her aborted daughter, on whose memory she lives; the lizard, likewise, is green in colour, and in fact is called Lady Green. No one but Bahadir actually sees the lizard, which strongly suggests the lizard's abstraction. In Act I, the Maid informs the Detective, "This same lizard. That's what he calls her. I've never seen her, but he sees her every day" (190). Bahadir's close attachment to the lizard works in parallel with his marital relationship with the Wife. Throughout the play, the disappearances and re-appearances of the Wife, which constitute the driving force of the action, coordinate with those of the lizard. As Bahadir returns from prison only to find his wife back and safe, he goes to the garden to

discover also the return of his lizard. He cries out joyfully, “Yes, Lady Green has returned. I spotted her ambling along in her green dress on her way to her sanctuary…. I wonder where she could have been?” This same question links the Wife with the lizard as Bahadir immediately remembers his wife’s three-day absence and confronts her: “Talking of which – where were you?” (142). Similarly, the Death Scene at the end of Act II is a final emphasis on their inseparable relationship which emphasises their single entity. Bahadir’s announcement of the disappearance of his wife’s corpse at the climactic moment of the play is immediately followed by the announcement of his discovery of the lizard lying dead in the same hole designated for the burial of his wife. Thus, the mysterious disappearance of the Wife’s corpse and the inexplicable sudden death of the lizard work together to create the sensation of the mysteries of existence.

The train, a recurrent image in al-Hakim plays, symbolises life. This is indicated in the flashback scene between Bahadir, then a train inspector, and the Dervish:

> INSPECTOR. And where’s your ticket?
>
> DERVISH. To hand.
>
> INSPECTOR [*stretching out his hands*.]. May I have it?
>
> Dervish [*producing a piece of paper*.]. Here you are.
>
> INSPECTOR [*examining it*]. This is a birth certificate.
>
> DERVISH. My birth certificate.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> DERVISH. That’s my ticket for the journey.
>
> INSPECTOR. I want your ticket by which you travel on the train.
>
> DERVISH. This is my ticket by which I travel on the train.

> INSPECTOR. Which train?
>
> DERVISH. The main-line train. (110)

Also in the same flashback scene, the children's folk song heard from an off-stage wagon is a further indication to the train's journey as being a symbol of life's journey. The children's song, from which the play's title is derived, includes various elements symbolic of existence: a tree, a cow, food and God. The fact that the song is sung by young school children refers to an early phase in the cycle of life. Similarly, the song sung on the occasion of the new born baby in the first flashback refers to an even earlier phase. All three sound effects, the two songs and the train's whistle, heard off-stage and merging together at the end of the play are suggestive of life going on despite the death prevailing in Bahadir's house.

The mystery surrounding the play also appears in the portrayal of characters. Two characters are themselves mysterious: the Wife and the Dervish. The mystery associated with the Wife derives from her sudden inexplicable appearances and disappearances. Her three-day absence is particularly mysterious and uncertain. The Maid's narration of the circumstances of her disappearance reflects the same atmosphere of confusion and mystery:

> DETECTIVE. Didn't he [Bahadir] tell you he intended to contact the police?
>
> MAID. No, he merely said to me: 'How long does it take to buy a skein of wool and return?' I answered him that my mistress had said: 'A period of half an hour.' To which he had said: 'When half an hour is up, tell me,' and he left me and went with his spade to the garden. That was on

the following day.

DETECTIVE. The following day?

MAID. Yes, a night had passed since my mistress had gone out.

DETECTIVE. And didn't he show any anxiety?

MAID. On the first day, no. He said to me: 'Seeing that your mistress has not yet returned the half hour is not yet up. She is precise in her reckoning, and I am more sure [sic.] about her reckoning than I am about the rotation of the earth.' And on the following day, the second night …

. . . . . .

MAID. He said: 'It's possible that the earth has stopped rotating for a day, up to such time as your mistress appears at the appointed hour.

. . . . . .

MAID. And on the third day he began to worry.

WIFE. Poor thing!

DETECTIVE. And what did he say?

MAID. He said: 'The skein of wool your mistress bought has undoubtedly taken her round the earth's globe twice. But that one single skein should take her round three times – that's altogether too much.'

WIFE. Indeed, he's quite right. (139)

More mystery surrounds the person of the Dervish, whose character is apparently symbolic of the abstract. In his introduction to the translated version of the play, Denys Johnson-Davies states that:

> Only the dervish is a product of the East and represents the hidden forces [within ourselves?], the realisation – more readily acceptable in the East – that the irrational and the 'absurd' are an inevitable part of existence. (qtd in A. Said 143)

No exact interpretation can clearly explain the Dervish's character. While on various occasions he seems to represent Bahadir's own conscience, of which Bahadir is often afraid, on other occasions he symbolises conditions of human life. In the flashback scene Bahadir admits to the Dervish his fear of an invisible person constantly threatening his being: "I don't understand what he wants.… He upsets me and frightens me and I'm afraid one day he'll lead me astray" (115). But when the Detective inquires who this person could be, Bahadir's confusion is obvious:

> DETECTIVE. Who is that person who upsets you and you're afraid will one day lead you astray?
>
> HUSBAND. I don't know.
>
> DETECTIVE. But it's you who are saying so.
>
> HUSBAND. I don't know why I say it.
>
> DETECTIVE. But as I see it the dervish knows.
>
> HUSBAND. Doubtless he does.
>
> DETECTIVE. What way is there of finding out about this point?
>
> HUSBAND. I don't know the way. (115)

Bahadir's fear of the Dervish in this scene foreshadows his intimidation by the Dervish's arrival after Bahadir has killed his wife. Apparently, the Dervish arrives with knowledge of the murder. This scene shows the Dervish as the only character who understands all

and predicts all. The Dervish's certainty about the future takes a curious twist when he joins Bahadir and the Detective in the Investigation Scene before the Wife's murder. The Dervish then declares that he is sure of her fate: "Either he has killed her," he says, "Or else he hasn't yet killed her." And in the flashback scene he predicts Bahadir's future life when he mentions the suburb of Zeitoun, where Bahadir later dwells, the tree that produces four different fruits in the four seasons, and the "venerable Lady Green."

The Dervish seems strange and mysterious at the first moment he appears on the scene. Throughout the flashback scene, the Dervish's actions and statements refer to his abstraction. Bahadir states that the Dervish comes "out of the air," and indeed his first encounter with him on the train fits that description: he boards the moving train, stretches out his hands from the train's window into space, produces a few tickets, then throws them out of the window sending "them back whence they came." In this scene, the Inspector, now believing the Dervish to be a sacred person with extraordinary powers, curiously proceeds to ask him to unveil his future life:

> INSPECTOR. Do you know what I ask of life?
>
> DERVISH [*singing*]. *Oh tree climber bring me a cow with you. Milk it and feed me with a china spoon.*
>
> INSPECTOR. It seems you know. (112)

We are left in the dark as to what the Dervish knows, but his uncanny foresight is vividly established.

This scene between the Inspector and the Dervish raises the play's second theme of man's constant search for knowledge and the futility of his search. In his introduction to the play, al-Hakim comments on man's natural love for knowledge: "man always likes

to argue, to pose questions and to receive answers." He emphasises this issue in his play by allowing it to include questions which remain unanswered until the end. First of these is the futile investigation conducted by the Detective to sweep away the mystery surrounding the Wife's three-day absence. Similarly, Bahadir's wish to unveil his future is thwarted by the Dervish's refusal to provide him with more information. Finally, Bahadir's frustration at failing to uncover the mystery behind his Wife's absence drives him to murder. The confrontation scene between Husband and Wife is the culmination of the play's theme of man's futile search for knowledge:

> HUSBAND. Tell me, then, where were you?
>
> WIFE. I was somewhere.
>
> HUSBAND. Naturally. Inevitably you were somewhere, because you cannot be nowhere. But where was this somewhere? At the house of one of your relations?
>
> WIFE. No.
>
> HUSBAND. At the house of one of your acquaintances?
>
> WIFE. No.
>
> HUSBAND. It was, at any rate, a house?
>
> WIFE. No.
>
> HUSBAND. A hotel?
>
> WIFE. No.
>
> HUSBAND. A hospital?
>
> WIFE. No.
>
> HUSBAND. A sanatorium?

WIFE. No.

HUSBAND. A prison?

WIFE. No. (145-46)

An earlier scene foreshadows his final loss, as the Wife is surprised that he had regained his curiosity and interest in her. All this she considers "a bad sign." She confronts the Detective with her concern:

DETECTIVE. Does it upset you that he worries about you?

WIFE. I don't like him to be worried.

DETECTIVE. In such circumstances it is a duty to be worried.

WIFE. He has never known what it is to be worried – he shouldn't have to know. (139)

As Bahadir re-enters at this very moment, he announces, to the surprise of his wife and the Detective, the pleasure of experiencing imprisonment. The theme of imprisonment is related to the issue of life's meaninglessness and the breakdown of communication. Ironically, Bahadir's release leads to imprisonment in the larger domain of his household which ends symbolically and literally in death. Not only does Bahadir lose the Wife and the Lizard, but he also becomes certain of his near death. The Dervish discusses with him the death sentence awaiting him at the discovery of his crime:

DERVISH. Without a doubt. Scientists will make of the tree a subject of research.

HUSBAND. Research? Then the scientists will come to this garden?

DERVISH. Exactly

. . . . . .

HUSBAND. …Nothing will make me afraid or flinch, even though I be sentenced to death, for otherwise my life could be worthless!

DERVISH. What is your decision?

HUSBAND. I want the marvellous tree. (161-63)

Ironically, Bahadir's aspiration for a "marvellous" life indicated by his choice of the "marvellous tree," does not extend beyond his wish. A moment later he discovers the disappearance of the corpse and the death of the Lizard. The Dervish's departure is immediately followed by merging the sounds of the songs and the train's whistle indicative of life going on despite death prevailing inside the house.

The scene of the murder raises the idea of lack of communication as one of the play's major themes. The continuous break in communication reflects the absurdist notion of the failure of language to create a bond between human beings. This is obvious from the opening moment of the play when the Detective tries in vain to conduct his investigation. In this whole scene the dialogue drives nowhere:

DETECTIVE. When exactly did your mistress disappear?

MAID. Just as the lizard returned to its lair.

DETECTIVE. You mean at sunset?

MAID. I didn't see the sun set.

DETECTIVE. And when does the lizard return to its lair?

MAID. When my master makes his appearance from under the tree.

DETECTIVE. And when does your master make his appearance from under the tree?

MAID. When my mistress calls for him. (188)

A similar aimless conversation takes place as the Detective starts investigating the Husband, while an ultimate break in communication occurs in the flashback scene between Husband and Wife and foreshadows similar break that leads to the Wife's death. In this scene al-Hakim uses a disparate, disjointed conversation in which words spark responses that employ the same words but with different meanings. The scene reflects the "self-created worlds" in which each of them lives. Whereas the Husband is completely immersed in the world of the tree and its dweller, the Wife lives in the world of her aborted baby. The same atmosphere of confusion continues as the Detective tries to converse with the returned Wife. This constant break in communication culminates in the confrontation of Husband and Wife in the Act II, which ends with the Wife's death.

This theme of the lack of communication reflects also the mood of uncertainty and irrationality dominating the world of the play. The play stresses the existentialist notion that there is no inherent logic in human existence. The only reality is what man believes in. Man creates logic out of his desperate need to give meaning to his life. Thus, reality changes according to man's changing perspective. This notion is raised in Act II as the Detective attempts to explain the Dervish to the Wife:

DETECTIVE. A man who knows everything and sees everything. He suggested that your husband killed his wife and buried her under the tree.

WIFE. He suggested that, suggested that he'd killed and buried me? And where did this man come from?

DETECTIVE. He came from the train.

WIFE. From what train?

DETECTIVE. From out of the air. I mean he was in the train – with your husband in the train – then we called him and he left your husband in the train doing his inspecting and came and sat down with us here – with your husband and me in this very place.

WIFE. What a muddle! Do you understand what you're saying?

DETECTIVE. No.

WIFE. Neither do I. I don't understand.

DETECTIVE. The fact is I don't understand what I was saying. It would appear to be quite meaningless.

WIFE. Of course. (133)

Yet, a moment later she assures the Detective that she believes his story and finds it "perfectly rational." The Dervish emphasises the idea of changing reality according to man's change of perspective. He rejects Bahadir's claim of the meaninglessness of his wife's existence. He addresses Bahadir, "what you call futility is in relation to yourself," for the "meaning of every being [is] within its own framework not within your head!" (160). Bahadir's discovery of the disappearance of the corpse ends the play where it starts. In his book, *Modern Egyptian Drama*, Farouk Abdel Wahab argues that it is a pattern in many of al-Hakim's plays to end at the points where they begin. "If there is any change," he states, "we are made to see that it was pointless" (qtd in A. Said 148-49). This quality in al-Hakim's dramatic works gives expression to the meaninglessness emphasised in the above argument between the Dervish and Bahadir. The play's themes of existential entrapment, lack of communication, the irrationality and uncertainty

dominating man's world, and the futility in trying to establish a meaning for existence are all clearly associated with the theatre of the absurd.

Although *The Tree Climber* was a success on the Egyptian stage, it was met with negative reaction from two of Egypt's major literary figures: Taha Hussein and al-Aqqad. On hearing that the play purported to be "absurdist," al-Aqqad replied: "Have we now so completely finished with the rational that we need to explore the irrational?" (qtd in Ya'qub 46). Al-Hakim explains their reaction in defence of his play stating:

> The truth is, neither Taha Hussein nor al-Aqqad were used to reading that type of drama. Neither has read anything but the classics known for their clear logic and rational dialogue.... Taha Hussein could not swallow it [the play] when he did not see in it the conventional logic he is used to finding in an ordinary dramatic work. (qtd in Ya'qub 45)

Al-Hakim then proceeds to mention various positive critical reactions to the play. He cites, in particular, the statement issued by the Theatre de L'Atelier which praised the play's combination of ancient Eastern folklore with a new style (A. Said 149). In his article "Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898-1987): Leading Playwright of the Arab World," Paul Starkey also praises the play as being al-Hakim's first and most successful play to reflect an influence of the theatre of the absurd. Starkey also discusses the hybrid nature of the play which combines both Eastern and Western elements:

> Despite the reassuring presence of a dervish on the stage, and the derivation of the play's title from an old Egyptian peasant song, *Ya Tal'i al-Shajarah* (The Tree Climber) makes few concessions to Egyptian popular taste: the dramatic techniques employed are those of the "Theatre

> of the Absurd," to which the play is indebted both for its rejection of established stage-conventions and for its main themes…. Yet though the play reflects the preoccupations of the "Theatre of the Absurd" in its expression of the breakdown of communication, and its picture of man giving way to aggression when confronted with the unknowable, it lacks the starkness and brutality associated with the works of Beckett or Ionesco; moreover, the play, also contains elements of symbolism not readily associated with the "Theatre of the Absurd," most obviously the figure of the dervish. (29)

In a similar vein, *Bank al-Qalaq* (Bank of Anxiety) is another example of al-Hakim's stylistic hybridy. It is an interesting hybrid play which is described by al-Hakim as a *masriwaya* [i.e. play-novel or narrative play] (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 85). It consists of ten narrative chapters alternating with ten scenes of dialogue, and this is probably the product of the author's aesthetic boredom. Al-Ra'i finds in the play an approximation to the 'total theatre' (85). For Badawi, it is quite possible to extract the ten scenes to obtain a self-sufficient play, regarding the narrative part [i.e. the ten novelistic chapters] as no more than expanded stage directions, which are not essential to our understanding of the action. The theme of *Bank of Anxiety*, however, is interesting in that it shows al-Hakim's overwhelming awareness of the dangerous malaise of Egyptian society.

In fact, *Bank of Anxiety* is extremely contemporary in form, perhaps in advance of its time. Much of the play-novel is in the form of dialogue. It might be expected that Egypt's great playwright would eventually develop this new, fast-moving form for a

novel: the *masrawiya* (play-novel). It is a revolutionary technique, giving the play-novel the same impact and double vision as can be achieved on film. The author describes the characters from the outside, instead of having them speak in a straight-forward confession. By shifting his focus from the inner to the outer, somewhat the way a cinema camera moves in on its subject and then jumps far away, al-Hakim can reveal a great deal about his characters. The treatment of Adham's thoughts as he walks along the Nile is a good example of his technique:

> The evening air was fresh outside. It was one of those Cairene nights of May. The stroll along the Nile "Cornish" was delightful. The couples of lovers sat in intimacy all along its stone benches. Every boy clung to his girl. As Adham walked among them, he saw too clearly what their future would be: housing crisis, crises of communication and consumer goods.... That is the end result of the addition, subtraction and division in love operations in our present age. The thing that worries the lovers now is how to get together. But when they are joined under one roof and all becomes naked between them, worry will take on a new aspect … (17)

Furthermore, his juxtaposition of sections of pure dialogue in the text adds to the shifting, cinematographic effect. He has produced much the same atmosphere – "suspended between reality and psychedelic eccentricity" (Hoppe, Online) – that is achieved in films. The following quotation from the end of Chapter Six and the beginning of Scene Six is a good example of Hakim's technique. Adham's newspaper friend Mutawally is talking with Adham and Sha'ban in their newly established bank. He has noticed Sha'ban's attraction for the rich manager's niece and Adham attempts to steer

him away to a different topic before he gets too curious. After Mutawally leaves, Adham and Sha'ban wait for their Bank of Anxiety clients to come. Chapter Six, of which the last page is quoted, is a novelistic chapter, followed by a "scene" arranged like a play:

> The crafty reporter noticed Sha'ban's concern, and cast a sly glance in his direction. Adham understood what he was after, and hastened to cover up for his friend by pointing out that all the case meant to them was an attempt to understand her social class. What was its actual position in this changed society? … Had society really changed? From what point of view had it changed? And how far-reaching was the extent of this change? Was it really complete change, or merely superficial?! ... Mutawally only shrugged his shoulders. Suddenly he seemed tired, because everything outside the realm of pure reporting made him yawn.… Even commentary and analysis of news bored him and made him lazy. Whenever the course of a conversation would reach a joke or a similar triviality, he would get up and leave. This was what he did now. He left the two companions saying that he would return another time to get what news the bank would make.… Adham and Sha'ban were left sitting, waiting for their customers to come. They waited until waiting lost its meaning. And they almost forgot that they were waiting for anyone or anything.… Then, when the doorbell rang they took no notice of it. Or rather, they noticed it, but did not believe it. But it was really ringing …
>
> Scene Six

(*Adham is sitting stiffly at his desk. Sha'ban is in front of him. The Doorbell is ringing …*)

SHA'BAN. Is it really ringing?

ADHAM. Or … do you think we're dreaming?

SHA'BAN. And is it really a customer?

ADHAM. That is what we will know when you open the door.

SHA'BAN. Am I the one who is supposed to open the door?

ADHAM. Of course, who else?

SHA'BAN. Why don't you open it?

ADHAM. Because I am the director.

SHA'BAN. And I am the treasurer.

ADHAM. There is no treasurer any more. We did away with that office because the rich "Bek" handles all financial transactions now.

SHA'BAN. Then there is also no longer any office of director.

ADHAM. How do you mean? [sic.]

SHA'BAN. Because the rich "Bek" also handles general administration. You're no more than a simple employee here, with a desk in room number one.

ADHAM. By this reasoning, you, too, are just another employee and your desk is in room two.

SHA'BAN. Precisely. In other words, there is no difference between you and me. Therefore when the bell rings, one of us must answer.

ADHAM. It must be you who answers because your are number two and I am number one. Number one is better than number two.

SHA'BAN. It's stopped ringing. It seems that the customer has left … (128-29)

The dialogue continues in this vein until the customers come in and begin to recount their problems to Adham and Sha'ban. As seen in the part quoted, *Bank of Anxiety* alternates between the novelistic form and the dialogue without underlying rationale. There is no particular reason the author could not have put what the newspaper reporter said into the dialogue form. The play chapter comes as an interlude to the text. The text merges with the play, giving the novel an ethereal quality, especially since the dialogues are slightly absurd. The reader of *Bank of Anxiety* is suspended like the characters themselves. His attitude alternates between the intense participation of the playgoer and the detached feeling of the omniscient observer in a novel.

4.2.3 Linguistic Hybridity

By 1900 and the first two decades of the twentieth century, Classical Arabic (*fusha*) was the medium of theatrical expression. And though the twenties and the thirties teemed with theatrical activities conducted in vernacular (especially melodramas), serious romantic dramas – mostly translations and adaptations – were mainly in Classical Arabic. But the vernacular sentimental satires of Najib al-Rihani, Awad argues, were the most influential on the new dramatists (including Tawfiq al-Hakim) in the period prior and succeeding the revolution of 1952. Al-Rihani made use of the vernacular "in comedy and in tragi-comedy a living reality at least in Egypt, if not in the Arab world" (L. Awad 184).

However, when al-Hakim first used the vernacular in his celebrated novel *Awdat al-Ruh* (The Return of the Spirit, 1933) and in some of his plays such as *Kull Shay' fi Mahallih* (Not A Thing Out of Place, 1966) he was met with harsh criticism which condemned him as being "a corruptor of the sacred tongue" (qtd in A. Said 14), led by Taha Hussein, a highly esteemed figure. These attacks caused al-Hakim to avoid the vernacular for a while and to use instead what W. M. Hutchins called, a "hybrid language," a middle language between the classical and the vernacular. Hutchins comments on al-Hakim's linguistic hybridity:

> Al-Hakim has not only written works of diverse inspiration with diverse subjects but has written in different types of Arabic as well. He has written in literary Arabic which is not often spoken and in urban and rural spoken dialect which is not often written. In Incrimination, he has experimented with a language hybrid which he hopes will eventually bridge the gap between the different levels of Arabic. (qtd in A. Said 29)

This compromise earned al-Hakim membership in the Arabic Academy of Languages.

In the play *al-Safqah* (The Deal, 1959) with its themes of land ownership and the exploitation of the poor peasant farmers, al-Hakim coaches the dialogue in something he termed 'a third language,' one that could be read as a text in the standard written language of literature, but that could also be performed onstage in a way which, while not exactly the idiom of Egyptian Arabic, was certainly comprehensible to a larger population than the literate elite of the city. The use of such 'hybrid language' enabled al-Hakim to solve the diglottic problem in the field of drama (Somekh 74). In his postscript to the play, al-Hakim indicates that the type of language he devised is comprehensible

both in terms of *fusha* (standard or classical) and of spoken Arabic (*al-Safqah* 159-62). By producing such a text, the playwright is released from the dilemma as to which of the two linguistic levels he is to employ in his dialogue.

In other words, the device would make it possible to write plays which, when read in print, can be understood in accordance with the norms of Classical Arabic, but when staged, it is adaptable, automatically and without incurring many textual changes, to the level of the local dialect (*a'ammiyya*). The following written sentence can operate, therefore, on two linguistic levels, as specified below:

اسمحوا لي بكلمة صغيرة

Can be read in terms of *fusha* (standard) as follows:

Ismahu li bikalimatin saghiratin [Allow me to say something].

It can also be realised in terms of Egyptian [Cairene] Arabic:

Ismahuli bikilma sughayyara [Allow me to say something]. (*al-Safqah* 41)

Al-Hakim's "new hybrid language," then, is not only an experiment at producing a standard text which is reminiscent of the spoken idiom. It is also an attempt to create a bivalent text which exploits the inherent ambiguity of non-vowelled Arabic script (Somekh 75). In a point of fact, in his postscript to *al-Safqah* al-Hakim did not use the term "third language," but that term gradually came to denote the textual type inaugurated in *al-Safqah*. (The term "third language" is used in the postscript to al-Hakim's play *al-Ta'am li-Kul Fam* (Food for Everyone, 1963), although the author seems to refer in that case to the simplified type of standard rather than to the strictly bivalent type.)

Al-Hakim also made an attempt at writing plays with bivalent texts as in *Bank al-Qalaq* (Bank of Anxiety) and *al-Wartah* (The Dead Trouble, 1966). This time, however, he employs a number of forms and functionals which are exclusively dialectal. For example, in *Bank of Anxiety*, al-Hakim uses Egyptian dialectal phrases such as " ليه يا بني ليه" [*laih ya bni laih*] (35), "لكن ايه" [*lakin aih*] (191), and "البوليس؟ تاني؟" [*el-bolees? tani?*] (237).[2] Similarly, in *al-Wartah* we find Egyptian forms such as *illi* [who or which], *di* [this]. In the postscript to *al-Wartah*, he contends that in using such functionals he is not really violating the norms of Classical Arabic, because '*illi*', for instance, is nothing but a short form of '*alladhi*' (al-Hakim, *al-Wartah* 189-99). The same applies in al-Hakim's view of words such as *aywa* [yes] and *ma'rafshi* [I don't know].

However, al-Hakim's innovation aroused heated debate among critics and linguists (Somekh 75), and it would seem that it did not generate a great deal of enthusiasm among other Arab playwrights. Furthermore, al-Hakim himself seems to have abandoned the idea of producing plays with bivalent texts. Most of the plays he wrote in the 1960s and 1970s are either in simplified standard Arabic or in straightforward spoken Arabic (75).

4.3 Evaluating al-Hakim's Hybridity

As it has been discussed earlier, many plots and themes of al-Hakim's plays are derived from texts of the past (Greek or Eastern myths). Al-Hakim seems to suggest that texts of the past "can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha, *Location* 55). For al-Hakim, past and present are inseparable; he employs the wisdom of

[2] "ليه يا بني ليه" [*laih ya bni laih*] is literally translated as "Why, son? Why"; "لكن ايه" [*lakin aih*] as "But what"; and "البوليس؟ تاني؟" [*el-bolees? tani?*] as "The police? Again?"

the past in order to reflect upon the present life.[3] Though plays such as *The Sleepers in the Cave*, *The Sultan's Dilemma*, and *Praxa or the Problem of the Government* tell stories of the past, they actually deal with contemporary issues. For instance, *The Sleepers in the Cave* relates to Egypt's current situation as the country awoke from centuries of stagnation to face the challenge of the twentieth century and Western civilisation; *The Sultan's Dilemma* indicates the great tension in the international situation, which is the fear and anxiety caused by the inability of the world's leaders to decide whether the solution to world problems is to be sought in arbitration by force or by the law; and *Praxa or the Problem of the Government* reflects the failure of the democratic government in Egypt. In harmony with the view proposed later by Homi Bhabha, al-Hakim seems to suggest that the author should not only "recall" the past, but rather "renew" it by "refiguring it as contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (Bhabha, *Location* 10). What makes al-Hakim distinct from other Arab dramatists and writers is that for al-Hakim the past is not 'nostalgia' but a 'continuum' that links to the present and 'becomes a part of the necessity of living' (10).

Al-Hakim's hybrid plays indicate his power of creativity and innovativeness which open up equal spaces of mixing that neither assimilate everything into one global pot, nor deny the right of special recognition to indigenous people and tradition. Moreover, al-Hakim's hybridity entails a gentle modification of his perceptual apparatus to accommodate foreign concepts; and as a result the reader arrives at a new way of perceiving which is necessarily different from, yet accepting of, both cultures s/he

[3] See T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" 260-268.

encounters or inhabits (Kuortti and Nyman 68). In fact, al-Hakim's hybridity seems to be a result of his ceaseless experimentation with the genre of drama in Arabic and with the linguistic capacities of Arabic in order to create a national drama. As a dramatist, al-Hakim experimented with all possible forms and styles while projecting the various social and political issues of the day. In his preface to *al-Masrah al-Munuwwa* (Theatre of Variety), al-Hakim explains the reasons for his experimenting with various dramatic themes and techniques. He argues that his efforts were motivated by his awareness of the "frightful gap" that separates Arabic literature from the world's literature due to the lack of an Arabic dramatic heritage (303). He therefore states that

> For this reason … I have looked to every age. I have created plays that draw inspiration from the Greek theatre … plays inspired by the Quran … [others] inspired by *The Thousand and One Nights* … plays inspired by our contemporary society … and then plays inspired by different sensations and settings … the voyage has toured different styles … [and] has also been through assorted varieties.… I have tried to take in thirty years a trip on which the dramatic literature of other languages has spent about in two thousand years. (303-304)

In this sense, al-Hakim's experimental hybridity seems to be aesthetic [intentional], in Bakhtinian terms, which is described as 'shock, change, challenge, revitalize or disrupt through deliberate intended fusions' and in so doing 'create an ironic double consciousness' (qtd in Kuortti and Nyman 6-7). Thus, al-Hakim's hybridity denotes the way that elements from diverse, seemingly contradictory cultures can, without losing their uniqueness, meet and combine a third space of identity (222).

More importantly, al-Hakim's hybrid plays which are constructed in the 'liminal' 'third space' not only undermine the polarisations of East and West and Self and Other, but also attempt to bring these bipolar opposites close to each other. Like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, al-Hakim seems to suggest that cultures are not really pure but rather mixed and hybrid. They are not discrete phenomena, but being always in contact with one another. Moreover, they 'actually assume more foreign elements, alterties, differences, than they consciously exclude' (E. Said 15). In addition, al-Hakim's hybrid plays create new cultural meaning by means of rearticulating and translating elements that are neither Eastern [Arabic-Islamic] nor Western, 'but something else besides which contest the terms and territories of both' (Bhabha, *Location* 41). Al-Hakim is perhaps the most genius Arab dramatist who has benefited from the potentialities of Western theatre as well as Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) tradition and heritage, and has produced a new form of dramatic writing.

Al-Hakim's hybridity is an attempt to bridge the gulf between East and West, Self and Other, past and present, and tradition and modernity. The hybridised nature of his plays reflects dialogic exchange that negotiates the contact zone and constructs bridges across the gulf: bridges like those described in Irene Nakai's poem:

> i must be like a bridge
>
> for my people
>
> i may connect time: yesterday
>
> today and tomorrow for my people
>
> who are in transition, … (qtd in Kuortti and Nyman 140)

Unlike colonial texts that often focus on binary dynamics of resistance or absorption, al-Hakim's texts (plays) indicate a dialogic nexus of exchange between bipolarities. As hybrid constructions, they offer a multicultural vision beyond the rhetoric of melting pot or mosaic. These plays weave together Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) tradition and Western literary tradition into transcultural texts. They reflect dialogic strategies against colonial dialectics, and craft a hybrid borderland of resistance and freedom where possible worlds and multiple voices co-exist (139).

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Conclusion

Arabic drama (in the Western sense) was characterised by its absence from Arabic literature. Nevertheless, some traditional dramatic forms, such as *pharaonic drama*, *maqama*, *ta'ziya plays* and *shadow plays* existed in early Arabic drama. Although traditional dramatic forms never ceased to exercise some influence on the writings of many modern Arabic playwrights, they never developed into drama in the Western sense (Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature* 330). The latter was imported to Arabic literature only around the middle of the nineteenth century. During the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt (1798-1801) the French troops were entertained by French dramatic spectacles. As the European community in Egypt increased under the modernising rule of Mohammed Ali and his successors, the interest in European opera and drama grew and performances took place both by visiting foreign companies as well as local amateurs. Thus Western theatre was introduced to the Arabs with strong aura of authority. A whole apparatus of translation and reproduction of Western theatrical cannons flourished in the Arab world. As a result, the Arabic dramatists started to appropriate Western models leaving behind the indigenous dramatic forms that could have been dynamised from within. The first Arab writers to appropriate Western drama were the Lebanese Marun al-Naqqash and the Egyptian Yaqub Sannu. They introduced Western drama into the Arab world by means of translation, adaptation and arabicisation. Though modern Arab dramatists translated and adapted Western plays, they wrote original dramatic pieces. More importantly, they assimilated Western dramatic techniques in their original plays.

During the late 1920s and 1930s the popular commercial theatre was providing a cheap diet of singing, dancing, slap-stick comedy and Arabicised French vaudevilles. It

was al-Hakim who gave Arabic drama and theatre respectability and seriousness by publishing his first serious and mature play *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1933), which was described by Taha Hussein as "the first work in Arabic literature which may be properly called drama" (qtd in Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 189). Al-Hakim's extraordinarily long and active career as a dramatist – during which he produced more than seventy plays, covering a period of over half a century, from the 1920s to the 1970s – not only elevated the status of Arabic drama but also made it possible to stand comparison with modern and ancient European drama.

Al-Hakim has contributed tremendously to modern Arabic drama. His dramatic output is classified into different categories and stages: early experimentation with drama, theatre of variety, theatre of the mind, plays after the 1952 Revolution, and theatre of the absurd. These stages in al-Hakim's dramatic career reflect gradual growth in Arabic theatre, a kind of growth that derived its momentum from both the Arabic-Islamic milieu and Western theatrical canon. In other words, al-Hakim's plays are 'hybrid' in nature, i.e. they reflect two different traditions: Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) as well as Western. In this sense, al-Hakim's plays are construed in the 'Third Space' (Bhabha 54): it is a space that is located between East and West, Self and Other, past and present and tradition and modernity.

The study has examined al-Hakim's hybridity at three different levels; textual (or intertextual), stylistic and linguistic. Textual hybridity is the appropriation of a text or theme from the Western tradition and then reshaping it into the Arabic-Islamic context as in *al-Malik Odib* (Oedipus the King, 1949). Stylistic hybridity involves the employment of an Arabic or Islamic text or theme in a Western form or style as in *Ahl al-Kahf* (The

Sleepers in the Cave, 1933). Linguistic hybridity shows al-Hakim's artistic and linguistic talent in employing what is called the "third language": a combination of the Standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect, as in *al-Safqa* (The Deal, 1966). These levels of hybridity in al-Hakim's plays have been illustrated through the discussion of select plays.

Ultimately, Al-Hakim's hybridity opens up new dimensions of experience where the mixing of Eastern and Western dramatic traditions generates something new. Al-Hakim's hybrid plays lead their readers to a network of possible discourses and seem to emanate from a number of different perspectives. They also create a multicultural space in which variety of texts blend and form a new dramatic form. These hybrid texts are made of multiple writings drawn from Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) and Western cultures, entering into mutual relations of dialogue and understanding. As a postcolonial writer, al-Hakim has "double-consciousness." He argues that he "moves in two worlds," for while – as an Easterner – he has benefited from the contact with the European culture by borrowing styles and renewing methods, he still preserves his national spirit (*Pygmalion*, 49). Al-Hakim's hybridity also can be appreciated in its ability to question what appears natural and complete, to problematise binaries East/West and Self/Other. It is a threat to colonial and cultural authority; it subverts the concepts of pure origins or identity of dominant authority through the ambivalence created by denial, unsetting, repetition and displacement (Kuortti and Nyman 9).

The study has attempted to create a space of mutual understanding between the East and the West by means of brining the two bipolar opposites as close as possible to each other. It has focused on the commonality of humanity and emphasised the importance of difference and exchange between people of different cultures. This is a

difference in which the audiences and readers of both cultures appreciate the cultural production of each other without a sense of superiority and demonstrate fluid and flexible identities which are 'enabling' in terms of mutual understanding, acculturation and 'transculturation' (70). Al-Hakim's hybridity can make difference into sameness and sameness into difference, but in such a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different (Young 24-25). The study also suggests that the relationship should be based on negotiation rather than negation, and integration rather than contradiction. This thesis seeks to address various issues by proposing a re-reading of the works of Tawfiq al-Hakim through the analysis of the hybrid nature of his plays as a part of cultural negotiation and socio-political critique.

By writing hybrid drama, Al-Hakim, among few playwrights, has achieved originality and modernity. He was the first Arab writer to be attentive to the prevailing intellectual currents and ideologies of his time. His works have been translated into a number of languages, Western and Eastern, more than the works of any other Arab writer. He is no longer just a literary giant or the greatest Arab dramatist after whom a leading theatre has been named in Cairo; he has become an institution whose literary efforts have become a legend in his lifetime.

Though this study is confined to al-Hakim's major plays, it underscores the necessity of contextual research. It is an attempt to indicate a path for further research on enriching the body of Arabic drama, especially re-reading and reinterpreting al-Hakim's plays and novels. Due to the huge corpus of al-Hakim's literary writings, this thesis has limited itself to the investigation of al-Hakim's dramatic career with a specific reference to select plays: it is beyond the scope of this research to cover all the plays written by al-

Hakim, let alone his novels and other writings, which can also be a fertile soil for further research and investigation. Moreover, the study may not have covered in detail the other dimensions of al-Hakim's plays; for example, al-Hakim's intellectual theatre, his views on women, his "third language" and his philosophy of life.

The texts analysed in this study are significant in that they incorporate a range of global issues that move beyond the dichotomies East/West, Self/Other and tradition/modernity. I would suggest that translating and teaching such texts in non-Arab universities, will encourage people to step outside their stereotypical perceptions, enable them to create a space for the "Other" beyond the ingrained misconceptions and images with which the Arabs have been generally associated with for long time. Basically, studying and teaching such hybrid texts can help show the commonalities between human beings and create awareness of intercultural negotiations and connections. It can play an essential role in bridging the cultural, intellectual and political gaps between the East (Arabs and Muslims) and the West as well as other world communities. These hybrid texts, implicitly or explicitly, challenge the readers to think and re-think and to revaluate their perceptions of Arabic drama and culture. More importantly, the texts open a series of dialogues between literatures and cultures and help in enhancing the knowledge of non-Arabs about the Arabic people and culture.

This study demonstrates that the themes of modern Arabic drama are not limited to any topic, but are rather rich, diverse, multifaceted, changing, challenging, negotiating and crossing borders. Modern Arabic drama reflects numerous issues treated by Arab dramatists in many ways diagnosing and re-evaluating the conditions from different perspectives and suggesting more than a solution for the issues they tackle in their texts.

They include and address issues central to contemporary Arab societies such as political conflicts, social injustices, national struggle, colonialism, women's issues, East/West dichotomy, global politics and peace. Therefore, it is suggested that exploring such themes can serve as a site for understanding the complexities of Arab traditions, culture and politics. It is recommended that the academic studies on modern Arabic drama in general and Tawfiq al-Hakim in particular can stir the interest for non-Arabs to read the texts and develop a better understanding of the Arab and Islamic world. Furthermore, because comparative literature and cultural studies always look for connections among diverse genres, literatures and cultures, a future study could explore connections between modern Arabic drama and modern Indian drama, for example, or modern American drama.

Thus, this study goes beyond the borders of words, identities, cultures and politics, favours a transnational flavour, creates spaces for inter-cultural negotiations and bridges the gulf between traditional enemies. The employment of an approach that avoids the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and develops inclusionary, not exclusionary, and multi-faceted, not dualistic, patterns of cultural exchange and maturation adds global significance to this study as a connective bridge across worlds.

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