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THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN DRAMA ON TWO ARAB PLAYWRIGHTS:  
TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM AND KATEB YACINE

*City University of New York*

PH.D.

1979

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1979

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TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM AND KATEB YACINE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial  
fulfillment for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy, The City University of New  
York.

1979

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Abstract

## THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN DRAMA ON TWO ARAB PLAYWRIGHTS

by

A. Zeyad Barazanji

Adviser: Professor Allan McKormick

The dissertation is a study of the impact of Western literature on the evolution and development of Arabic theatre as evidenced in the works of the Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim and the Algerian playwright Kateb Yacine.

The introduction briefly analyzes the problem of influences in comparative literature and its relation to this study, since the impact of Western literature is evidenced not only in particular works and playwrights, but also in the evolution of a genre from the point of zero. It also describes the state of affairs before and after Napoleon's expedition into Egypt which marked the introduction of European theatre to the Arab world. Finally, it presents the different reasons and theories for the absence of dramatic literature in the Arab world before the nineteenth century.

The first chapter analyzes some of al-Hakim's works before his trip to Paris. This analysis helps in exposing the changes that took place in his dramatic works after his return from Paris. The period is characterized by the direct adaptations of European plays and the influence of the Egyptian popular theatre which specialized in melodramas, comedies and farces.

The second chapter describes some of the works which were written during and after al-Hakim's stay in Paris, and the changes that took place in his dramatic works. Al-Hakim begins to employ serious themes adapted from the Quran, the Bible, and Arabic and Pharonic history. His adaptations of European plays are not mere imitations anymore, they are rather vehicles for conveying his own ideas. Furthermore, al-Hakim begins to pay more attention to structural and stylistic aspects of his dramatic works by attempting to harmonize the different elements of drama for the purpose of creating a cohesive work of art.

The third chapter analyzes the period of maturity in al-Hakim's plays. He begins to create his own themes, responding to the social and political development in his country and the world around him. Characterization, dialogue, metaphor, and structure of his plays begin to aspire to creating myths rather than using history and legend as vehicles for portraying his own ideas. His later dramatic works become perfect enough to be a contribution to world literature.

The fourth chapter analyzes the works of Kateb Yacine, and the trilogy Cercle des represailles in particular. A poet who is directly influenced by French literature, Yacine uses French as the medium of expression, yet his themes deal with the plight of the Algerian people and especially their revolt against the French colonizer. The choice of Yacine as the second Arab playwright in this study was dictated by the fact that his works are a different phenomenon in contemporary Arabic theatre. Yacine employs Algerian themes with Islamic tone, yet he uses French as the medium of expression. As a result his works exhibit a tension between his heritage and the culture he is forced to adopt and which he admires. Therefore his characters and the imagery he employs exhibit a tension that is unique. However, although Yacine is preoccupied with the effects of colonization on his country, his plays never portray the two sides as mere villains or heroes.

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INTRODUCTION

The controversy involving the concept of influence in the comparative study of literature is strong enough to discourage any attempt to approach the question. From Jean-Marie Carre's concept of "rapports de fait" to Ihab Hassan's notion of causality and his call for the interrelationship of various traditions to Anna Balakian's use of the term "influence and literary fortune" a student is asked to form his own opinion. Haskell Block, however, appeals to common sense, declaring that writers learn from other writers "just as painters learn from other painters."<sup>1</sup> I shall attempt to avoid the quagmire of controversy and confine myself to specifics.

Perhaps many, if not all, students of comparative literature assure themselves, truly or falsely, that their subjects are different or unique. I must admit that such a fantasy did cross my mind. Although conflicts might arise when influence between two works of art, two writers, two groups of writers, etcetera, is argued, in my study it is beyond dispute that western culture was responsible for the development of theatre in the Arab world. The question of influence encompasses the birth and evolution of a genre, theatre, in the Arab world from zero to a degree where one can boast of a modest theatrical tradition, a period spanning half a century, from the mid-eighteen-hundreds to the turn of the century and a complete and thorough study of a theme of such magnitude is incompatible with the present limitations of time and space; on the other hand, the evolution of Arabic theatre will become apparent when two carefully chosen playwrights from this culture, the Egyptian Tawfiq al-Hakim and the Algerian Kateb Yacine, are discussed.

For example, in some of al-Hakim's works, such as Oedipus and Pygmalion, one can detect obvious European influence. It would undoubtedly

be interesting to analyze how al-Hakim treated such myths, and I intend to do so; however, of more interest to me is the development of the two playwrights in the light of their European experience.

The term "experience" instead of "influence" is used since, especially in the case of al-Hakim, the European and American influences are evident in the totality of the experience rather than in individual works of art or individual writers. Al-Hakim went to Europe with a completely open mind, eager to experience a new and stimulating culture. Thus his three years in France resulted not only in obvious change in his writing but also a total change in his attitude toward drama and its role in literature. To understand the importance of European theatre in relation to the two playwrights, a brief review of the state of affairs in the Arab world before the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries is necessary.

Before Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 there was little theatrical activity in the Arab world. We know from discoveries made in Egypt early in the Twentieth century of the existence of an ancient Egyptian religious theatre long before the Greeks. The Hieroglyphics on Egyptian temples show a highly ritualistic theatre which the priests controlled within the temples and allowed the public to witness only in part. Luwis 'Awad<sup>2</sup> quotes the Greek historian Herodotus' account of his visit to Egypt. There he witnessed a kind of a religious theatrical presentation, called "mysteries," and he swore to the priests that he would not reveal their secrets. Evidence about the development of this religious theatre into a secular one is thin, yet it exists. Luwis 'Awad also cites an account of an actor's servant who used to travel with his master. Between that period and the Nineteenth century the extent to which theatre developed in ancient Egypt is not clear and awaits new discoveries.

We know that theatre flourished in what is now Greater Syria during the Roman era because the remains of theatres are still used in festivals to this date. Yet, what happened after that? Why did the Arabs, before and after the Islamic period, not have a theatre? How could a literature so rich in achievement fail to produce dramatic literature.

Arab scholars and European Arabists suggested few explanations, some of which were colored by preconceptions and prejudices, while others attempted to be objective and fair. I believe that none of the explanations is convincing by itself and only a combination of factors could be responsible for the absence of drama from Arabic literature before the Nineteenth century.

For the pre-Islamic era, the answer is rather simple. H. A. R. Gibb, in his book Arabic Literature, An Introduction, offers a plausible explanation. Gibb says that the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula "are of necessity nomadic, subsisting chiefly on the produce of their camels and sheep, and compelled to move unendingly from place to place, in search of fresh pasturage."<sup>3</sup> Muhammed Kamal al-Din, in his book Al-Arab Wal Masrah, (The Arabs and the Theatre), elaborates on Gibb's explanation saying that the tribal structure did not possess the dynamics of a settled society of a metropolis, and that the nature of tribal society encourages the concept of the "individual," -- the basic source of dramatic conflict -- to function only within the collective wholeness of the tribe. He also stresses the simplicity of the pre-Islamic religions which did not reach the sophistication of the Greeks.<sup>4</sup>

The post-Islamic era is more complicated since other factors are introduced. Kamal al-Din dismisses the argument of the French scholar, Jacques Berque, who asserts that classical Arabic language is incompatible with the requirements of dramatic dialogue, that it is like a

"beautiful garden" with frozen forms, and that dramatic dialogue requires dynamic forms. He also dismisses the notion that the Arab mind works in generalities and absolutes, and that Arabs do not possess the analytical mind required in dramatic composition.<sup>5</sup> Kamal al-Din's dismissal of such an argument is valid because of early Arab scholars who translated the highly analytical texts of Greek philosophy and commented on them. The social factor of the nomadic nature of pre-Islamic society does not fit the test here since in the post-Islamic period cities like Damascus, Aleppo, Baghdad, and Cairo became centers of learning and scholarship.

Two other explanations are related to history and religion. Before the Arabs conquered Greater Syria and Egypt theatre was prohibited by the Christian rulers because it was viewed as a manifestation of a heathen culture. Therefore, the Arabs did not find examples which they could imitate or adapt. And even if dramatic texts had been found by them their own religious orientation would have made it impossible for them to develop it.

Ahmed Shams al-Din al-Hajaji presents another logical and plausible explanation which is anthropological in nature. He says that theatre is either born within the culture or is adopted from another. When theatre is born within a culture its seeds are found in religious rituals; that is how Greek theatre developed, and how European theatre was reborn early in the Renaissance. Al-Hajaji points out correctly that Islamic religious rituals are carried out individually between the worshipper and the worshipped without the intervention of a priest, and that the communal aspects of these rituals are a means of collective participation where the role of the "priest" is minimal actually there is no need for a clergyman; any member of the Muslim community could lead the prayer. Furthermore,

Muslim prayer lacks the precise and ceremonial rituality of the Christian mass.<sup>6</sup> However, Islam, like Christianity, conceived of only one God as the absolute authority and could not accept the concept of Greek drama (even if they had known it) which was based on the mythology of many gods and the conflict between men and the gods.

With the Mongol invasions and the disintegration of the Abbassid Dynasty, the Islamic world fell to separate statehoods until conquered by the Ottomans. The Arab world then was in virtual isolation from the outside world for five centuries. With the Nineteenth century came contact with Europe and a nationalistic and literary renaissance swept the Arab world. Arabic theatre started in Syria with Marun al-Naqqash, and later spread to Egypt. Yet as Gibb emphasizes, Arabic drama in the Nineteenth century cannot be considered more than a beginning, and that real drama "has found in Tawfiq al-Hakim a major exponent, both in literary drama and in plays on modern social themes."<sup>6</sup>

With the Napoleonic occupation came a cultural influence which manifested itself in, among other things, theatrical performances by visiting theatre groups from France. The theatrical activities attracted the French population and a small circle of upper-class educated Egyptians. Gradually, European theatre gained popularity in the Arab world through the efforts of translators who made this form of entertainment accessible to the middle and lower class. By the end of the Nineteenth century and the beginning of the Twentieth, original plays were being written and dramatic literature was gaining a foothold as a separate genre. About that time, Tawfiq al-Hakim started to adapt plays from the French and eventually committed himself, along with others, to institutionalizing dramatic literature.

In Algeria the story is different. The French occupied Algeria in 1830, incorporated it into France, and made French the official language. They dominated the cultural scene until the 1940's and 1950's, when the Algerians started actively to seek independence. The national awakening that brought about the Algerian Revolution gave birth to a literary movement that struggled to express its national aspirations through drama. One of the members of this movement was Kateb Yacine, an Algerian who fought against the French but who to this day continues to write in French. Hardly a pioneer in theatre, yet an important figure in Algerian literary and political circles, Yacine represents another facet of European influence in the birth and evolution of Arabic drama.

The choice of al-Hakim and Yacine as subjects for this study was prompted by the fact that both writers were influenced by Western theatre, although to a different degree. Al-Hakim writes in Arabic and was, and still is, instrumental in creating a national Arabic theatre that can claim a place in world literature. On the other hand, Yacine writes in French and his writings show an undercurrent of tension between his attraction to French culture and his desire to assert his national identity.

The aim of this study is not only to trace al-Hakim's European experience and Yacine's French influences but also to discover how the two playwrights' relation to western theatre was instrumental in developing and shaping both of them. Borrowing Anna Balakian's statement in this regard, the aim is to reach the "turning point at which the writer frees himself of the influences and finds his own originality."<sup>8</sup>

This study, it is hoped, will open channels that have not been explored in the past and will perhaps help to stir fresh interest in

Arabic literature in general and contemporary Arabic drama in particular. Furthermore, I believe that the broad field of comparative literature is relatively deficient in its approach to the study of Arabic literature. I also hope that my efforts in presenting certain aspects of contemporary Arabic theatre to western readers will promote better understanding between these cultures.

## CHAPTER ONE

TAWFIQ AL-HAKIMLife\*

Tawfiq al-Hakim was born in Alexandria in 1898, according to literary historians, and in 1902 according to his own testimony. His father's family was rooted in Egyptian rural society, while his mother was of Turkish origin. His father was in the legal profession and eventually became a judge. This well-to-do family prepared Tawfiq to follow his father's profession, which was, and still is, considered a respectable one in that society. The family moved frequently from one town to another; as a result al-Hakim was late in starting his formal education. To avoid delay in his intermediate schooling, al-Hakim was sent to Alexandria from a nearby village where his father was working, and for his high-school education al-Hakim was sent to Cairo where he stayed with his uncles. He eventually studied law at the University of Cairo and earned his degree in 1924.

Al-Hakim's time in Cairo gave him an opportunity to attend the theatre and try his hand at writing plays. In Cairo he participated in students' activities and demonstrations against the British occupation of Egypt and was eventually imprisoned for a brief period in 1919. His first play, A'Dha'yf a'Thaqeel, (The Heavy Guest), depicts abuses endured by Egypt under British occupation. His family became aware of Tawfiq's playwriting, an activity not considered respectable by social standards. In order to separate him from Cairo's "corrupt" atmosphere, Tawfiq was sent to Paris for further study after completing his degree in 1925.

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\*This brief synopsis of al-Hakim's life does not attempt to be complete. Its major function is to expose the important elements in his life which affected his career as a writer.

For three years, while his parents believed that he was studying for his doctorate, Tawfiq was deepening his knowledge of European literature and theatre, and acquiring the experience which would be crucial in determining the course of his literary career. He spent most of his time mingling with actors and directors and reading virtually everything that came under his eager eyes. During al-Hakim's stay in Paris, theatre activities were brisk. George Pitoeff's production of Pirandello's Henry IV in 1925, which had a resounding influence on Parisian theatre, was followed with his production of Bernard Shaw's Saint Joan, and Cocteau's Orphée in 1926. Al-Hakim considers his experience in France as the beginning of his serious interest in writing. In France, he discovered writers like Ibsen, Pirandello, Shaw, and Maeterlinck.<sup>9</sup> However, his parents were not very excited about his "literary discoveries," and when Tawfiq failed to achieve progress toward his degree his parents realized their mistake and ordered him to return.

Al-Hakim did not give up easily and tried to stall. He asked his father, through government connections, to secure him a scholarship to study literature instead of law. His father's reply reveals the status of literature in Egypt in those days. Tawfiq's father writes in one letter, "A physician or a lawyer could be a man of letters, but if such a man is to take literature as a profession, the result would be risking his future."<sup>10</sup> In his answer al-Hakim avoids telling the truth and informs his parents that he "never enjoyed the Paris of fun and merriment, and that he started studying from the evening he embarked on the ship to France and that he did the same in Paris." However, al-Hakim does not specify the kind of work he was doing.<sup>11</sup>

His father's negative reply and the lack of personal funds forced al-Hakim to return to Egypt and to work in the legal profession.

However, the three years spent in Paris were enough to open his eyes to a new world, a new culture, and a new experience. The respect Europeans had for the theatre and the arts gave him a new impetus to dedicate his life to literature and to the elevation of the arts in Egyptian society. His testimony about the Parisian theatre reveals the differences between the two worlds. He describes how he was shocked when he went to the Comedie Francaise after he was accustomed to the Ukasha Theatre where he used to stage his comedies; "It was like going from a fish stall to a fruit market."<sup>12</sup>

In 1929 al-Hakim was transferred to the civil courts as a prosecutor, a post he held for five years. In his new position, which required living in rural areas, al-Hakim was able to be in touch with all classes of Egyptian society, rich and poor. His observations and experiences were used in one of the best and most profound autobiographical novels in modern Arabic literature, Mudhakkarat Na'eb Fil'Aryaf, (Diary of a Public Prosecutor). The novel registers the agony, joy, ignorance, and wisdom of Egyptian peasants through the eyes of a sympathetic and scrutinizing observer. The novel was translated into many European languages as a masterpiece of modern Arabic literature.

During those years while working at the law al-Hakim never ceased to write, especially after he was transferred to the Ministry of Education as chief investigator in 1934. But he was never comfortable in his government positions and, on one occasion, was reprimanded by the minister for writing an article in a Cairo newspaper criticizing corruption in the Egyptian parliamentary system in 1938. As a result of his refusal to retract his criticism, fifteen-days pay was deducted from his salary and he was eventually transferred to the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1939. After four years in that ministry al-Hakim could no longer bear the routine of government jobs;

he resigned his post and joined the daily newspaper "Akhbar al-Ya'wm," ("Today's News"). The new position gave him an opportunity to voice his opinions about the political and social affairs in Egypt without social restraint. However, the more valuable aspect was an opportunity to publish serially many of his works.

In 1951 al-Hakim returned to the government as a general director of the public library system. In 1956, he was appointed a full member, with the rank of a deputy minister, of the newly established Higher Council for the Patronage of the Arts and Letters. In 1959, he became Egypt's representative to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in Paris. Ironically, al-Hakim did not want to stay in Paris for long and preferred to return to his previous position.

In recent years, al-Hakim has become more involved in the social and political problems of Egypt, an involvement that has subjected him alternatively to the praises and denunciations of the official Egyptian news media. Some leftist and marxist critics consider al-Hakim's writings reactionary, some political moderates accuse him of being an opportunist, and still others accuse him of isolating himself in an ivory tower. The truth of the matter is that al-Hakim does not associate himself with any specific ideology and, therefore, is hard to categorize. Moreover, although his opinions and plays have always stirred some kind of controversy, no critic or literary historian can avoid acknowledging al-Hakim's contributions to Arabic theatre and his leading role in establishing Arabic drama as a genre.

A survey of al-Hakim's life and autobiographical works show that his mother was a dominant force on his character. Her fiery temper and domineering character seem to have led him to avoid women for a long time,

until his marriage in 1949. He has been accused by many critics of being misogynous, a label he helped to shape, for in his early writings al-Hakim was rarely sympathetic to his female characters.

Women represented for al-Hakim a distraction from artistic creation. He seems to believe firmly that his father was possessed of an authentic passion for poetry that was muffled by the routine of family life and probably by lack of encouragement from his wife. Even in the play Devant son guichet, which he wrote in French while in Paris, and which reveals some empathy for the girl ticket-seller, the man and the woman always talk through a window and the play remains vague as to whether or not a meeting ever took place between them. His recent works reveal a more balanced treatment of the female characters. In his plays, as in society, the status of women has definitely changed; they no longer are merely objects of beauty to be appreciated from a distance, but rather strong characters who can compete with men on an equal footing.

#### The Three Stages of Dramatic Development

In an introduction to a collection of plays, Al-Masrah al-Muna'wwa' (Theatre of Variety or Various Plays), (1956), al-Hakim describes his plays as a thirty-year journey in different directions. Some of his plays are serious, others are comic; some are written in classical Arabic, others in Egyptian dialect; still others are philosophical, social, or political. Al-Hakim asserts that "any contemporary European playwright who belongs to the Western tradition, writes today with his feet deeply rooted in two thousand years of theatrical heritage, firmly rooted in the literature of his country and in the Greek tradition."<sup>13</sup> He describes how literary experience is limited in the Arabic language

because the Arabs did not recognize dramatic literature until recently. "Therefore," al-Hakim says, "the playwright in our country is starting from zero point and is writing with a large gap behind him."<sup>14</sup> Al-Hakim justifies his "mad journey," as he calls it, as his effort to fill the gap in Arabic literature. He believes he is offering the Arab world what they have missed in the last thousand years. However, in another collection of plays, Masrah al-Mujtama', (Theatre of Society), (1950), al-Hakim suggests another justification for his "mad journey." He asserts that the different directions he followed in writing his plays were due to a response to Egyptian society and what it went through in the last thirty years.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Hakim's justifications are difficult to believe in the former case and, although rather plausible in the latter, still remain incomplete. His adherence to popular trends and his concern for audience reaction were also important factors in determining the nature of his plays, especially before his direct contact with European theatre, which is the principal topic of this thesis.

Al-Hakim's plays have been studied and analyzed quite frequently; he is, in fact, one of the most studied writers in the Arab world. Critics have approached his works from different angles -- thematical, stylistic, and generic -- but no one has approached his works in the light of European influence and its effect on shaping his drama. To be sure, a few critics have referred to his experience with European writers, but no study has been devoted to tracing that experience in particular plays and analyzing al-Hakim's original contributions.

Al-Hakim himself does not deny such experience; indeed, he confirms its validity. In an interview given to the Egyptian monthly, Al-Masrah,

(Theatre), he attacks some Egyptian critics who believe that developing countries should not subject themselves to foreign influence in cultural affairs. "It is natural," al-Hakim says, "to believe that we must find our originality in our past and our folk traditions; it seems to me that this is the complex of developing countries; nations which are culturally established do not need to affirm their uniqueness, and do not hesitate to borrow from other nations."<sup>16</sup> He compares the arts of all nations to a melting pot in which every nation contributes its share for the benefit of humanity. "Therefore," says al-Hakim, "our national arts must feed themselves from whatever source that can aid in their development and help them flourish . . . and should not be satisfied with a single source."<sup>17</sup>

Ahmad Shams al-Duin al-Hajaji emphasizes the effects of al-Hakim's European experience: "If al-Hakim had stopped at that point [i.e. staying in Egypt] he would not have had such a great influence on Arabic theatre . . . In France his experience with the theatre was polished to return and write The People of the Cave."<sup>18</sup> Al-Hakim, in his introduction to Odipus the King speaks about his experience in France in the third person:

The writer of these lines left for Europe. . . and there the secret was revealed to him, and did not find much trouble in discovering the key to the problems (of Arabic theatre). The world of theatre and literature in Europe is interlocked with no barriers between them. The reason is simple: Drama is a genre of literature, taught in colleges and universities as literature before it is pushed to the theatre. The writer of these lines had to start from the beginning (of European literature), return to the fountain . . . He thought that he could start anywhere, but discovered that he had to start with the Greeks.<sup>19</sup>

### The Pre-European Stage

The pre-European stage in al-Hakim's works is not directly related to this study since during this period al-Hakim did not experience the

European theatre in Europe itself. While some of the plays were translations or adaptations of French plays (Aminos is an adaptation of Alfred de Musset's Carmosine), others, such as Ali Baba, reflect al-Hakim's response to the appetite of the Egyptian audience for musical comedy and farce. What is predominant in them is the influence of the Egyptian popular theatre of the period, a theatre that compromised artistic and literary values for the sake of satisfying a largely uneducated and unsophisticated audience.

The question that might arise is why analyze these plays if they are not directly related to al-Hakim's European experience. Classical European plays were presented in translation for an elite audience in the Opera House in Cairo, and it is possible that al-Hakim was influenced by them. My contention is that this survey will demonstrate not only the influences of the European experience on al-Hakim's works but also will show that this experience was instrumental in changing al-Hakim's ability to write, and in leading him to discover his individuality. By analyzing one or more plays from the first period, I will be able to show al-Hakim's strength and weaknesses and study the changes that took place after his return from France.

Most of the plays in the early period were written for acting companies and disappeared with their dissolution. The plays in the first stage, extending to the year 1931, are: A'Dha'yf A'Theqiel, (The Heavy Guest), (1919); Khatem Sula'yman, (The Ring of Sula'yman), (1923); Aminos, (1922); Al-Mar'a A'Jadida, (The New Woman), (1923); Al-'Arees, (The Bridegroom), (1924); 'Ali Baba, (1924-1925); Devant son guichet, (1926); Al-Khuru'j min al-Jannah, (Exit from Paradise), (1928); Sirr al-Muntahirah, (The Secret of the Woman Who Committed Suicide), (1929),

Ha'yat Tahatamat, (A Ruined Life), (1930); Rasasa Fil Qalb, (A Bullet in the Heart), (1931). Although the texts of the musical comedies have been lost, and newspaper reviews and critiques are mostly subjective and could hardly be used as a basis for a critical analysis of the plays, the texts of some of the social comedies are available and bear many of the weaknesses and potentialities of al-Hakim's early plays. I have, therefore, chosen to analyze The New Woman as an example from the first period.

Written in 1923 and produced in 1926, the play aroused controversy in Cairo's social circles, especially among activists in the women's rights movement, because of its attack on their beliefs. The play revolves around the efforts of Mahmood, a wealthy middle-aged widower, to find a husband for his daughter Leila and the complications that ensue. Leila had been living with her aunt since her mother's death, but after the death of her aunt Leila moved in with her father. Aware that his daughter's presence will deprive him of his freedom, he commissions his secretary to find her a husband. The secretary suggests Sulayman, a tenant in one of Mahmood's buildings. Sulayman seems an appropriate candidate because he is rather sophisticated and has been unable to pay his rent for the last few months. In order to make marriage to Leila attractive, Mahmood transfers ownership of the building where Sulayman lives to Leila. Initially indignant at the secretary's proposal, Sulayman relents when Leila calls to collect the rent. While Leila is in Sulayman's apartment, Ni'mat, the run-away wife of Sami, a friend of Leila's father, comes out of the bedroom. We discover she had run away because she suspected an illicit relationship between Leila and Sami. However, Leila assures Ni'mat that such a relationship never existed and that Sami has been looking for Ni'mat for the last three months.

The third and final act takes place at Mahmood's country house, where people have gathered to attend Leila and Sulayman's wedding. But, marrying Sulayman had not occurred to Leila, who has no objections to being his friend but does not want to become his wife. She is deaf to all appeals. Sulayman is about to give up the whole matter, but is persuaded by Mahmood to try again. Ni'mat then arrives. In this revelation act, Ni'mat accuses Leila not only of stealing her husband but also of trying to marry her lover. Sulayman, who had not bargained for this kind of wife, leaves Mahmood's house and seeks freedom again. The play ends without the expected happy conclusion.

The theme of the play is the evil of women liberation and the corruption and immorality that might arise from it. The play is designed to prove that a society that allows women to remove their veils and have relations with men outside the sanctity of marriage will suffer the chaos we witness in the third act. It shows how single men become reluctant to seek marriage since they can form liaisons with women without the moral and social commitment that are a part of marriage, and how marriages might be destroyed because men and women already married are allowed to relate freely to members of the opposite sex. Al-Hakim is perhaps unaware of the implications of his thesis; he is, in effect, denying the validity of friendship between members of the opposite sex. He is also negating the fact that marriage is a human relationship as well as a sexual one. Of course, time has shown that al-Hakim's fears were unwarranted, and he was fair enough to apologize for his attitude in the preface to the 1956 edition of the play.

The play could be considered a piece-a these in which al-Hakim seems to be obsessed with the need to make a loud noise. He strives to satisfy the stage with a cheap laugh and an illogical melodramatic thrill, losing his target on the way. He projects his thoughts into an artificial world

that could have been only partially witnessed by him and which hardly resembles reality. He approximates reality when he portrays the male and the old-fashioned female within his society, for he is part of that world. But when he attempts to depict progressive women, who are trying to rid themselves of outmoded and inherently repressive traditions, he stumbles and echoes well-worn patterns of stage action which lead away from the particularity required to convey his message.

Instead of creating a balance between the thesis and the antithesis, al-Hakim hammers at his theme before evincing it. He stresses and sometimes overstresses his point by direct exposition, and the play does not achieve its desired effects through the characters' words. The reader stands confused between two forces: the liberationists and the anti-liberationists. The anti-liberationists are themselves corrupt and their criticism loses credibility. As for the liberationists, represented by Leila, they are feebly portrayed and are not given a chance to develop or mature. In other words, the subject of the play is not dramatized through the ordering of impressions and the imaginative activity of the spectator, but rather through direct statements of such characters as the wife of Ali, one of Mahmood's cronies. She is rich and rather ugly, and her husband lives with her because of her money. The criticism of the liberationists from such a woman is comic but not convincing.

What is most disturbing is the illogical hypothesis which al-Hakim uses as his spring-board. It bears the seeds of its own contradictions by prophesying chaos in social relations. This hypothesis appeals to the ignorantly conservative among his audience and, in the process, leads them to ask the wrong questions instead of inspiring them by what is left unsaid.

As my summary of the plot might indicate, the unifying element is the thesis. Yet the incongruity between the events and the characters and

their attitudes shows that al-Hakim was not able then to construct a tightly-knit plot. His attention was directed towards a melodramatic finale while leaving the structure loosely joined with incidents that comment on the subject but do not inspire meditation. The comic element in the plot succeeds only in deceiving us about the outcome of the third act. Although al-Hakim succeeds in making his ideas palatable to the ordinary spectator, his jokes are at times tasteless and appeal to the pedestrian side of his public.

If al-Hakim was trying to portray the corruption that results from freer relations between men and women, he chose the wrong characters to present his point of view. The male characters are drawn from real life, representing stereotypes which could be encountered in Egyptian society. Ulterior motives prompt their actions. Most, if not all the characters remain two-dimensional, with very little psychological conflict. Mahmood, for example, has one objective in mind, to find a husband for his daughter. The rest of the male characters are not very different; Mahmood's cronies are either parasites who nibble from his table or men seeking company in their debauchery and drinking bouts. Their usefulness in developing the plot is questionable, and they can be eliminated without harming in the least the structure of the play.

However, al-Hakim struck an early success in portraying the financially bankrupt bachelor, Sulayman, who has squandered his inheritance. Although manipulative and perhaps opportunistic, as when he borrows three hundred pounds from his mistress Ni'mat, he remains lively and provocative. He does not accept the lure offered by Mahmood's secretary, yet when Leila appears he changes his mind and accepts the deal; not on account of the building, but because Leila is beautiful and sophisticated enough for him. Thus, surprised by Leila's arrival,

Leila: Tell me frankly. Are you really fallen to that point?\*

Sulayman: Very!

Leila: What is the reason? Gambling? Cotton market? Stocks?

Sulayman: What gambling, what cotton, and what stock market?

Leila: Then what happened exactly?

Sulayman: (confused) I don't know . . . what happened to me was very sudden!

Leila: When did all this happen?

Sulayman: Just one minute ago!

Leila: Strange . . . only one minute ago you had money?

Sulayman: What has money to do with it?

Leila: Then how did you lose your money?

Sulayman: Who said I lost money?

Leila: Then what did you lose?

Sulayman: My mind! . . .

Leila, who appears to have some individuality at the beginning of the play, is brutally ridiculed before she can prove her case. She becomes more and more unconvincing by increasingly progressive artificial situations. Although al-Hakim is trying to portray Leila as a fickle person who lacks moral integrity, she remains the strongest character, even when compared with her male counterpart. The result is disharmony between the characters drawn from real life and those who are a product of al-Hakim's imagination. As we shall see later, al-Hakim will learn from his contact with European theatre to discover the third dimension in his characters and perceive the motivation from within the play and the situations that intrinsically reflect its structure and development.

The haphazard portrayal of the characters is most evident in Ni'mat's role. Although she could be considered a central character in what might be called a sub-plot, Ni'mat remains but a shadow character. She is the liberated woman who introduced Leila to her husband and who later left him, believing that he had an illicit relationship with Leila. The circumstances surrounding her departure are not explained. It was unlikely

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\*He means to say that he is falling in love with her, while she thinks that he is talking about his finances.

that a married woman in a city like Cairo in the early 1920's would simply disappear without provoking a major scandal. Yet even her husband's friends are not aware of her disappearance. I believe that al-Hakim could not find a logical solution to the problem and left it vague. Al-Hakim does not tell us how Ni'mat became a "friend" of Sulayman. These and other gaps are evident in his handling of characterization and they mislead the reader with many disturbing questions. What really happened between Leila and Ni'mat's husband, if anything, that led Ni'mat to leave her husband? If Ni'mat is such a believer in women's liberation, why did she abandon her husband without discovering the truth?

Al-Hakim has always been praised for his ability to manipulate dramatic dialogue effectively, and in this play he shows early signs of his future craftsmanship. Using the upper middle class dialect of Cairo urbanites, al-Hakim sets the pace in the first act. The tempo rises with every new arrival to Mahmood's house, as his friends are forced into an adjacent room for fear that the visitor may turn out to be his expected mistress. Here, al-Hakim is comfortable in handling the dialogue, for this is the language of men chatting in the coffeehouses of Cairo, and al-Hakim is quite familiar with it. However, he is not familiar with unconventional characters, like Leila, Mahmood's daughter. In Leila's argument with her father an imposed masculinity is evidenced by her selection of words, and although she is more convincing than her father, the quality of the characterization remains mediocre. In his handling of this scene, al-Hakim seems to be echoing the dogmatic standpoint of the antiliberationists, and he reaches the point of depicting Leila more as a schoolgirl demanding her weekly allowance than as an intelligent adult. Moreover, Leila's words do not seem to spring from deep inner convictions; they sound rather hollow and trite.

In the second act, the dialogue becomes more conversational and less dramatic. To relieve the monotony, al-Hakim uses word-play in a comic manner that reaches vulgarity at times. When the secretary is making his offer to Sulayman, for example, a misunderstanding develops. Sulayman asks about a business deal concerning the building while the secretary answers by describing Leila. In the process, sexual allusions are used about closed doors and the good condition of the "building." Although the jokes and the allusions are very funny, they do not further the cause of the antiliberationists; actually, they prove the point of the liberationists about the decadence of outmoded tradition. In contrast, Leila's reply to her father demonstrates more logical thinking:

Mahmood: What about today's educated woman?

Leila: Today's educated girl understands her relation with men not only in terms of marriage!

Mahmood: Then what?

Leila: There are other types of relations! There is friendship, there is the relation at work; the educated Egyptian woman must look at man not only as a husband, but also as a friend, a companion, and a fellow worker.<sup>21</sup>

In the face of such an argument, whatever the father says will be useless, because his defense is that of a male-dominated world afraid of being invaded by women.

As social criticism, the play fails to achieve a balanced exposition of the antagonistic forces, and the contest is presented neither through dramatic conflict nor through the characters' inner conflicts. On the other hand, the comic aspect is marred by a confused melodramatic ending that does not accomplish any kind of relief. The play is dated, and does not reach beyond immediate popular consumption. Al-Hakim would eventually learn from his European experience, and from playwrights like Ibsen, how to transcend immediate social problems and achieve universality.

The New Woman is but one example of al-Hakim's pre-european plays, since a complete survey of all his works during that period would be beyond the scope of this work. The New Woman was chosen because most of the important aspects of al-Hakim's first period are evident in this play. Other important plays pertaining to this phase are Aminososa, al-Hakim's adaptation of Alfred de Musset's Carmosine -- the analysis of which was not feasible since the text is not available -- and his adaptation of the story of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" from the Arabian Nights. While the former reveals an early attraction to romantic themes, the latter denotes an ability to write comedies for the sole purpose of entertainment and anticipates his more mature adaptations of Biblical and Islamic myths.

What is essential to note in this period of al-Hakim's work is this total dedication to theatre and his ability to adapt himself to new situations. The lack of technical versatility of juxtaposition of the different elements of dramatic structure will be improved in the second period. It is in the second period that al-Hakim will not only be able to adapt from European theatre, but also to interpret plays like Oedipus.

## NOTES

## Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Haskell Block, "The Concept of Influence in Comparative Literature," Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature, no. 7, (University of North Carolina, 1958), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis 'Awad, Dirasat fi Adabina al-Hadith, (Studies in Our Modern Literature), (Cairo, 1961), pp. 16-45.

<sup>3</sup>H. R. A. Gibb, Arabic Literature, An Introduction, (London: Oxford University Press, 1926; 2nd ed. 1963), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Muhammed Kamal al-Din, Al-Arab Wal Masrah, (The Arabs and the Theatre), (Cairo, 1975), pp. 23-24.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-33.

<sup>6</sup>Ahmed Shams al-Din al-Hajaji, Al-Arab wa Fan al-Masrah, (The Arabs and the Art of Theatre), (Cairo, 1975), p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>Gibb, p. 161.

<sup>8</sup>Anna Balakian, "Influence and Literary Fortunes: The Equivocal Junction of Two Methods," Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature, no. 11, (Indiana University, 1962), pp. 24-31.

<sup>9</sup>Al-Hakim, Sujn al-Umr, p. 222.

<sup>10</sup>Al-Hakim, Safahat Min al-Tarikh, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>12</sup>Al-Hakim, Interviews, November 12, 1970.

<sup>13</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Al-Masrah al-Muna'wwa', (Various Plays), "Introduction," (Cairo, 1954), p. 6. [A collection of plays.]

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Masrah al-Mujtama', (Theatre of Society), "Introduction," (Cairo, 1950), p. 6. [A collection of plays.]

<sup>16</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Ahadeeth Ma'a Tawfiq al-Hakim 1951-1971, (Interviews with Tawfiq al-Hakim 1951-1971), (Cairo, 1971), p. 30.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>18</sup>Ahmad Shams al-Din al-Hajaji, Myth in Contemporary Arabic Theatre, (Cairo, 1975), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup>Al-Hakim, "Introduction," Odipus the King, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup>Various Plays, Al-Mar'a al-Jadida, (The New Woman), (Cairo, 1923), pp. 600-601.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 569-570.

## CHAPTER II

THE POST EUROPEAN STAGE

Al-Hakim's return from France in 1928 marks the beginning of a new stage in his career. His concept of drama had been enriched by three years of intense experience in Paris. In his pre-European period he was anxious to satisfy the immediate needs of a popular audience by writing plays that were mainly meant to entertain, sacrificing in the process literary values. Now, fired by the literary and artistic status of theatre in Europe, al-Hakim devotes himself to elevating the Egyptian theatre.

His first attempt at writing after his return resulted in Rasashah fi al-Qalb (A Bullet in the Heart), (1931), a social comedy that repeats many of the stereotypes of this early period. Although the play was later made into a film, it was never staged. A Bullet in the Heart is a definite improvement when compared with his social comedies and musical farces of the early period, but still lacks the depth and subtlety of later plays. As a result of poor response to this play and a growing dissatisfaction with the Egyptian theatre in general, al-Hakim ceased to participate in theatrical activities. A period of relative isolation now begins, during which he wrote some of the best plays of his career. Al-Hakim asserts that these plays were not intended for the popular theatre, but mainly for reading. He describes how his contact with European theatre made him change his attitude:

Today, theatre starts in my mind and the characters become ideas moving in the absolute of meaning, wearing the garment of symbols. I still believe in the "Coup de theatre" [a reference to the gimmicks of pre-European period], yet now it is not the incident but

the idea. That is why the gap between me and the stage widens, and I could not find a way to transmit my ideas in any other way other than the press.<sup>1</sup>

In the same introduction, al-Hakim professes his admiration of Aurelien Lugne-Poe comparing his plays to the French dramatist. Lugne-Poe, who took over the Theatre d'Art in 1893 and made it the Theatre de l'Oeuvre, was a champion of the theatre of ideas, with everything subordinated to the idea.<sup>2</sup> This and his pioneering antirealism seems to have played a role in giving al-Hakim an example and an excuse to write plays for reading only. These plays are: Ahl al-Kahf (The People of the Cave), (1933); Sheherazade, (1934); Muhammed, (1936); Braxa Jura, (1939); Pygmalion, (1942); Sulayman al-Hakim, (Solomon the Wise), (1943); Odipe al-Malik, (Oedipus the King), (1949); Isis, (1955). These "dramas of ideas" represent a complete shift from the early plays, yet if we recall that al-Hakim's apprenticeship began not with the "drama of ideas," but rather with the physical actuality of the stage, we realize that his divorce from the theatre could not last very long. The European experience was still too fresh in his mind, and he was to discover later that a dramatist has to combine literary values with theatrical techniques in order to achieve perfection.

The eight plays mentioned above fall into three categories: the first three and Sulayman are derived from Arabic literature and Islamic legends and the next three from Greek mythology, while Isis' source is to be found in Egyptian mythology. Although the first group of plays was not adapted from European literature, its influence is evident in their style, characterization, and dramatic structure. They are basically influenced by such European playwrights as Ibsen, Shaw, and Pirandello, as al-Hakim himself admits. These three playwrights were labeled as proponents of the

"theatre of ideas;" yet their plays were intended for acting and were successfully produced. Al-Hakim's plays, however, still await the resourcefulness of a creative director for, as we shall see later, they are inherently difficult to stage.

Of the four plays derived from Arabic literature and Islamic legends only People of the Cave will be analyzed in detail. The importance of the first chapter, and the analysis of The New Woman in particular, will be instrumental in determining the areas of development in the new phase. Al-Hakim's choice of material and his treatment of it confirms that he is a different artist from the young playwright who set out to complete his studies in France in 1925. Al-Hakim's concept of adaptation at this stage of his career is completely different from his earlier vision; he is not simply "Egyptianizing" the material at hand, he is interpreting it as well. In his introduction to Oedipus al-Hakim defines his concept of adaptation: "The purpose of adaptation," he says, "is to ladle from the sources and then absorb those sources and reproduce them to the reader, colored with our own ideas. That is what the Arab thinkers and philosophers had done with Plato and Aristotle," and that is what al-Hakim sets out to do.<sup>3</sup> Al-Hakim calls this process a "wedding" between two spirits and two literatures. In the same introduction to Oedipus, al-Hakim says that upon his return to Egypt in 1928 he felt a need to introduce a tragic element into Arabic theatre, and that his aim was to view the Islamic legend in reference to the Greek concept of tragedy.<sup>4</sup>

Considered by many Arab literary critics and historians as the first attempt at creating a drama of literary value in Arabic literature, The People of the Cave was written in 1933 and unsuccessfully produced by the Egyptian National Theatre Company in 1935. Taha Hussein, one of the most

respected writers and critics in the Arab world describes the play as a serious phenomenon, "not only in contemporary Arabic literature but in all Arabic literature."<sup>5</sup> The source of the play is the Koranic story of a group of Christians and their dog who escaped persecution and slept in a cave for more than three hundred years, after which they woke up to look at the world. During this time Christianity had become the dominant religion of the country. The men eventually went back to the cave, where they died. Al-Hakim also consulted Christian sources, which differ from the Koranic one in the number of men and the time spent in the cave. The simplicity of the story lends itself to elaboration and to freedom of treatment on the part of the playwright. Al-Hakim utilizes all the possibilities of the original plot and creates the first myth in Arabic drama.

In the play, al-Hakim is concerned with the age-old struggle of man against time, a subject that had preoccupied the minds of ancient Egyptians since the dawn of history, as the pyramids, the tombs, and the mummies forever remind us. The play is also concerned with the conflict between what al-Hakim called "reality" and "truth" as the three men and their dog are confused between the two worlds. Whether influenced by Pirandello or not, al-Hakim seems to be obsessed with the idea of reality and truth and their effect on human activities.

The play opens with three men awakening in the cave, aching and feeling hungry, thinking they had slept for only a day or so. They send the shepherd Yamlikha to get food. He returns and tells them of his encounter with a strangely dressed horseman who was frightened when he offered him coins in exchange for some food. The three men realize that their beards and fingernails have grown unusually long and they begin to

suspect that something strange has happened. The horseman returns with other men, and after seeing the three men they run away shouting, "Ghosts! Ghosts of the dead!"<sup>6</sup>

The second act is set in the palace where the king is discussing the legend of three men who had escaped the tyranny of the heathen king, Duqyanose, and were never seen again. They also mention a prophecy which predicts their return. The three men are brought to the palace and honored like saints. However, the men are interested in their past lives and want to know about their families and property. The shepherd leaves to look for his herd, while Marnoosh goes to town to look for his wife and son. Mishilina stays in the palace because he sees in the king's daughter, Prisca, who has the same name and resembles a former loved one, the daughter of the heathen king Duqyanose.

The shepherd is the first to realize the futility of his efforts when he is told that some three hundred years have passed, and he resigns himself to that fact by returning to the cave with his dog. Marnoosh tries harder, and discovers that his house had vanished a long time ago and that his son had died of old age. He returns to the cave realizing that his relation to the past no longer exists. Only Mishilina remains because he still hopes to revive his love with young Prisca. However, his insistence only deepens his agony and frustration, and he eventually returns to the cave to die with his two friends.

The fourth act takes place in the cave, where a dialogue occurs about the nature of life and religion. The three men are joined by young Prisca, who decides to die with her new-found love. The entrance to the cave is blocked by earth, and a monument is built to commemorate the three, or rather four, saints.

When comparing the plot of The People of the Cave with that of the early plays, the difference is immediately apparent. Instead of the uselessly complex webs of The New Woman and Aminososa we have a plot that does not confuse the reader with endless subplots that add nothing to the development of the play as a whole. The haphazard design of The New Woman is replaced by an almost choreographic structure: the play opens with the three men in the cave and the fourth act ends there. In the second act they disperse, each looking for his past. Later, their return to the cave is logically motivated, and, finally, in the fourth act they are regrouped in the cave, the only remaining bond that relates them to each other.

The characters from The People of the Cave differ from the two-dimensional stereotypes of the early period, and now we have individuals with whom we also can identify. These are men who struggle to come to terms with the realities they face, and except for the intrusion of Prisca in the fourth act, the major characters are left to develop without the direct interference of the playwright. As in many well-written plays, the development of the characters and the fate they face are the natural result of the inner dynamics of the play and are not brought about by the strings of a playwright-puppeteer whose aim is to develop the plot regardless of verisimilitude.

There is a certain grouping of characters in the play that adds to a tight structure. The three men and their dog represent the past, while the other characters represent the force of the present. The two groups are linked by Prisca, who ties the past to the present with her resemblance to the dead Prisca, Mishilina's beloved. Although the three men represent the past, they are different and embody different character

traits. The shepherd is the "born Christian" who never questioned his faith because he did not know anything else. His wisdom is nature's wisdom and his concern in life is the tending of his flock. Upon discovering that the flock is gone and that he has been asleep for such a long time, he accepts his destiny and returns to the cave with submission. He is the first to return because his attachment to the world is material, and therefore less binding. He is also the first to doubt his belief in religion, and he dies a disbeliever, for his belief was not rooted in deep personal conviction. The second man, Marnoosh, is attached to the world by social bonds, and he lingers longer because social attachment is stronger than material attachment. He refuses to return to the cave when the shepherd tries to convince him that there is nothing in this world for them. Upon discovering the loss of his family, he submits and returns to the cave with deep anguish. He dies doubting his belief in God and a life after death.

Mishilina is the one who lingers longest. His attachment to the world is emotional and thus more lasting. He clings to it, hoping to convince young Prisca to renew the past through their love. However, Prisca realizes that he does not love her for herself, but rather for her resemblance to the other Prisca, Duqyanose's daughter. It takes some self-searching on the part of Mishilina, but he finally relents and accepts his own destiny. In this love subplot, al-Hakim dramatizes his concept of truth versus reality. Mishilina is trying to overlook the truth about his life and clings to the illusion of love, but is finally convinced after Prisca reveals her identity:

Mishilina: Prisca! Are you not the daughter of Duqyanos!  
 Prisca: Are you mad? Could I be the daughter of a king who died three hundred years ago?

Mishilina: (Holding his head in his hands as if expecting a catastrophe) Who are you then? My God! I am about to go mad, I am going mad. . . .

Prisca: (Stretching her hand to him with concern) What is the matter with you?

Mishilina: The daughter of this man, this king . . . God! How could this be?

Prisca: Whom did you think I was . . . Oh . . . (She shouts as if something had become clear to her) Oh! . . . yes . . . yes . . . My God . . . I understand . . . I understand.

Mishilina: (Raising his head) What? What?

Prisca: I understand . . . I am not the Prisca you mean, My God . . . then all the things you said were not for me, but for the other.

Mishilina: I don't understand.

Prisca: Did you forget that you are three hundred years old? Did you forget that you stayed in the cave for three hundred years?<sup>7</sup>

This truth "overcomes" reality, and Mishilina returns to the cave accepting defeat but never losing faith in his religion.

Prisca's decision to be buried alive with Mishilina is a forced addition to the plot. It could be justified in many different ways, but it never blends in with the landscape of the play. Al-Hakim prepares the reader for the final act by allowing Prisca to relate a recurrent dream about being buried alive, but the act remains poorly motivated.

Prisca: (With agony) Dreams of youth . . . (as if talking to herself) Yes . . . you were right about that.

Galias (the tutor): Didn't you dream that you were buried alive? Could you believe a dream like that?

Prisca: (Again becoming aware of his presence) What? Yes, what a strange coincidence! Did I see that in my dreams last night? Yes, Galias, why not? The dream is about to be realized.<sup>8</sup>

Al-Hakim's toying with the unconscious realization of dreams and deep-rooted wishes is not developed to its fullest. No matter what al-Hakim wants us to believe, one cannot avoid the temptation to see in Prisca's episode an attempt on the part of al-Hakim to affirm the supremacy of love and the infinite desire of the lovers to realize their

binding emotions at any level. This version of the "Romeo and Juliet" love story -- which has many parallels in the pre-Islamic as well as in the post-Islamic periods -- remains incompatible with the rest of the play. It is a melodramatic finale that places the playwright in center stage and thus interferes with the natural flow of events.

Al-Hakim uses modern Arabic in what could be considered an early attempt at creating a "third language," as Muhammed Mandoor calls it.<sup>9</sup> It is basically classical yet free of the stilted style characteristic of Arabic literature in the nineteenth century. The dialogue reaches a poetic level at times, creating an ethereal atmosphere appropriate for a play which hovers on the level of dreams. As a matter of fact, the three men in the final scene question the reality of their experience in the outside world and wonder if it was ever more than a dream.

Marnoosh: Yamlikha . . . Is it a dream or reality?  
 Mishilina: Answer Yamlikha. Did we get out of this place?  
 Yamlikha: What . . . do I hear?  
 Mishilina: Here we are. The three of us, and Qatmir [the dog]. We are asleep.  
 Yamlikha: Oh, Christ . . . Was it a dream?  
 Mishilina: You also saw? Tell us what you saw . . .  
 Yamlikha: My God!  
 Marnoosh: Speak Yamlikha . . .  
 Yamlikha: Didn't they come and didn't they take us to the palace?  
 Marnoosh: You also dreamt that?<sup>10</sup>

They continue to question the reality of their experience until they notice the new clothes they are wearing and all doubts vanish. Al-Hakim toys with the concept of dreams that reminds one of Henri-Rene Lenormand whose concept of "Time is a dream," is the title of his play Le Temps est un songe.<sup>11</sup>

Al-Hakim avoids the verbal logic and word-play characteristic of the early period. Instead, he allows his characters to proceed with their dialogue, making it possible for the language to blend in with the development of the action without the protrusion of any single element.

However, by assuming that the play is primarily for reading, al-Hakim allows himself the freedom of long dialogues between the characters. The lengthy arguments that ensue on the nature of religion and other abstract subjects constitute undramatic gaps that weaken the overall effects of the play. Al-Hakim seems to retain some of the defects of his early period, for example, unnecessary delay in revealing certain facts does not seem to create the suspense that al-Hakim is aiming at:

Mishilina: (Asking Galias about Prisca late at night) . . .  
 Where is she at this moment?  
 Galias: Who is "she" saint?  
 Mishilina: (Irritated) The princess.  
 Galias: With the king.  
 Mishilina: Strange! What could she be doing with the king at this hour of the night?  
 Galias: Saint! It . . .  
 Mishilina: (Insisting) Speak . . .  
 Galias: When the king is sleepless, he calls her to read for him.  
 Mishilina: (Angrily) In his private chamber? This strange man? I understand, I understand. Is this the holy bond?<sup>12</sup>

And the dialogue continues for five pages without reaching any conclusion.

In the second act the characters seem to be talking to themselves, for no one is able to relate to the other. Mishilina is trying to convince Galias, while Galias is trying to reveal that Mishilina has been asleep for over three hundred years. Later on, Mishilina's confusion of identities and young Prisca's efforts to convince him that he is mistaken occupy the better part of the third act. Al-Hakim is trying to show the depth and sincerity of Mishilina's love, but in the process he diverts the reader's attention from the main issues. These defects loosen the structure of the play and eventually weaken its dramatic effectiveness.

The play was staged by the Egyptian National Theatre Company in 1935, but it failed to attract a large audience. Al-Hakim attributed its failure on stage to deficient direction and lack of appropriate theatre effects.

That might have been the case; nevertheless, the play does not lend itself easily to theatre production. The prolongation of uncertainty in the second and third acts suspends the action and reduces the tragic elements. Furthermore, the long and abstract dialogues about the nature of "reality" and "truth" are distracting. Al-Hakim's attempt to show the intensity of the shock experienced by the three men does not justify the prolongation of their uncertainty. In a similar manner, al-Hakim introduces the story of a Japanese sailor who returns after an absence of four hundred years. While in the cave with her tutor, Galias, Prisca tells him that story to illustrate her reasons for wishing to be buried with Mishilina. The story takes four to five pages, it distracts from the main action and does not help in furthering our understanding of the play or of Prisca's dilemma.

The cave represents the past and al-Hakim opts for the present. Sacred as the three men are, they belong to the past and there they should remain. The play ends with the king and his men closing the cave and building a shrine at its entrance to commemorate the saints; they are to be remembered, but the flow of life must continue. Thus, al-Hakim is concerned not only with the philosophical implications of the myth but also with the political and social messages that may be drawn from it. Al-Hakim, in effect, is saying that Egypt has a glorious past to boast of, but that it should not be an impediment to the establishment of a new society.

As early as July 1934 al-Hakim received a letter from the writer Mayy Ziyadah telling him that reading his play The People of the Cave makes her feel that an Egyptian Pirandello is born.<sup>13</sup> In his explanation to the letter, al-Hakim wonders how she was the first to discover the similarities with Pirandello's theatre. The play does call to mind Pirandello's Henry IV.

In both plays society seems eager to suppress history and prevent Henry IV and the three men from revealing their true selves. In both plays the historical characters try their best to adapt to their new environments but they are checked, and in a sense they are forced to retreat into history.

In Sheherazade, written during his stay in Paris and published in 1934, al-Hakim uses the One Thousand and One Nights as a backdrop, presupposing the reader's familiarity with the story of Sheherazade. She managed to prevent Shahrayer -- who used to have a girl killed each night after having made love to her because he had once surprised a black slave in bed with his bride -- from ordering her death. When the play opens, we learn that a slave girl Zahida is to die, the first, and presumably the last, victim after Shahrazad's tale came to an end. In the past Shahrayer used to kill for revenge and pleasure, now he wants to kill for knowledge. Al-Hakim leaves the specific reasons for the killing vague and does not elaborate on how Shahrayer rationalizes his final murder.

After the last killing, Shahrayer embarks on a journey for, having heard all the adventures, he is now intent on experience. He wants to travel because he wants to discover himself, for he has grown from being the "child who toys with things" to a "man who thinks about things."<sup>14</sup> He is torn between the heart and the mind, between acting and thinking. The journey is a manifestation of Shahrayer's struggle and of his inability finally to solve the puzzle of existence. He ends his travels wiser, but that does not necessarily make him happier or more decisive. There is a tragic element in Shahrayer's efforts to emulate the gods, to transcend human banality and achieve the utmost. His futile search for the self is reminiscent of that of Camus' Sisyphus and Caligula and, indeed, in some scenes Shahrayer approximates their existential anguish. Thus, when

Shahrazad asks him to sit down, he answers:

Shahrayar: No . . . I don't want to sit down, I don't like to sit down . . . always this earth, nothing but earth, this prison that keeps revolving. We do not walk, we proceed or recede, we do not ascend or descend, we move in a circle, everything revolves. This is eternity. What a trick! We ask nature about its secrets and it answers by going round and round.<sup>15</sup>

Finally Shahrazad gives him her assessment, "You are a man hung between heaven and earth, torn with agony. I tried to bring you back to earth but did not succeed."<sup>16</sup>

One reason for Shahrayar's agony is Shahrazad herself. She has upset all his equations, showing him that she is not merely physical, but also has a mind capable of transforming him into a mature thinker. Shahrayar's description of Shahrazad expresses what she means to him:

Shahrayar: I ask you who is she? She is the prisoner in her veil all her life. . . . She knows everything on earth as if she were the earth. . . . She, who never left the room, knows Egypt, China, and India . . . She is the virgin who knows men as if she had lived with them a thousand years, and knows the character of men, be it good or evil. She is the small [meaning small person in size] who, not satisfied by earth, went to heaven and now converses about it as if she were the angels' companion. She descended to the center of the earth and now talks about the lower kingdoms as if she were a jinni's daughter. Is she twenty years old? or does she have an age? My brain is boiling . . . wanting to know.<sup>17</sup>

She remains an enigma, not only for Shahrayar, but also for the two major male characters in the play. She is a pure beautiful body, for the black slave in the play, but a pure heart for Qamar, Shahrayar's minister and friend. For Shahrayar she is both and many others: "I have had enough of bodies" he cries, "I don't want to feel, I want to know."<sup>18</sup>

By inventing a continuation to the original tale, al-Hakim creates a new myth. The translucent oriental atmosphere is enhanced by the One

Thousand and One Nights, forever looming on the horizon. Al-Hakim's Shahrazad is the strong and mysterious woman who has driven Qamar to suicide with her coquettish attitude. This signifies a departure from al-Hakim's early portrayal of women characters in which he would credit them with being nothing more than entertainment for men and everpresent detractors from artistic creation.

Sheherazade has its inspiration in Arabic sources, but the creation was a consequence of al-Hakim's contact with Western culture and experience in love. As early as 1934 al-Hakim wrote about the effect of Paris on him, and especially the atmosphere in Montmartre.<sup>19</sup> However, Fu-ad Duwarah, in the Egyptian monthly al-Majalla, ascribes al-Hakim's personal experience in France to his Islamic upbringing. He quotes an interview published in a Cairo weekly, Sabah al-Khair, in which al-Hakim states that Sheherazade was a reaction to his contact with European philosophy which considered man to be the new god of the universe, that God is dead. He mentions that his religious beliefs were threatened by the atheistic wave that dominated Europe after World War I. His reaction was to write Sheherazade in which Shahrayar represents man as conceived by the European philosophy of the time; in which man tries to rid himself of all his human limitations.<sup>20</sup>

Al-Hakim returns to Greek theatre and adapts Aristophanes' Council of Women. The play, as published in 1939, consisted of three acts; however, al-Hakim added another three in 1954. This analysis will refer only to the 1939 edition, since the added acts represent a completely different period in al-Hakim's artistic development and will be discussed in my analysis of the third period.

Al-Hakim uses the name of the judge's wife Braxa as the title for his play. He adheres to his source only as far as the end of the first act, when women assume power under Braxa's leadership. Al-Hakim then moves

away from the original plot and creates his own, although Aristophanes' play offers a more attractive theme as far as his opinion of women is concerned. The deviation shows that al-Hakim was more interested in the political and social aspects of the play. Although Braxa Jura remains a comedy, al-Hakim is more serious than Aristophanes in his treatment of the theme, and his play should be considered more as a drama of ideas than as a farce. As a matter of fact, the play's subtitle is The Problem of Ruling.

1939 was a year of corruption under the so-called democratic system in Egypt, during which many political parties were trying to seize power through bribery and manipulation. All this was taking place under a self-serving British occupation, concerned only with preserving the status quo. The Egyptian people were asked to sacrifice in order to protect British interests against the barbarism of Nazi Germany. The Egyptians had suffered a different kind of barbarism under the Allies during World War I, when they fought on the side of the Allies with other Arab countries against the Ottoman Empire. Against this background al-Hakim wrote his play, illustrating the various political choices. He ends his play with a dictator at the helm. Al-Hakim had advocated the need for firm political leadership ever since he was a young writer. He makes this clear in his autobiographical work, The Return of Consciousness, in which he declares that the Egyptian people need a firm hand to lead them away from chaos and disorder.

As in Aristophanes' play, the first act of Braxa Jura ends with the women of Athens assuming power. In the second act, confusion in both political and social life occurs from contradictory laws that allow each faction the freedom of action they demand. When a group of debtors demands new laws, Braxa is ready to grant them what they want:

Voice: (from among the crowd) You have destroyed us!  
 Braxa: Who are you?  
 Voice: The poor debtors. . . .  
 Braxa: What do you want?  
 Voice: Issue a law that cancels all our debts! . . . And  
 execute anyone who asks for payments.  
 Braxa: His execution?  
 Voice: By burning!  
 Braxa: By hanging. . . .  
 [They contemplate different possibilities]  
 Voice Or by drowning, as you wish . . . you have freedom of  
 choice!  
 Braxa: Yes! Yes! Thank you for allowing me this freedom. . . .<sup>21</sup>

Braxa is not concerned with the confusion that ensues when, responding to an opposing group, she issues a law which contradicts the above. Her main concern is with her make-up and the way she looks: the young army commander Hironimus is on his way to visit her and she wants to look her best. As soon as she is alone with him, Braxa surrenders everything, including political power. Hironimus assumes dictatorial power and throws Abocrat (Hippocrates) -- who is supposed to be Braxa's advisor but who only lavishes praises upon her, no matter how unmerited -- in prison. Soon after he is joined by Braxa and Hironimus is left unchallenged.

The third act takes place in the prison where Braxa and Hironimus talk to Abocrat about his difficulties. Abocrat, a philosopher, suggests the formation of a triumvirate, in which Braxa would represent freedom, Abocrat wisdom, and Hironimus strength. Hironimus does not agree, since he wants full power. The 1939 edition of the play thus ends with the triumph of dictatorship.

It would be futile to try to justify or condemn al-Hakim's final solution, since both positions are arguable. Unfortunately, al-Hakim becomes so preoccupied with his subject that the play becomes a debate. Aristophanes in his play did not try to go beyond farcical fantasy and treated the whole matter as a joke. Al-Hakim, on the other hand, was

dead serious, but the results are ludicrous. With the ingredients for a comic plot he tried to write a modern Julius Caesar. His skeleton characters have no motive for their actions and the reader is confused between Abocrat's convincing argument in favor of collective leadership and Hironimus equally convincing, though opposing, point of view:

Hironimus: (sarcastically) Do you want to share the power with me?!

Abocrat: And Braxa will be with us!

Hironimus: The three of us?

Abocrat: Yes, the three of us, and the three of us are civilization!

Braxa: My friend Abocrat, can we -- you and me -- prevent him from dominating?

Hironimus: And can I have any order while you two are with me?

Abocrat: That's how it should be. . . . The three of us must walk together, side by side, without any one dominating the others.<sup>22</sup>

Al-Hakim is not satisfied with the final solution, for he is critical of dictatorial rule. But in the absence -- at least in his own mind -- of an alternative, he chooses the horrors of dictatorship.

As a work of art, the play is a failure and ranks far below The People of the Cave. The theme does not seem to have ripened in al-Hakim's mind, and this may be partially due to lack of perspective, for he is reacting to a current Egyptian problem; still, he does not strive to universalize the conflict within him and the play remains a personal statement. It is not unusual for an artist to face a dilemma in which many contradictory ideas are at work; actually this is frequently the state of affairs. What al-Hakim fails to achieve is a transformation of the confusion into a dramatically convincing conflict between the major characters who represent different points of view. In al-Hakim's play, the characters seem to conduct a debate rather than a dialogue, and this brings the action to a standstill. In Act III the arguments reach the point of becoming merely declarations of political principles:

Hironimus: (shouting) Enough! I do not believe in divine power, nor in the right of heaven to interfere in earthly affairs.<sup>23</sup>

Commendable as this political "theory" may be, it remains just that.

When Abocrat expounds further,

Abocrat: That is correct! When Zeus created the earth he also created rules for its movements, the secret of its life, so that he could rest on Mount Olympus in peace, while the earth takes care of itself. In everything he planted the seeds of other things; in weakness there is a germ of strength, and in strength a germ of weakness. . . .<sup>24</sup>

he presents his ideas in paragraphs and could go on forever.

Al-Hakim was experimenting without the necessary tools that writers like Eliot, Shaw, or Sartre possessed, the ability not to lose sight of the dramatic vision when writing a play which is basically the expression of an idea in the mind of the dramatist. In plays like No Exit, Sartre's mind was occupied with the idea of man in this world, but the writer never lost his other, equally important, task: the creation of a work of art intended for the stage. It is appropriate to mention at this point that al-Hakim was to write another play in which the theme would again be the problem of governing. But in The Sultan's Dilemma he succeeds in developing a highly effective drama, an analysis of which will be made later.

Al-Hakim's next play during this period is Pygmalion. Written in 1942, the play was his first adaptation of a Greek myth. In his introduction to the play, al-Hakim says that he was inspired by a painting he saw in the Louvre during his stay in Paris. There is no evidence of direct influence from George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion in al-Hakim's play, although he must have read it or at least known of its existence. Unlike Shaw, al-Hakim adheres to the general line of the myth as related by Ovid in his Metamorphoses. However, al-Hakim restricts himself only partially.

Narcissus, Ismin (the Echo of Greek mythology), Apollo, and Venus are al-Hakim's creations, and his conclusion departs from the original as well.

The theme is a familiar one and a favorite of al-Hakim: the artist's conflict between his aspirations for pure intellect and his human needs. Until he wrote Pygmalion, al-Hakim had remained a bachelor, and the struggle he experienced within himself parallels that of Pygmalion. The theme, furthermore, suits his romantic temperament, as an early fascination with the French romanticist Alfred de Musset reveals. At that period in his life al-Hakim still believed that earthly pleasure, especially male-female relations, were a hindrance to an artist's creative faculties. In the story of Pygmalion and Galatea al'Hakim allegorizes his idealistic concept of the artist as one who should admire beauty from an aesthetic distance but never become entangled in the game of love.

The first act reveals Pygmalion, the famous artist, at home with his unusually beautiful statue. The statue and its reclusive creator are the gossip of town; it is rumored that he treats his statue as a mistress, decorating it and protecting it from any harm. Later on we find Pygmalion, a worshipper of Apollo, at the temple offering sacrifices to Venus. Venus, who had visited Pygmalion's house in the past with her rival god Apollo, was surprised at his ability to create such a beautiful statue and envied Apollo for having such a talented follower. Thus, when Pygmalion asks Venus to bring the statue to life she answers his prayers. Pygmalion is overpowered by the miracle and the act ends with Galatea and Pygmalion joyously embracing each other.

In contrast with the first act, the second opens with a chorus asking Pygmalion the reason for his sadness, and we discover that Galatea has eloped with Narcissus. Ismin, who was trying to win Narcissus' love, tries to comfort Pygmalion and urges him to come with her to look for the

couple. Although he refuses to look for her, Venus and Apollo return Galatea to Pygmalion while he is asleep. Galatea asks Pygmalion for forgiveness and accepts him as her creator.

In the third act, Pygmalion is bored with Galatea's role as the dutiful wife, and his image of an eternally beautiful Galatea is destroyed when he sees her with a broom in her hand. He finally invokes Venus and asks that Galatea be turned into a statue again. Venus acquiesces. However, frustrated with the struggle within him, Pygmalion attacks the statue with the broom, destroying it. The play ends with Pygmalion close to death, flanked by Narcissus, who attempts in vain to ameliorate his suffering.

Al-Hakim amplified the myth's different possibilities to suit his own purpose without distorting the original. The addition of new characters, notably Narcissus and Ismin, satisfies al-Hakim's need for symmetry. Pygmalion's counterpart is Narcissus, who represents the craving for earthly love, while Galatea, Ismin's counterpart, represents the artist's aspiration for ideal beauty. The addition of Venus and Apollo reproduces the symmetry on a heavenly scale. The gods are brought to earth with their petty rivalries as each tries to win over Pygmalion. As Venus stands in admiration we are further reminded of the statue's beauty; if it is capable of astonishing Venus, it must be truly extraordinary:

Venus: A woman!

Apollo: No! What you see is more beautiful than a woman and much more perfect.

Venus: (looking at the statue and whispering to herself) How could he rise to such a level . . .

Apollo: (proudly) This is the secret!

Venus: Mortal. . . .

Apollo: And yet!

. . . . .

Venus: I cannot believe that such a work could come out of mortal hands!

Apollo: These humans, Venus, are distinguished from us, gods, in their ability to surpass themselves.

Venus: (as if talking to herself) The power of art! What is

this power that enable mortals to create the immortal?<sup>25</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the statue's beauty, the presence of the gods enhances the mythical atmosphere in the play.

Pygmalion remains the central figure in the play and al-Hakim's alter-ego. Al-Hakim deviates from the myth by not explaining the reasons behind Pygmalion's reluctance to marry or for his avowed hatred for women. Naturally, an explanation of that nature could be interpreted as stemming from the author's own motivations, and al-Hakim is too shrewd to allow his critics such an opportunity. Such marginal details can be overlooked without creating a gap in the development of the play. Pygmalion's primordial craving for women is expressed in his prayer to Venus, a passage of poetic prose that -- at least in Arabic -- is so powerful as to induce the reluctant goddess to relent:

Pygmalion: Venus! Venus! Radiant among the goddesses. You who with your blazing fingers light the hearts of men, listen to my plea!

. . . . .

Pygmalion: Venus! Venus! You who are bounteous in your alms! Grant me one thing: Breathe the warmth of life in Galatea's statue. My wife, the ivory Galatea! Give her life, Oh goddess of love and life!!<sup>26</sup>

Later on, Pygmalion reiterates his desire for human warmth to assuage loneliness:

Pygmalion: I am tired. I cannot follow this path, creating, creating. I create beauty, I create love, I create everything!  
No! I'm tired, I want to feel that there is someone who creates for me, and gives to me, and cares for me!

. . . . .

What is this weakness? . . . For the first time I feel the weight of creation, its coldness, and its cruelty.<sup>27</sup>

However, Pygmalion's joys and desires are as fickle as those of the women he once abhorred. The human companionship he craved is only an artist's dream, for in everyday life the sublime coexists alongside the mundane, much to the artist's chagrin. Galatea's return and her deep and sincere atonement do not reconcile the contradictions within him. The artist in him wins for a while, but when Venus answers his prayers and turns Galatea into a statue Pygmalion's agony is only increased. His final act of destruction is an ironic victory of the artist within him. He will be able to create other beautiful statues, but he will forever yearn for a Galatea. Al-Hakim's treatment of life versus life has parallels in Pirandello's concept of the conflict between everchanging life and the static form in art. Although al-Hakim seems to seek refuge in art and a meaning for his existence, he remains unsure of art as his final act symbolizes.

In contrast with Pygmalion, Galatea symbolizes the female as al-Hakim envisions her: at best a confusing element in the life of an artist and at worst a definite hindrance. When Galatea comes to life she wants to be assured of Pygmalion's love; nevertheless, it does not take long for her to become dissatisfied, and she elopes with Narcissus. Al-Hakim does not explain her motives. He assumes that the reader will know that she is more interested in material love than in its spiritual and intellectual counterparts. Al-Hakim does not attempt to develop Galatea's character because for him she is simply a beautiful woman, a creation of the artist's genius. She is a whim, a decoration, something to be experienced for a while and then forgotten. She elopes with Narcissus because she is interested in the shell, not in the substance; Narcissus is no more than a handsome fool concerned only with the way he looks. Yet strangely

enough, and whether al-Hakim is aware of it or not, Galatea is the winner at the end. Her destruction is Pygmalion's failure, for, within her own limitations she had tried to adjust.

The subplot in Pygmalion concerns the myth of Narcissus and Echo. Al-Hakim reduces the myth's characters to human beings; Narcissus is simply a child whom Pygmalion found in the forest and who become like a son to him, while Echo's name becomes Ismin, a member of the chorus who falls in love with Narcissus. Nevertheless, the outline of the original myth has been preserved, for Ismin still tries to win Narcissus, who in turn is in love with Galatea. The subplot moves in two separate courses: one lies outside the main plot and is concerned with the two lovers, Ismin and Narcissus, as an entity, the other collides with the main plot and interacts with the relationship between Pygmalion and Galatea.

In the first act, al-Hakim portrays Narcissus as a worshipper of Venus. She has granted him the beauty that attracts so many girls, including Ismin. Nevertheless, Narcissus is not satisfied and prays for Apollo to endow him with talent. In this manner al-Hakim has created the symmetry essential to him. On the other hand, Ismin is the wise lover who is craving for Narcissus' beauty. Narcissus will attain maturity only when he realizes his foolishness in eloping with Galatea; he then confesses his love to Ismin and asks her advice. In creating a love story between Ismin and Narcissus, al-Hakim has gone beyond the simple attainment of symmetry, for as much as Galatea was created by the power of the artist, Narcissus was created by the power of love. When Ismin and Narcissus leave the house holding hands in the third act, Apollo and Venus appear on stage:

Apollo: (whispering to Venus and pointing to Ismin) Look!  
Who is this woman?

Venus: A woman who could create by love.

Apollo: Strange! As Pygmalion was able to create by art!

Venus: As you see.  
 Apollo: A mortal woman!  
 Venus: (smiling) That is the secret!  
 Apollo: What is the power of love that can create?<sup>28</sup>

Al-Hakim does not seem to be negating the power of love. He has moved a long way from his ivory tower and has learned that there are shades of black and white in life with which he has to contend. In the relation between Ismin and Narcissus al-Hakim is not only admitting the attraction between opposites, he is actually depicting how they complement each other.

We are told by M. Hajaji in Myth in Contemporary Egyptian Theatre that al-Hakim saw a film version of Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion two years before he wrote his play. Al-Hakim has admitted that Shaw influenced him, but one cannot fail to notice a shift from his earlier intransigence when he used to condemn women as parasites of artistic creation. Of course, the political atmosphere was not yet ripe for a socialist interpretation of Shaw, neither was al-Hakim ready to plunge into the social milieu of Egypt. However, he was able to admit certain grounds for some kind of equality between men and women.

In the story of Apollo and Venus, al-Hakim adds another episode to the original myth. The rivalry of the gods echoes that of their human counterparts. From the beginning of the play Apollo and Venus vie in trying to win Pygmalion over. They win alternately, but in the end their success is doubtful, although Apollo says that Pygmalion is becoming more like the gods:

Apollo: I don't know if I can say that about him. . . . He is doing the same things we do! He is imprisoning himself by loving a creature of his own creation. We have succeeded in clipping the wings of his sublimity, we have dragged him down to our level . . . I can say we have conquered him!<sup>29</sup>

However, his final act of destruction proves the gods wrong, for Pygmalion is his own man and his fascination with Galatea is only a temporary affair.

In spite of the additions, the plot remains concise and coherent. The unifying element, Pygmalion's confusion between the artistic and human drives within him, radiates to every other action in the play and prevents the scattering of the reader's attention. Al-Hakim now dramatizes his theme without projecting himself into the play through long speeches and dialogue manipulation. Al-Hakim contends in his introduction to the play that the conflict between abstract ideas takes place in the mind of the playwright, but it is evident that, while still consciously adhering to the "theatre for reading," al-Hakim was unconsciously applying his European training to develop his dramatic techniques.

Despite al-Hakim's assertions, the play was successfully produced on stage in the 1950's. The director of the play called it a "dramatic poem" to emphasize its poetic aspects. In a sense, that proved al-Hakim's assumption that the play was basically for reading. The director did eliminate some of the lengthy speeches, but that did not alter the play significantly.

The universality of Pygmalion resides in the expression of the dilemma faced by the artist in his struggle to achieve a balance between the contradictions within himself. The inconclusive ending expresses the author's own struggle to come to terms with his yearnings for a female companion. Al-Hakim was to solve this struggle by marrying in 1946, realizing perhaps that the sight of his wife with a broom no longer incited him to destroy her.

Al-Hakim was criticized for his isolation from society. It seems to me that the play was an escape from the seemingly incurable ills of Egyptian society. The war was close to him, yet he was not very concerned

about whether the British would win or not, since he believed Egypt would be the loser in any case.

The last play in this category is Odipe Al-Malek (Oedipus The King). Written in 1949, the play is an adaptation of Sophocles' masterpiece. Although al-Hakim studied many versions and seems to admire Gide's the most, his adaptation adheres to the original. He also seems to be influenced by the Freudian school, which contends that myths represent the relations of the individual to the family and of the family to the tribe. This is the only play from this period for which al-Hakim used a complete example from European literature. However, al-Hakim makes many changes in order to arrive at his own interpretation of the play. Some of these changes are substantial and in certain cases amount to a deviation from the dramatic structure which eventually weakens the total effect.

The influence of the Freudian school is evident in the opening scene. Al-Hakim, rather than presenting the serious atmosphere of Sophocles' Oedipus, sets the first act inside the palace. Oedipus, Jocasta, and their four children are gathered for what a modern family would call an "after-dinner-fireside-chat."\* Although Oedipus is preoccupied with a serious matter of state, he responds to his children's demands and starts to tell them about his adventures and his combat with the Sphinx. Suddenly, people outside are heard clamoring for a solution to their plight. The effectiveness of the people's shouting is dampened by the previous scene; however, al-Hakim succeeds in portraying Oedipus as a family man as well as a statesman. In a sense, he brings Oedipus closer to earth, prompting the reader to view him more as a human being.

In al-Hakim's version the Sphinx is simply a lion. Furthermore, the whole story has been devised by Tiresias in order to prevent Creon from

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\*Al-Hakim's emphasis on family relations seems to echo Cocteau's La Machine infernale.

becoming king. Oedipus tacitly accepts Tiresias' stratagem and lives a false heroic life for many years. Al-Hakim seems to have two reasons for effecting the changes: first, he wanted to portray Oedipus as a family man who would go to any length to protect his family; and, second, he wanted to create an atmosphere of political conspiracy and suspense. If tragedy is the fall of a great man, Oedipus, in al-Hakim's version, is already reduced to a political manipulator. For readers to justify Oedipus' attitude is to reduce the degree of sympathy they may have for him. If al-Hakim had removed the story of the play from the historical surroundings, as many playwrights did with classical tragedies, then we might have found justification for the changes. However, al-Hakim kept the play within its historical confines and wanted the reader to forego the basics of classical tragic tradition. By changing the Sphinx into a lion, al-Hakim lowered the mythological level of the tragedy to an act of simple heroism. The riddle and Oedipus' ability to solve it are not merely refurbishing details, they prove Oedipus' wisdom. He is a man of great knowledge and, as a result, his fall becomes more tragic. Although the substance of the prophecy was not changed, al-Hakim satisfies his desire for not attributing a divine origin to an evil prophecy by changing its source. In effecting this change, al-Hakim follows Gide, who nevertheless had a different reason for changing the original. Gide wanted to assert man's individuality and his right of choice.

In another important change, al-Hakim alters the knowledge Oedipus has of his origin and his reason for leaving Corinth. In Sophocles' version, it is the old shepherd who informs Oedipus that his father, King Polybus, is dead of natural causes, and that the people of Corinth have chosen him as the new king. Oedipus' fears are not completely allayed, for the prophecy foretold that he would marry his mother as well. The

shepherd, however, tells him that he should not fear, for it was he who gave him to Polybus, who then became his adoptive father. The latter part of the story begins to worry Oedipus, until he finally realizes that the killing of his father and the marriage to his mother did take place. In al-Hakim's version, Oedipus leaves Corinth not because he is afraid of killing his father and marrying his mother but, rather, because he was told that he is not Polybus' son. He sets out to discover his origin and ends in Thebes. In this way al-Hakim emphasizes the quest for self-knowledge. To accommodate the changes, al-Hakim has the shepherd say that he thought of looking for Oedipus in his birthplace, and when Oedipus asks him how he knows Thebes is that place, the shepherd answers:

Shepherd: I know it because I was the one who picked you up  
when you were a baby and gave you to Polybus.  
Oedipus: You? Picked me up? And where did you pick me up?  
Shepherd: On a mountain covered with trees, near Cithaeron.<sup>30</sup>

The rest of the scene is almost identical to the corresponding one in Sophocles' version. Since Oedipus already knows that he is not Polybus' son, the exposition scene does not have the same surprising effect as in the original play.

The endings of the two plays differ. In Sophocles' version Oedipus' wish for banishment from Thebes is granted, but he is allowed to take any of his children with him. Al-Hakim's play ends with Oedipus leaving with his daughter Antigone, although he has asked earlier that Creon take care of all the children. In this manner al-Hakim draws from Oedipus at Colonus, which begins with Antigone leading a blind Oedipus:

Antigone: As long as I have eyes, they will be yours. . . .  
You will not be alone, I will be at your side,  
wherever you are.  
Oedipus: Antigone, my daughter, my heart will not be content  
if I drag you with me in this road of agony. Your  
place is here, with your uncle and your brothers and  
sisters.  
Antigone: There is no place for me but beside you! I see for  
you. . . . Don't you remember that I always wanted

to see things your way . . . seeing them as you saw them.<sup>31</sup>

The play ends with the same emphasis on family relations with which al-Hakim started: the curtain falls with father and daughter leaving hand in hand.

Oedipus remains the dominant character in the play and the pivot around which the rest of the action revolves. However, in Sophocles' version, Oedipus is running away from the truth about his past, while in al-Hakim's play he is leaving Corinth in search of his identity. His search is almost forgotten when he settles down happily with Jocasta; however, when his doubts are again aroused he resumes it, only to be appalled by his findings:

Oedipus: The truth? I never feared its face and was not frightened by its voice.  
 Jocasta: I always tried to warn you about that . . .  
 Oedipus: Jocasta, I had to know the truth.  
 Jocasta: You know it now, are you satisfied?  
 Oedipus: True, I wish I didn't know it. How could I imagine it to be so terrible. I never knew it would destroy my happiness. Only now do I realize, after it has avenged itself because I tried to remove its veil.<sup>32</sup>

Al-Hakim's preoccupation with truth and reality has plunged him into creating a contradictory character, a man with shallow convictions. Oedipus' desire to keep his family together and his craving for happiness do not justify the inconsistency, nor do they redeem him in the eyes of the audience. We might accept this logic from a character in a modern play, but it is difficult to overlook contradictions in a character of mythological stature.

Al-Hakim criticizes Gide in his introduction to the play for turning the myth into a philosophical treatise in which Oedipus appears as a twentieth century individual. Yet Gide, unlike al-Hakim, remains consistent in his approach to the myth and to the character of Oedipus. In the opening scenes of al-Hakim's play Oedipus confronts Tiresias on the conspiracy of

the Sphinx and affirms that he is ready to confess everything to the people because he does not fear the truth. Later on, however, while Jocasta realizes the futility of their life and its hopelessness, Oedipus tries to cling to an empty shell:

Oedipus: Don't say that, we can rise. Rise with me and let us put our fingers in our ears, let us live the reality with the life that throbs our hearts with love and mercy.<sup>33</sup>

Relentlessly Oedipus continues to prod Jocasta into disregarding the past. Al-Hakim is extremely careful to keep out non-Islamic aspects of the myth, in conformity with his audience's feelings, yet he does not see anything wrong with having a man who married his mother after killing his father insist on living as if nothing had happened. Even the so-called nonbelievers, the Greeks, could not accept such abnormality. The dignity of man that often exceeds human expectations is reduced in al-Hakim's play to the degeneration of a caricature lover who defies even the logic of a character from an Ionesco play. Even the final act of self-blinding is committed only after Jocasta kills herself, leading us legitimately to believe that he blinded himself not for shame, but because he no longer had any hope.

There is no doubt that Sophocles' play is rich in possible interpretations and certainly can absorb al-Hakim's emphasis on man's inability to confront the horror of truth. However, al-Hakim did not have to over-emphasize the point. He seems to have been unable to accept the strength of man without contradicting religious beliefs, although there is nothing in Islamic tradition that prohibits man's assertion of his dignity in the universe. Oedipus further contradicts himself by agreeing to go after Laius' killer after he is informed by Creon and the Priest of the oracle's command. However, when he learns that the oracles has specifically named

him as the killer, he becomes enraged and accuses Creon and the Priest of conspiring to dethrone him. This departure from Sophocle's version seems unnecessary. It eliminates part of the suspense of the original play and leads Oedipus into conducting a mock trial, into the creation of which al-Hakim brings his experience as a former public prosecutor.

Jocasta is less altered in al-Hakim's version. She tries to dissuade Oedipus from pursuing the truth, sensing that something disastrous is in the making, but in important contrast to Oedipus she refuses to continue living once her infamy is exposed. Jocasta is the caring mother who tries to keep her family together; still, she has the courage to kill herself after refusing to yield to Oedipus' insistence.

Al-Hakim's Creon does not differ much from Sophocles'. He is the same wise and reasonable man of state who avoids the limelight of power. Oedipus' accusation is unjustified in both versions. The mock trial brings Creon and Oedipus face to face:

Oedipus: Who is this man you sent? (to the oracle)  
 Jocasta: He is Creon.  
 Priest: He is (as you know and we know) a man who does not argue with the truth, and does not avoid reality. He would not say to the priests at the temple of Delphi "Prove to me that this answer is the gods' and not your own."<sup>34</sup>

When Oedipus insists that Creon is behind the whole affair and is hoping to become king, Creon answers in character:

Oedipus: You are the head of this [conspiracy]. Greedy for the throne, you were fooled by those priests, but I will make a fool out of you.  
 Creon: Enough, Oedipus! I forbid you from accusing me of treason. Remember that I am your wife's brother, and I would never harm you or Jocasta for a covetous purpose. I had the power in my hands before you came, and I surrendered it to you for the benefit of the people and in obedience to the advice of the holy ones.<sup>35</sup>

In this sense, Creon is morally superior to Oedipus, whose contradictory statements can hardly be compared to those of Creon. Yet Creon is the man who prefers to live in the shadow of power without exposing himself to its dangers.

Although there is a certain vagueness about Teiresias' motives in Sophocles' play, he is not the cunning conspirator al-Hakim portrays. For no clearly spelled-out reasons al-Hakim's Teiresias derives an evil pleasure from other people's sufferings. His malignancy reaches a grotesque level. In this manner al-Hakim raises his importance in the play to the point where he becomes as important as Oedipus himself, the grand designer behind all action. I do not know whether al-Hakim intended Teiresias to be that important; it seems to me that he was caught in his own design, losing control after he made Oedipus a partner in the conspiracy. Teiresias appears to be the ideologue who toys with humans because he has an ability to see beyond their range of vision. Oedipus is rebelling against the lie he has lived since he came to Thebes and we hear Teiresias answer:

Oedipus: . . . I ran away from that king [Polybus] looking for the truth of my origin. I ran away from Corinth because I could not bear to live a lie, and I came here to find myself living a bigger lie!

Teiresias: Perhaps deception is the natural state of your life.

Oedipus: And yours too, Teiresias!

Teiresias: And my life too, and the life of all people. . . .<sup>36</sup>

In al-Hakim's play Teiresias becomes the evil designer with a noble purpose, for his only purpose in getting rid of Laius was to allow the people of Thebes to choose their own king:

Teiresias: (to Oedipus) I will shout: "People of Thebes! I did not try to impose my will for my own glory, but because I believe that you should have your own will . . . I wanted to close a page in the book, to let you choose your own king from the street, with no family background, with no support other than yours . . . because there should be only one will in this land and that is your will."<sup>37</sup>

Teiresias is portrayed as a believer of man's independence and right to free choice, something that is similar to Gide's absolute belief in man. However, in order to portray man's inability to exercise absolute will, al-Hakim presents Teiresias as a man who through manipulation reduces his will to absurdity.

Al-Hakim attempted to dramatize many of his ideas in one play, but succeeded only in writing a philosophical thesis, ironically just what he had accused Gide of doing. The theme of truth versus reality remains his major focus, yet he tries to introduce a political theme through Teiresias. Jocasta and Oedipus are reduced to caricatures by the sentimental scenes in the last act, when Oedipus pathetically begs Jocasta to forget what they know. In trying to cover all these themes, al-Hakim has forgotten his major task as a playwright. His failure to dramatize his subject leads him to endless abstract arguments. The action is reduced to a minimum, since the suspense which we experience in Sophocles' play is almost nonexistent.

Oedipus' tragedy is not felt since from the beginning he is depicted as a flawed character and how could we feel sympathy or pity for a man who behaves so inconsistently? The horror we experience in Sophocles' Oedipus when he appears on stage after blinding himself is now replaced by disgust. The play reveals al-Hakim's own confusion, for he was too close to his material and not able to create a character more determined than himself. How much of al-Hakim's life is reflected in this confusion is a matter of debate, but his next major play reveals that he was experiencing a self-searching period from which he emerged stronger and with a clearer vision. Al-Hakim proved uncomfortable when dealing with subjects alien to Islamic thinking. The concept of numerous gods vengeful in their dealings with humans might be accepted by al-Hakim, yet his deep-rooted religious

upbringing resists incorporating them into the play. In the attempt he blunts the sharpness of Oedipus' intellect and reduces him to a political schemer. He tries to keep his play in its historical surroundings, but everything else is removed from the historical context. As a result the reader is uncertain as to whether he should view Oedipus as the king of Thebes or as a name selected to serve the playwright's purpose.

### Isis

Isis represents a transitional stage between the so-called "theatre in the book" period and the final stage in al-Hakim's development as an artist.

Written in 1955 and produced in 1956, the play is an adaptation of the Pharaonic myth of Isis, the goddess of fertility, and her husband-brother Osiris, the god of the lower world, judge of the dead. The play's sources are Plutarch's Essay on Isis and Osiris and the "Chester Beatty," an Egyptian manuscript translated by A. H. Gardener in 1931.

The plot revolves around the treachery of Typhon,\* brother of Osiris. Typhon invites Osiris to a banquet for which he has prepared an expensively made chest, which he promises to give to the guest whose body it fits. Typhon had constructed the chest to fit Osiris. When Osiris lies in the chest and he fits, Typhon has him locked in and thrown into the river Nile. The chest is found by sailors who sell Osiris to the king of Byblos. At Byblos Osiris works hard to help the people and with his many innovations succeeds in improving the peasants' life. Isis, who was searching for her husband, succeeds in finding him. After Isis reveals their identity the king of Byblos promises to help the royal couple. Back in Egypt

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\*Al-Hakim alternatively uses the old Egyptian names found in the original myth and those which appear in the later Greek version. Here he prefers Typhon over Seth, thus adhering to Plutarch's version.

they hide in the woods until Isis gives birth to a son, Horus. Osiris, who continues to help his people and is now known as the "Green Man," is soon discovered by Typhon's spies. He is killed and cut into fourteen parts, each one, so the myth says, to fertilize a corresponding province forever.

Isis raises her son Horus in preparation for a dual with his uncle to avenge his father's murder. Horus is defeated, but his life is spared at the urging of the town mayor, who convinces Typhon of the advantage of conducting a public trial to expose Horus' false claims to the throne. During the trial, Typhon's attempts to prove that Horus is Isis' illegitimate son are thwarted by the arrival of the king of Byblos, who testifies that Osiris was alive in Byblos after having been found in a chest, and that Horus is his son. The people revolt against Typhon, depose him, and proclaim Horus king.

Plutarch's version of the myth is not considered complete; however, his omissions do not alter the myth substantially. Although al-Hakim draws from Plutarch extensively, he is selective and does not hesitate to introduce changes, though he is careful to avoid tampering with the spirit of the myth. Thus al-Hakim, unlike Plutarch, remains faithful to the historical context and has the action take place in ancient Egypt.

Like Plutarch, al-Hakim portrays Osiris as a peaceful inventor concerned about his people's prosperity. But, in contrast to Plutarch, al-Hakim isolated Osiris from the drudgery of day-to-day government and leaves political power in the hands of Typhon. Aided by Osiris' detachment from the governmental process, Typhon succeeds in inciting the peasants against Osiris, and the stage is set for the conspiracy and deposition of the king. In another important change, al-Hakim does not bring Osiris from the Other World to coach his son in preparation for the duel,

since this would contradict a basic trait in Osiris, who abhors violence. Even when he is back from Byblos he does not try to regain his throne, for in order to achieve his purpose he would have to resort to guile and violence. When the two writers, Touth and Mustate, try to convince Isis to urge her husband to fight for his throne, she replies:

Isis:           Quelle action. Mon époux ne veut point reprendre le pouvoir.

Moustate:    Nous (Touth) serons persuasifs.

Isis:           Nul ne pourra l'en convaincre. Ni mes conseils, ni la naissance de son fils l'ont abouti. On dirait qu'un choc l'a brisé. Il fut atteint jusqu'aux profondeurs de son être, lorsqu'il entendit ses sujets maudire le souvenir même d'Osiris!

Moustate:    C'était la propagande de Typhon.

Isis:           Je le lui ai répété sans pouvoir, hélas, ébranler sa décision.<sup>38</sup>

In having Osiris refuse to resort to violence, al-Hakim departs from Plutarch and in doing so demonstrates his newly acquired ability to create characters that are consistent.

Isis remains the strongest and most important character in the play. Her importance comes from being able to surmount adverse circumstances and from achieving her dream of avenging her husband and regaining the throne for her son. However, in a departure from Plutarch's story, al-Hakim's Isis does not assume a ruling role while her husband is away; she is not a doer but rather the strong woman behind her son's success. There is no doubt that al-Hakim has moved a long way from his earlier condescending attitude toward his female characters. Isis is neither the temptress nor the fickle woman we witnessed in Braxa and Pygmalion.

His characters are no longer black and white personalities on whom the subtler gradations of grey are lost. In spite of Typhon's evil nature, his acts are not totally devoid of justification. Although al-Hakim does not develop this point, one is apt to wonder why Typhon should want to become king, since he is already governing. Typhon does not throw

the chest containing his brother without some display of emotion:

Cheikh el Bled: (écartant les rouseaux et les papyrus) Plus rien . . . aucune trace . . . Le courant l'a emporté.

Typhon: Dans le nil, sur le courant qui te pousse vers l'éternité . . . Osiris . . . Mon cœur porte ton deuil, O mon frère! Pardonnez-moi, car le pouvoir est à celui-là seul qui le sait conquérir.<sup>39</sup>

Al-Hakim does not seem to be confused about Typhon. The few little touches of sympathy which al-Hakim allows eliminate the sharp contours of an evil character and make him more realistic.

The few other characters whom al-Hakim added to the play help him to present his ideas without the abstract discussions of the previous plays. The Mayor Cheikh el Beled, the two writers, the children, and the peasants remove the play from the realm of the "theatre in the book" to that of the theatre on stage. Aside from dramatizing the minor ideas in the play, they help in tying together the various incidents.

Whether influenced by the Egyptian revolution of 1952, which deposed king Farooq, or by his marriage in 1947, al-Hakim seems to abandon his earlier preoccupation with the theatre for reading. He does proclaim in his introduction to the play that he is not writing for the theatre, but rather for reading. However, the staging of the play in 1956 showed a change of heart. Critics have argued about the major theme in the play: some see it as the struggle between the ideal and the practical in the field of politics, while others see in it the struggle between the attitude of artists who proclaim that art is for the service of society and the art-for-art's-sake artist. One may even accept al-Hakim's own interpretation of the play, in which he contends that the theme is the struggle which will take place between politics and science in the year 2000.

There is no doubt, however, that the struggle between the ideal and the practical in the realm of politics remains an essential theme of the

play. Al-Hakim does not seem to favor a particular side, but his idealistic character, Osiris, is defeated. On the other hand, Typhon's evil means succeed only temporarily. Significantly, the final victory of Isis and her son is attained only after they learn how to use the same devious means which Typhon himself used in order to assume power. Some questions may be raised as to the morality of this final statement; however, al-Hakim is no longer writing a political thesis but exploring the real world. The influence of the Egyptian revolt, headed by Nasser, is apparent in al-Hakim's condonation of the use of illegal means to gain legal status.

The political theme is emphasized from the first scenes, when people are suppressed by Typhon's agents. The analogy between an Egypt under Typhon's rule and an Egypt under Osiris and his family on the one hand, and an Egypt under the monarchy and an Egypt under Nasser on the other is a call for popular participation in governing the country. Nevertheless, al-Hakim was criticized by some critics for portraying a slow popular reaction to exploitation and the people's inability to understand the progressive and humanitarian Osiris. Some obviously wanted him to present only the positive side of the people's response, but al-Hakim was interested more in dramatizing a myth with political connotations than in writing a propaganda play with a myth as vehicle. Al-Hakim's youthful experience and his knowledge of the Egyptian people proved to be more realistic and profound than the drummings of the new believers in democracy. His belief in the ability of his people is final and absolute, yet as an artist he could not overlook the historical fact, sad as it may be, that men could be made into a flock of sheep, ready to accept whatever their rulers offer. The trial by the people in the last act is a testimony of their ability to react when they are given a real choice.

The artist's responsibility towards society is put to the test in times of crisis. Al-Hakim dramatizes his ideas without the rhetoric of his earlier "reality" versus "truth" abstractions. Situations rather than arguments are now used in order to portray the dilemma faced by the artists. Touth and Moustate, the two writers, refrain from interfering with the sufferings of the people, contenting themselves either with registering historical facts or with isolating themselves in ivory towers to write about beauty.

At the beginning of the play Touth is oblivious to Isis' pleading to interfere; however, when they realize the magnitude of Typhon's cruelty, they awake and decide to share in the action. While other writers are in the palace, singing praises to Typhon, Touth decides that he cannot stand by anymore, that he must act now.

Touth's change from bystander to doer did not result from an abstract dialogue, neither did it happen because the playwright thought it proper. Touth's decision to participate is the outcome of an inner struggle precipitated by the social atmosphere. The reader is logically convinced, through the development of the action, of the naturalness of Touth's decision.

The idea of rebirth already present in the original myth is now brought to the foreground. Al-Hakim's obvious allusion is to the Egypt of his time, suffering for a long time under tyranny but coming back to life through the will of its people. The theme of rebirth is almost as important as the "reality versus truth" theme in al-Hakim's writings, where his belief in Egypt's ability to rise from centuries of sleep is ever present.

Al-Hakim considers the conflict between politicians and scientists an important theme in his play. However, he is either misleading his readers or unable to dramatize the theme to its full potential. Since playwrights'

explanations of their own plays cannot be taken seriously all the time, and in my opinion should not be, let us assume that the work of art speaks for itself. There is no doubt that an allusion to a possible conflict between politics and science is present, but it remains just that.

Aside from changes in the story line, al-Hakim made a major change in the mythical atmosphere of the story. He stripped the myth of all superstitious improbabilities and brought it closer to the realm of the probable. In al-Hakim's version the chest does not drift by itself to Byblos, it is found by some sailors and sold to the king. In contrast to Plutarch's version in which Horus is conceived only after Iris miraculously infuses life back into Osiris, al-Hakim's version dispenses with any supernatural phenomenon. Time is reduced from eighty years in Plutarch's version to the period needed for Isis to go to Byblos and return plus the eighteen years needed for Horus to come of age. Thus al-Hakim adheres to the law of dramatic necessity, making his play span only the length of time needed for the plot to develop. The play starts with the beginning of Isis' search and previous incidents are related later on by witnesses. Al-Hakim's craftsmanship is further demonstrated by the shortening of the trial scene. In contrast to the protracted mock trial in Oedipus, in which he lengthens the scene to the point of boredom, al-Hakim now allows the action to intensify the situation. The sudden arrival of the king of Byblos is an unexplained development, but it does achieve the purpose of refuting a complicated web of accusations, which appear very difficult to dispel by any other means.

Al-Hakim steers away from his word-play and verbal logic. He is now closer to the point where he begins using the so-called third language, a balanced and effective mixture of Egyptian dialect and classical Arabic. The writer's emotional involvement is subdued and the characters are

allowed to express themselves through individualized styles. Dialogue is used to develop the action in the play and not to prove a point and, except in rare instances, it is precise and to the point, capturing the audience's attention and allowing them to concentrate on the development of the play.

One is tempted to ask the question: why did al-Hakim fail in his adaptation of Oedipus yet succeed in adapting Isis? It seems to me that no matter how great an adaptation of a masterpiece is, it is always apt to be dwarfed by the original. On the other hand, when a playwright is adapting from raw material, as in the case of Isis, the product will be judged with the original work in mind. Furthermore, in the latter case the playwright is not struggling to outdo someone whose place in history has been established. In Oedipus, al-Hakim reinterpreted the play in order to convey his own ideas. In the process he debased Sophocles' masterpiece. Learning from his mistakes, perhaps, and encouraged by a new and different environment, al-Hakim started writing for the theatre again and not just for select readers interested in abstract arguments rather than in staged drama. By concretizing the myth and increasing its plausibility al-Hakim was able to widen his range of interests without vulgarizing his taste to satisfy an audience's need for entertainment.

The clarity of his vision is no longer confused by contradictions. One may agree or disagree with his point of view, but one cannot fail to admire his ability to combine the different elements of drama. His experimentation with different forms of adaptation has at last convinced him that a playwright can learn from the experience of others, but should never try to imitate those models. Moreover, al-Hakim becomes more aware of his role in society and of the best way of contributing to the art to which he has devoted his life. In the final contemporary period al-Hakim will move

further away from the European models to achieve a national theatre through the blending of his European experience and his Egyptian Arabic heritage with the catalyst of his genius.

## NOTES

## Chapter II

- <sup>1</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, "Introduction," Pygmalion, (Cairo, 1942), pp. 9-10.
- <sup>2</sup>Jacques Guicharnaud with June Guicharnaud, Modern French Theatre, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 297.
- <sup>3</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Odib al-Malek, (Oedipus the King), "Introduction," (Cairo, 1936), pp. 31-32.
- <sup>4</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Introduction to Oedipus, p. 39.
- <sup>5</sup>Taha Husain, Fusul fi al-Adab wal-Nagd, (Cairo, 1945), pp. 92-93.
- <sup>6</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Ahl al-Kahf, (People of the Cave), (Cairo, 1933), p. 36.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 113-114.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 121.
- <sup>9</sup>Mahmood Mandoor, Masrah Tawfiq al-Hakim, (The Theatre of al-Hakim), (Cairo, 1966), p. 133.
- <sup>10</sup>People of the Cave, p. 139.
- <sup>11</sup>Buicharnaud, p. 10.
- <sup>12</sup>People of the Cave, p. 81.
- <sup>13</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Safahat min al-Tarikh, p. 44.
- <sup>14</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Shahrazad, (Sheherazade), (Cairo, 1936), p. 52.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 161.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 169.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 72.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 69.
- <sup>19</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, "Montmartre -- the Poet" in The People of the Art, pp. 111-133.
- <sup>20</sup>T. al-Hakim Yatahadath (T. al-Hakim Speaks), (Interviews between 1951-1971), (Cairo, 1971), p. 65.
- <sup>21</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Braxa Jura, (Cairo, 1939), pp. 50-51.

- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-82.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 84.
- <sup>25</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Pygmalion, (Cairo, 1942), pp. 33-34.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-40.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 46.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 108-109.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-111.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 140.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 189.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 163-164.
- <sup>33</sup>pygmalion, p. 164.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 69.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 107-108.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 78.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81.
- <sup>38</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Isis, Trans. Edouard Gemayel, (Cairo, 1975; Arabic ed. 1955), pp. 82-83.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE MATURE STAGE

The transition period which began after Oedipus the King reached its climax with the publication of Isis in 1955 and its successful production the following year. In 1954 al-Hakim had written Al-A'ydi al-Na'ima, (The Soft Hands), a play which dealt with the social and political problems of the dispossessed feudal lords and the educated elite; Isis, however, was the first play in which al-Hakim attempted a structural synthesis of the theatre of ideas and the theatre of action. The "wedding" which al-Hakim professed to have achieved between European tradition and his Eastern heritage crystallizes in his best plays, some of which will be analyzed in this chapter, namely, Braxa Joor (Part II, 1960), Al-Safaqa, (The Deal, 1956), Ya Tali' al-Shajarah, (The Tree Climber, 1962), Al-Sultan al-Ha'ir, (The Sultan's Dilemma, 1960), Shams al-Nahar, (The Sun of the Day, 1965), and Maseer Sarsar, (The Fate of the Cockroach, 1966).

The plays written in this period still reveal a diversity of themes and techniques, ranging from social realism and the "message play" to experimentation with the theatre of the absurd and the "shadow play." Furthermore, this diversity is a reflection of the radical changes al-Hakim underwent during his career, especially in the third stage, where he moves from being a conservative reactionary in The New Woman to reclusive-idealist and bourgeois-liberal in the theatre of ideas, and finally to propagator of a personal version of Fabian socialism in The Deal. Whether these changes came about because of a need to accommodate himself to the different political climates or from natural growth expected of a sensitive artist remains open to debate. Still, from

evidence apparent in his prose works and essays, it seems that a combination of factors was involved. An analogy comes to mind which may not be totally applicable but serves the purpose: it is the controversy over Bertold Brecht's return to East Germany and his espousal of the Marxist doctrine that became the backbone of most of this late drama.

Nevertheless, al-Hakim's "journey" through different techniques and his changes in attitude show characteristics traceable to his youth. His condemnation of the British occupation, criticism of political corruption, and outrage at the plight of the peasants and the urban poor were manifestations of a rebellious and individualistic mind. Actually, the late President Nasser, who ruled Egypt from 1952 to 1970, was partly inspired by al-Hakim's autobiographical work, The Return of the Soul, in organizing the 1952 army revolt which resulted in the ousting of the late King Farooq. The revolution was the realization of al-Hakim's dreams, portrayed in his literary works; whether the results of this revolt were disappointing to him or not is a question I will attempt to answer in these pages. In the new atmosphere the philosopher-rebel decided to join the battle, as his alter-ego Tout does at the end of Braxa when he leads the people in a revolt against the king.

In three new acts added to Braxa Jura al-Hakim centers on the struggle between the various forces in politics: freedom, as represented by Braxa; wisdom, with the philosopher Abocrat as its advocate; power and order as represented by both the military commander and the previous king, Hironimus; and, finally, the people, a fourth force absent in the earlier version. In the fourth act Hironimus, after his defeat, releases Braxa and Abocrat and seeks their advice. When Braxa persuades him not to commit suicide, but to share power with her and Abocrat, the triumvirate rule refused by Hironimus in the third act finally comes into being, and a

figure-head is found in Braxa's husband, Belerius. However, in the fifth act we discover that the people around the new king, Belerius, have convinced him to imprison the three because Braxa and Hironimus have committed adultery. While in prison, they are informed by a disgruntled jailer that corruption under the rule of Belerius and his henchmen is leading the country into chaos. In the sixth act they are brought to trial by Belerius' right-hand man, Kironimus. However, the three succeed in pulling the rug from under the feet of their accusers, and the people are incited to revolt and assume responsibility for their own destiny.

As we shall see later, the second part of the play inherits many of the defects evident in the first part, yet when both are compared, al-Hakim's new and progressive approach to political and social problems becomes evident. His political comments in the fourth act expose the irony behind political machinations and he voices skepticism at the hollow power of kings. When Belerius asks how he could have been made a king in a minute, since his previous appointment as a judge had to go through many channels before becoming effective, the philosopher cynically answers that becoming a king is the only thing a man can become in less than a minute.<sup>1</sup> When Belerius complains about the difficulties of the kingly office, Braxa assures him that his duties will consist of simply smiling to the people and, when asked for advice, he would need to borrow someone else's head from time to time! At this, the philosopher, the ever-present cynic, whispers to Braxa: "Don't say that to him! People prefer to borrow other's heads without being consciously aware of it."<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting his new social role as a married man and reminding us of his earlier attitude toward women, al-Hakim manages to reach a state of poetic intensity that is a step removed from his romantic sentimentality and closer to the yearnings of ordinary human beings for the simple things

in life. For example, in reply to Braxa's comment that he must be mad to refuse the throne, Belerius says:

Belerius: I did not come to her to become a king, I came here to see my wife after a long separation, to take her back home and live peacefully for the rest of our lives. I came to open my arms, dear Braxa, and say to you: "let us go finally to our nest where we knew the warmth of married life, before you were snatched away by the ambition of power." You destroyed our home to build councils and prisons.<sup>3</sup>

and the philosopher, again acting as commentator for al-Hakim, replies, "When the man (Belerius) started being sensible, they accused him of being a fool and an idiot."<sup>4</sup>

The play registers, aside from minor themes, the philosopher's conversion from a theoretician to a committed actor in the political arena. Reflecting al-Hakim's desire to act instead of theorize, the philosopher sheds his garment of detached rationality and address the people thus:

Abocrat: I want to say: You rule! Not one group for its benefit, not one class for another, and not one individual for a group or for himself, but you all. Like one body and one soul, the whole for the individual and the individual for the whole. . . . .  
You cannot be more stupid than Belerius. Your rule may bring miracles or nothing. . . . Let us try!<sup>5</sup>

And later on, when the crowds overrun the politicians, we hear:

Kirenus: Help! Help! . . . Abocrat! Save me, O philosopher!  
Abocrat: I am not a philosopher anymore, I am in the midst of the battle.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Hakim's judgment about the people is not complimentary but realistic and stems from his knowledge that the masses can be misled and exploited, as he had often witnessed throughout his life and as Hironimus and other characters admit and demonstrate. However, al-Hakim is quick to correct this imbalance, and toward the end of the play he shows that it is hard to mislead the people indefinitely, for at one point they will wake up, their power unleashed. Idealistic as he may be in his concept of power, al-Hakim seems to have moved away from a purely subjective attitude

to a more dialectical response to the afflictions of his country. The final solution may be romantic in its extremes, some may even say utopian but, then, these were the fifties, and the visionary artist had hoped that the people might get a real chance to determine their own future.

Preoccupied with the political theme, al-Hakim sidesteps the relation between Braxa and Hironimus. Both, when confronted with the question of adultery, evade it. Here, in contrast with the first three acts, al-Hakim is not ridiculing only woman, for she is part of the political structure and is condemned as such. Even her ulterior motives in convincing Hironimus not to commit suicide are not emphasized. Al-Hakim integrates them with the larger themes of the play and moves on to more essential questions.

What the play gains in its polished theme it loses in dramatic structure, treatment, and characterization. In order to be staged, the six acts would have to be condensed into three or four, for even as a political play Braxa Jura is too episodic. As published in 1960, the six acts move on different and sometimes contradictory levels ranging from satire on women's rule to an analysis of dictatorship that ends in the assertion of the people's right to self-rule. One can argue that al-Hakim did not change the first three acts because he did not want to alter his testimony, and that he remained true to his artistic vision. But he could have shortened the length of the play and eliminated the obstacles to dramatic harmony which are the natural consequence of the years that elapsed between writing the first and second parts.

Due perhaps to the incongruity between the parts the characters remained poorly developed. When Braxa and Hironimus were defending themselves they talked about the exploitation of the people; however, it was they who tried to exploit the people by placing a puppet on the throne so that they could govern without being exposed. Thus their outrage at the

plight of the people appears, at least to the audience, as an incredible shift rather than a natural conversion of deeply affected and concerned human beings. Kilerius and the men who are conducting the trial remain caricatures of political figures rather than villains determined to exploit the masses. Of course, al-Hakim wanted to portray them as idiots who happened to control the fate of the people for a while, but this is where the contradiction between comedy and political drama fails to be resolved. In other words, the synthesis that he aims at in the final scenes, that is the elimination of imposed political forces upon the people, comes as the result of the author's interference and not as the logical and natural development of events. Even Abocrat's final transformation into a leader is the result of al-Hakim's desire to project himself into the action and is not the outcome of a searching process that normally precedes such a conversion.

Al-Hakim does succeed in creating a climax that appeals to the audience's yearning for political justice, but it is the kind of satisfaction a politician incites by using the rhetoric of a rally podium. Al-Hakim's fault seems to originate in his attempt to demonstrate to his audience that he has changed, that his vision is now fed by an aspiration for democracy. Perhaps he should have left the past forgotten and demonstrated his change of heart in a new play -- which he did in The Sultan's Dilemma.

Aside from Braxa Jura which has its roots in Greek comedy, most of al-Hakim's works at this stage are entirely his own creation. He now departs from direct and indirect adaptations and becomes more concerned with the structural and technical aspects of his drama.

Al-safaqa, (The Deal, 1956), is one of al-Hakim's most progressive in thought. It is an artistically mature play that depends on dramatic

surprises which, in turn, help in developing the action, for they are now well integrated into the play and add to dramatic tension and anticipation.

The play centers around the efforts of a few small farmers in a rural hamlet, somewhere in the Egyptian countryside, who try to buy a few acres from a Belgian company after the government has issued a decree prohibiting all such companies from owning Egyptian land. The play opens on a village square -- the setting is maintained through the play -- as a group of villagers prod the accountant to finish his calculations and confirm the success of the drive so that they may slaughter the calf and celebrate. Thus, in the first scenes we are told that the peasants have collected the money needed to make a down payment on the land. The first minor complication arises when Shannoodah, the accountant, announces that a certain young peasant, Tuhami, has not paid his share and is jeopardizing the whole deal. Tuhami is brought in and he pays. For a moment everyone's fears are dispelled, but soon we discover that Tuhami has stolen from his grandmother, who now comes along demanding her money, saved to pay for her funeral. Deaf to the villager's pleas, she takes the money and leaves. The situation is saved when the moneylender of the village, Haj Abdul Ma'wjooh,\* who is also the undertaker, agrees to lend Tuhami the money, thus rescuing the village.

Throughout the first act we are exposed to background events. We are entertained by the antics of the village barber, who is shaving the beard of Awadain, a prominent villager, while another awaits his turn. We discover that Sa'dawi has delayed the wedding of his son, Mahroos, to Awadain's daughter, Mabrookah, so that both Awadain and Sa'dawi may pay their share of the money. When Shannoodah is about to give an order to

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\*Haj is the title given to men who perform the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca, the holiest shrine in Islam. The title singles out the holder as having performed one of the five most important duties for a Muslim.

mark the beginning of the celebration, Khamis, the railway stationmaster, arrives to inform the villagers that Mr. Hamid, the wealthy landlord of the region, has arrived from Cairo. This news raises suspicions that he is in the village to compete with them for the purchase of the land. After much deliberation, the moneylender agrees to lend the village the money, with interest of course, to buy off Mr. Hamid, and the villagers march with music to the station.

The second act opens with the villagers escorting Mr. Hamid and his assistant Alloosh back to the village to the accompaniment of dance and music. From conversation between Hamid and his assistant we learn that they have no knowledge of the sale and have come for an entirely different reason. They voice their surprise at the villagers' reception. Naively the villagers offer Hamid one hundred pounds, but he protests that this is an insult and that he cannot understand why the poor villagers are willing to part with the money. The villagers add another fifty pounds, thinking that Hamid is simply bargaining with them. Finally his assistant gets to the bottom of the whole affair and discovers that the villagers are trying to prevent Hamid from buying the few acres of land that are for sale. The assistant, who is given twenty pounds for his trouble, then "persuades" Hamid not to bid since it would cause trouble; moreover, he has already pocketed two hundred pounds -- the villagers had added another fifty to make it even -- for doing nothing.

The celebrations begin and we are faced with a major complication that becomes the focal point of the play. When Hamid sees Mabrookah standing by, he demands that she come with him to Cairo as a nanny for his little son. Here both fathers are faced with a moral decision that is anathema to rural Egyptians, for they know that more likely than not Hamid wants Mabrookah as a mistress. After much soul-searching and faced with Hamid's threat to compete for the land, Mabrookah decides to take the

risk and go with Hamid to Cairo, assuring everyone that she will take good care of herself. In order to avoid her fiance's anger, he is told that she has to visit a sick aunt in another village and will be gone for a couple of days. The villagers hope that during this time they will succeed in striking the deal with the Belgian company. The act ends on a sad note of apprehension, and we are left unsure of Mabrookah's success.

In the third act the conflicts presented during the first two acts are brought together and resolved. At the outset, Mabrookah's father is understandably anxious about his daughter, from whom he has had no news; Mahroos' father fears that his son, who has disappeared the night before, might kill both Hamid and Mabrookah to avenge his honor; and finally, Tuhami, whose grandmother has died, cannot feed the mourners, as is the custom, since the undertaker claims he was not paid by the deceased. The first two problems are solved by the arrival of Mabrookah with Mahroos. Mabrookah explains that she tricked Hamid by pretending she had cholera and had the authorities cordon the house, thus preventing him from leaving. Mabrookah had spent two nights in the hospital to which Mahroos was directed to go and from which she was released after being certified as free from cholera symptoms.

Tuhami's problems prove to be more complicated. The undertaker insists that the old woman gave him only enough money for the funeral, but Khamis, the stationmaster, has some incriminating secrets about the Haj which he threatens to make public. Thus Khamis reveals to Awadain and Sa'dawi that soon after a burial, the undertaker strips the corpse of all its trappings and travels to the regional center to return the merchandise, losing only a small amount of money in the transaction. The undertaker is uneasy at the thought of being exposed to the villagers and the authorities, fearing especially that the dead people's relatives will

demand from him proper compensation. He consents to whatever Khamis asks, from paying for the funeral expenses of Tuhami's grandmother and for the wedding of Mabrookah and Mahroos to forgiving all the villagers' debts, including the two hundred pounds given to Hamid. The play ends with the arrival of Shannoodah waiving the contract for the land, and the village celebrates the end of its troubles and the beginning of a new life.

Al-Hakim adheres to the Aristotelian concept of unity in the structure of the plot. The play opens near the end of the action, and very soon we become involved in the complications that lead to the major crisis. Interest is built from the very first line of the play, as we hear the peasants in a chorus: "Shall we slaughter?"\* Only a few lines later we are introduced to the deal, and we are informed that certain payments must be made to complete it. Thus, from the beginning the word "deal" assumes a unifying force behind all the action and inaction in the play; it becomes a symbol that links the three acts together. Within this framework all the characters are introduced during the first act. The relationships among the villagers on one hand, and between them and the wealthy landlord on the other, are defined and elucidated, and the moral and economic factors exposed as the underlying force in their relationship.

By the end of the first act the thesis is clearly stated and the anti-thesis, embodied in Hamid, is also presented. To show the peasants' determination and to create dramatic tension, al-Hakim places many obstacles in their paths. With every obstacle the mood shifts from optimism to pessimism and back again. Thus, when Hamid is brought to pay his share, the peasants as a chorus shout "Shall we slaughter?" Later on, when the grandmother takes the money back and the mood shifts again, the deal is saved by

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\*It is the custom in many Islamic societies to celebrate a happy occasion, such as a wedding, by slaughtering a lamb or a calf. Thus, the peasants' cry "Shall we slaughter?" expressed their joyous anticipation of a happy event.

the moneylender's intervention, and the peasants again unite in the cry: "Shall we slaughter?" To prevent monotony, al-Hakim heightens the pitch at every obstacle; toward the end of the second act, the conflict reaches its highest point and at the closing of the curtain the audience is left tense with anticipation.

The subplots in this play spring naturally and logically from the mainstream of the action without contrivance. The lovers, Mabrookah and Mahroos, for example, move to one side of the village square and reveal to us the delay they have to face in their wedding. Their intrusion on the action is like an "aside" focused on by a slackening of action elsewhere on the stage. Al-Hakim grasps the opportunity to foreshadow future events by revealing Mabrookah's readiness to suffer a postponement to ensure the outcome of the deal. In another scene, the barber is focused upon while he is shaving Sa'dawi. In a technique not unlike that in a cinematic sequence, we are relieved from the tension of anticipation by these comics, who also add to our perception of village life.

In the third act the various conflicts are tied together with a dramatic recall that brings to mind the hints about Tuhami's grandmother's money, the undertaker's dishonesty, and Mahroos and Mabrookah's wedding. One by one as the knots are untied -- like a musical score in a symphonic composition -- in the platitudes of the finale, we relieve our tension with a sigh. The resolution takes place as the venal characters are exposed. We discover that the piety of the Haj is a mask that covers his mean and unscrupulous self; in contrast, Khamis, although not a native of the village and considered a drunkard, worries about the villagers as if he were one of them. When the ending comes we are aware of the idealistic absolutism of this conclusion, yet we are satisfied in purely human terms and accept its probability.

In the same fashion al-Hakim avoids the romantic individualism of the previous periods and creates characters that are human types selected from the vast Egyptian countryside. However, these types are not portrayed casually but are probed deeply to reveal their fears and weaknesses, their strengths and their defiance. Negative qualities are not slighted in favor of the oversized and idealized peasant heroes, but are exposed in an ironic yet sympathetic manner. Al-Hakim knows the world he is recreating, it has been his natural space since he was a child and this knowledge was deepened while working as a prosecutor in the thirties.

We become aware of Sa'dawi and Awadain's prominence from the beginning; they run the affairs of the village by tradition, not by wealth or family name. Their word is respected as final, yet they listen to advice. They show their mettle when, rising to the occasion, they are ready to sacrifice their honor to save the village:

Khamis: The truth. . . . The welfare of the village must be taken into consideration before everything.

Awadain: You mean that in order for the village to own a piece of land I must lose my honor?

Tuhami: Your honor? . . .

Awadain: Something easy! My honor is something easy?<sup>7</sup>

They are put in a very delicate situation and forced to make an agonizing choice, and although they give Mabrookah an option, we know their decision will be final.

There is the simple and tough Tuhami, ready to steal from his grandmother to pay his share of the deal, ready to volunteer to kill Hamid to save the village. He is good at heart, but reacts without much thinking. However, when the deal is threatened he remains clear-headed and prods Awadain to send his daughter with Hamid for the sake of the village. Contrasting Tuhami is Shannoodah, the "brain" of the village by virtue of his ability to read and write. This qualifies him as the accountant and he is

thus in charge of collecting money for the deal. Of course, he expects to derive a profit for himself, as Mahroos comments to Mabrookah in the first act,

Mabrookah: Master Shannoodah? He has an interest in the deal?

Mahroos: Not at all . . . for the sake of God . . . and commission.

Mabrookah: Commission?

Mahroos: Very simple. He does not care much for money nor does he ask for it because he knows that the peasant cannot pay, but he does not mind accepting a commission, like someone's gift to his beloved . . . the peasants would be embarrassed not to present him with a little bit of wheat here, a little bit of rice there, and some corn in the harvesting season . . . you add it up by the end of the year.

Mabrookah: We are the only losers in this village.<sup>8</sup>

Shannoodah is also a wise and moderating force, for when everyone agrees to accept Tuhami's offer to kill Hamid, he stands up, along with Khamis and the Haj, and convinces them to be reasonable and not to resort to violence.

A village cannot be conceived without a rotten apple in its midst, and Haj Ma'wjoos, a hypocrite who exploits the ignorance of the villagers for his own self-interest, fits the description. Posing as a pious "Hajji" who visited Mecca three times, he is resented by the villagers, yet sought for his money in times of need. His swindling is foreshadowed early in the play by Khamis when, trying to convince the Haj to lend the money, he hints at the Haj's periodic trips to the regional center:

Khamis: (whispering to the Haj) God orders us to be inconspicuous. . . . Praise be to God who made us meet by chance on the train. . . . Forgot? . . . The point! You understand and I understand. . . . Solve the problem without any scandals.<sup>9</sup>

Motivated by fear of losing his customers and by hopes of gaining more interest, rather than by a genuine concern for the welfare of the villagers, the Haj rescues the village. With a businessman's instinct for profit, he knows the prosperity of the village will mean more

moneylending and more expensive funerals, but to the villagers' relief he is finally exposed and made to pay for his dishonesty.

The barber's antics add color and character to the play's atmosphere. With his rusting razor and his shaving bowl, used by his wife when not under a customer's chin to feed grain to the chicken, he assures us that life is going on as usual.

Mabrookah is the village "Joan of Arc," the saviour with instinctive intelligence. Very early we get a glimpse of her readiness to sacrifice her personal interests for the village:

Mahroos: If we had had the wedding two months ago, after cotton harvest. . . .

Mabrookah: It is chance and destiny. . . .

Mahroos: The offering is ready, the music too . . . and everyone is happy.

Mabrookah: For the land.

. . . . .

Mahroos: God made them all happy . . . all of them . . . except you and me. All of them bought [something], everyone will have a property, but I lost my dowry and you lost your wedding's furnishings.

Mabrookah: God will retrieve all of it for us.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to her fiancé's lamentations, she accepts the situation stoically, though she is unhappy at the delay. She is a positive female character untarnished by al-Hakim's ridicule. He persuades us to accept her as a creation of his art and forces us to look beyond her to a reality with which his native audience is familiar. Her act of courage is not sentimentalized; rather, she is depicted as a simple folk heroine who succeeds by using a small yet effective trick. Al-Hakim does not attempt to probe deeply and uncover any psychological traits, for the overriding issue remains the deal. Her fiancé Mahroos is a hot-blooded youth, ready to kill to defend the village's honor and his own. Beyond that, he remains a detail in a larger picture in which he does not play an important role.

Hamid represents a class of feudal landlords who for the most part had obtained their property by unscrupulous means. He is greedy and lecherous, ready to jump at the first opportunity that smells of profit. For the villagers he has nothing but contempt, the epitome of the absentee landlord who leaves the tilling of the land to others while he enjoys the luxuries of Cairo. Ironically, he is tricked by one of those he despises, as Mabrookah stands up to him in her meek but effective way. His assistant Alloosh is a parasite whose loyalty is bestowed upon the highest bidder and who, when the opportunity arises, is ready to work against his own employer:

Aloosh: . . . You keep silent, and leave everything to me. I will straighten everything up . . . give me the money.  
 Sa'dawi: (giving him the money) Take it! God bless you! If your efforts succeed you will have a sheep for the Eed\*.<sup>11</sup>

Befitting the characterization is the adaptability of the play's setting, a village square that could easily be recreated on stage but that more importantly renders the play highly suitable for an open-air performance in any village square across Egypt.\*\* Since the play is also concerned with a public conflict, the choice of the setting is also highly appropriate.

By stripping the setting of superfluous ornaments, the author invites the audience to concentrate on the action. Al-Hakim succeeds in creating an authentic atmosphere that approximates our conception of village life by focusing on colorful language and richness of detail. Thus the play accentuates our perception of the poverty and austerity of the villagers'

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\*The Eed holiday commemorates the final days of the Pilgrimage to Mecca, and all over the Muslim world a four-day holiday is observed.

\*\*In a postscript to the play, al-Hakim emphasizes that his choice of the setting was made to facilitate its staging in any Egyptian village, thus making it accessible to a class of people who rarely get the chance to attend a theatre.

everyday life. A few hints about the barber's lack of customers except on special occasions and the eagerness to slaughter the calf suggests that the villagers do not often have the means to enjoy anything but bare necessities. Al-Hakim is careful not to let his audience get trapped in the natural beauty of the village. Somewhere in the background is the Egyptian countryside, but for the villagers it has no romantic appeal. Reality for them is the hard and cruel sunrise-to-sunset labor on a land they do not own. (One might compare it to the Brechtian drabness of The Caucasian Chalk Circle, but there the similarities end.) The dusty, crowded, and noisy surroundings show no attempt on the part of al-Hakim to manicure his picture, yet they are depicted within a framework both comic and sympathetic, creating a lopsided symmetry, the nature of which can only be grasped when one is aware of the ago-old penuries endured by the Egyptian peasant and his ability to laugh at his misery.

Aware of the difficulties that face any Arab playwright who seeks a uniform dramatic language, al-Hakim explains in a postscript his efforts to achieve a "third language;" one which does not deviate from the classical rules of grammar but at the same time may be understood by an uneducated audience. He explains that his aim was to write a play in a language suitable both to be read as literature and to be heard on stage. To a great extent The Deal achieves that end without minimizing the peasants' characteristically colorful expressions. Al-Hakim avoids the rhapsodic lyricism of pastorals, preferring direct prose. He also avoids the long contemplative speeches and sermons of previous periods; he allows language to set the pace of the action and maintains complete control over the advancement of the plot.

The language is vividly direct, alternating with pauses that allow the audience to absorb previous occurrences. We smile at the dialogue

between Mabrooka and Mahroos, or at that between the barber and his distinguished customers, yet these dialogues do not divert our attention because they are organically related to the main conflict:

Tuhami: (asking the Haj to lend him the money) Wait for me till the winter harvest (rap) . . . God will solve it, I will have a cow by then.  
 Haj: Do you guarantee that God will solve it?  
 Tuhami: No human being can guarantee God. . . .  
 Haj: And you want me to guarantee you?  
 Shan.: You are an able man, Haji . . . be brave!  
 Haj: You want me to throw my money in the air?  
 Sa'd: In the land . . . throw it in the bountiful land, land of our town. The piaster you throw in it is its glory.<sup>12</sup>

The whole play is constructed upon the ironic misunderstanding of Hamid's intentions by the villagers. Within the logic they are the victims of their own blindness. However, the play is intended as a comedy and does end like one; meanwhile the audience vacillates between laughter and outrage at the villagers' helplessly ignorant behavior. Al-Hakim does not 'interfere' to save the situation but lets it take its course, no matter how cruel the process. With tongue-in-cheek we hear Hamid respond to Sa'dawi and Awadain:

Sa'dawi: . . . all the villagers know the reason for your coming!  
 Hamid: You know the reason for my coming?  
 Awadain: We have news of everything, your honor! . . .  
 Hamid: (surprised) You have news?  
 Sa'dawi: The minute you arrived in the station.  
 Hamid: Someone from the village met us at the station and heard about the story. . . .  
 Awadain: That is correct!  
 Hamid: Thanks God everything is fine, God is most merciful and kind, and you are gallant people. You took the trouble to come to the station in an unprecedented welcome. God help in rewarding your efforts.  
 Sa'dawi: Good words.  
 Awadain: Sweet words, like honey . . . the subject is closed.  
 Hamid: What subject?<sup>13</sup>

In the final analysis, al-Hakim fails to place the reality of the play within a historical context. He ignores the fact that centuries of subjugation and exploitation are responsible for the ignorance and docility

of the villagers. He prefers to let reality speak for itself and allows the audience to reach its own conclusions. He does show that their morality is superior to that of their "betters," a fact made more significant by their helplessness; still, he punishes the wrong culprit, the Haj, and lets Hamid get away with the money, reminding us that not everything is solved. He may be cruel in his depiction of the villagers, but the reality of those villagers is cruel. He is celebrating a human force that his theatre had neglected for a time. As a moderate, al-Hakim fails to revolt against, or reach for, the roots of the social evils in his society.

#### The Sultan's Dilemma

Al-Sultan Al-Ha'er (The Sultan's Dilemma, 1960) may be considered al-Hakim's most mature play. In it he was able to fuse the elements of plot, character, thought, and language to achieve a structure that is complete and effective. If many of his works are documents of unresolved dilemmas, this one seems to carry a definite dramatic and personal resolution. The play centers around a problem that faces a ruler and the choice he has to make between the law and the sword as a means of ensuring the survival of his rule. By setting the play in the Mameluke period,\* al-Hakim not only endows the play with a historical perspective that allows him to avoid censorship but universalizes the theme as well.

The play opens on a city square sometime after midnight. We discover a man tied to a pole, the executioner sitting by his side. They are waiting for the Mu'ezzin's\*\* call to prayer to signal for the execution. The condemned man persists in asking how much time he has left and

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\*The Mamelukes were members of a military caste, once slaves, who ruled in Egypt from 1250 until 1517.

\*\*The Mu'ezzin is a layman who calls the Muslim to prayer five times a day.

the executioner is irritated at his questioning. To appease the executioner, the condemned man orders wine from a tavern across the street. When the wine merchant inquires about the crime, the executioner threateningly discloses his orders to proceed with the execution should the man dare to mention his crime; however, we discover that the man has been sentenced without a trial and that he has appealed to the Sultan for a fair trial. The drunken executioner disturbs a lady who lives across the street. An argument ensues between her maid and the executioner, and the lady herself appears. She recognizes the prisoner as a slave trader who had visited her house a few times, and when she sees the Mu'ezzin coming to call for prayer, induces him to come to her house and rest for a while, thus delaying the execution. Finally the vesir\* and his men arrive and rebuke the executioner for the delay. Shortly after, the sultan and his chief cadi (chief judge) arrive to answer the condemned man's appeal and give him a fair trial. Only then are we told that his crime has been to point out that the sultan, who was a slave in his childhood, was never manumitted by his owner, the late sultan. The chief justice is of the opinion that since the sultan was not manumitted, he is still property of the state and should be sold in public auction. Furthermore, the sultan, still legally a slave, cannot rule free people. At first the sultan favors the vesir's suggestion, which is simply to kill anyone who dares to spread such rumors. After a long exchange on the merits of the law, the sultan agrees with the chief cadi that the law should prevail. The chief justice's argument is simple:

Cadi: . . . But the sword gives right to the strongest, and who knows who will be the strongest tomorrow? . . . As

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\*The vesir held an administrative position equivalent to that of a Prime Minister in modern government. The position was often the center of intrigue and power struggle during the late period of the Islamic Empire.

for the law, it protects your right from aggression because it does not recognize the strongest, it recognizes right. And now there's nothing for you to do, Your Majesty, but choose between the sword which empowers and yet exposes you and the law which threatens and yet protects you.<sup>14</sup>

The second act opens on a city square where a wine merchant and a shoemaker are arguing about the advantages and disadvantages of buying a sultan. The sultan's retinue arrives and the slave trader conducts the auction after the chief cadí has read the rules, which stipulate that the highest bidder agree to manumit the sultan immediately. An unknown man buys the sultan for 30,000 dinars; however, he refuses to sign the manumission deed, arguing that his client has not authorized him to do so. The lady appears and we discover that the stranger was acting on her behalf. She refuses to sign the papers, contending that the rule constitutes a violation of her rights, and her argument prevails. She relents to persuasion but only on condition that the sultan agree to remain as a guest in her house until the dawn prayer. Again, the dawn prayer becomes the focal point in the events and the sultan agrees to carry his commitment to the law to the end.

The third act opens on the same square where the people have congregated to attend the sultan's manumission. The vesir, fearing that the lady will not keep her word, conspires with the executioner to accuse her of treason. The square is in darkness and we see light coming from a window in the lady's house. Next we see the sultan and the lady as she explains to him that she used to be a slave of the late master of the house, who married her after making her a free woman. It was from him that she had acquired a taste for music and poetry and, so, after his death she continued to entertain her late husband's old friends. Back in the square, the chief cadí arrives and orders the mu'ezzin to climb up the

minaret and call for prayer, although it is hardly past midnight. The lady and the sultan appear, surprised at the mu'ezzin's early call. When the chief cadí explains that the agreement stipulates that the lady is to emancipate the sultan when the mu'ezzin calls for the dawn prayer, but that no time has been specified, the sultan and the lady object to this literal interpretation of the law. The chief cadí replied that he was only trying to help. The sultan rebukes him and asks the lady to return with him to her house. However, to everyone's surprise but the sultan's the lady is now ready to sign the papers. They part with tears in their eyes and the sultan directs the vesir to quell any malicious rumors about this virtuous lady.

Like The Deal, The Sultan's Dilemma opens near the end of the story, and from the very first few lines our interest is aroused by the news that a man is about to be executed. We are further intrigued because he is not allowed to mention his crime and has been sentenced without a trial. To diffuse the gravity of the situation, al-Hakim reverses the relationship between the "condemned" man and the executioner, and, ironically, the former is obliged to entertain the latter so that he will be executed speedily and without much pain:

Executioner: It is in your interest that I should enjoy a quiet and peaceful sleep.  
 Slave trader: In my interest?  
 Executioner: Certainly, it is in your interest that I should be completely rested and in excellent health, both physically and mentally; because when I am tired, depressed, or disturbed my hand shakes, and when it shakes I perform my work badly.<sup>15</sup>

The slave trader not only orders a couple of drinks, he even promises to listen to the executioner's song.

Suspense mounts again as the wine merchant inquires about the crime and the executioner prevents the slave trader from answering. We are

kept in the dark until the end of the act, when the latter's comments about the illegality of the sultan's position present to us the dramatic incident upon which al-Hakim builds the entire conflict in the play. By the end of the first act we are exposed to all the characters and the major complication. The action progresses on both an outer and inner level. On the outer level we have the sultan's conflict with the other characters about the proper way to handle the problem: the chief cadî is adamant about the superiority of the law, while the vesir favors the use of force:

Vesir: If this man's head is cut off and hung up in the square before the people, no tongue would thenceforth dare to utter a word about the matter.<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand we have the sultan's inner conflict. He is aware of the implications of any step he might take, be it to resort to power or to adhere to the law, and his final decision to uphold the latter is the result of an intense soul-searching process. But his predicament does not end here, and he is forced to make a yet more agonizing decision. It is his acceptance of the condition imposed by the lady that brings about his eventual enlightenment.

There is a noticeably slower tempo in the first act, especially when compared with the corresponding one in The Deal, for now al-Hakim's focus has shifted to his characters' inner conflicts, and the situation rather than the action is now the subject of his attention. Toward the end of the act the mini-climax created by the sultan's acceptance of the auction causes the audience to anticipate the second act with interest, since it knows that the auction itself is a theatrical happening.

The pace quickens in the second act, as the crowd gathers to witness the auction. The shoemaker comments sarcastically to the wine merchant that he has kept his shop open because there are some among the people in

greater need of his shoes than of anything else. The climax is reached when the lady is revealed as the sultan's new master, an amusing yet strange situation in which the people find their ruler a captive of a woman of ill repute.

The major crisis in the third act occurs as we are held in suspense, unsure of whether the lady will keep her promise. However, her integrity is not put to the test; rather, it is the integrity of the man who represents the law, the chief *cadi*, that is questioned. To everyone's surprise the lady's moral superiority is evinced when, after the *mu'ezzin* calls the prayer ahead of time, she agrees to sign the manumission deed. At the end we are left with a feeling of satisfaction both at the sultan's insistence that the spirit of the law be upheld and at the lady's generosity.

Although the action is concentrated and points in one direction, the solution of the sultan's dilemma, there is still a lack of economy in achieving that goal, prompted by the nature of the situation faced by the Sultan. Before taking any decision the sultan hesitates and searches for the proper response, in the process long argument ensue, and the action is delayed. Nevertheless, the instances of suspended action do not reduce the degree of concentration since they are tied to the main plot. Thus, when the suspense of awaiting the second dawn, which will signal the freedom of the sultan we do not feel a lapse in the development of the action. Moreover, the window conversation helps to reveal the true nature of the lady, as highlighted by her willingness to overlook the trickery of the chief *cadi*.

Al-Hakim is communicating a message about the superiority of the spirit of the law which, albeit personal in its perception, achieves universal value. No matter how a historian might interpret the political atmosphere in Egypt at the time, Nasser was a dictator and the superiority

of the law was in question. Al-Hakim does not criticize the sultan (Nasser) directly, but instead directs his criticism at the royal court. In a larger context, al-Hakim states in the preface to the play that while he was writing it in Paris during his service as Egypt's representative to the UNESCO in 1959, he pondered whether international conflicts could best be solved by resorting to force or whether the law should be upheld at all cost. He asserts that ambivalence in this respect has dragged the world into confusion. There is no doubt that al-Hakim favors the law, yet he is not blind to its manipulation for political ends. Al-Hakim's statement should not be taken at its face value, for there is no doubt that the play could be viewed from a different angle, and al-Hakim himself does not discourage different interpretations.

Unlike The Deal, in which al-Hakim relies on types for his characterization, in The Sultan's Dilemma he creates individuals developed to their fullest. The nature of the play, with its emphasis on the private self, dictates the creation of individuals with psychological depth who face difficult choices. The fact that al-Hakim does not refer to his characters by name but rather by their professional or occupational titles does not interfere with our recognition of their individuality. If some of the minor characters remain types, it is because of their limited roles. Still, their function is essential to the development of the action. When the action is in a state of suspension, they help to fill the gaps by commenting on the events, and supplying background information; and when the situation is loaded with suspense, as in the scene preceding the auction, they bring comic relief.

In abstract terms, the play is about a man facing a difficult choice. To eliminate any historical identifications, al-Hakim simply calls him "the sultan," but as the play progresses we learn that he has proved himself as a great army commander and a leader before and after

assuming power. None of the characters seems to criticize his rule, yet the mere fact that the execution of an untried man is about to take place unbeknownst to him indicates that he is not fully in control of his sultanate. The slave trader's revelation is an intrusion into a previously smooth continuum which reverberates throughout the remainder of the play. After this, the sultan is not the same. In philosophical terms the incident resembles the laugh heard by the hero in Camus' The Fall after the drowning incident. Like the protagonist in The Fall, the sultan could close his ears to gossip by executing the slave trader, yet he cannot silence his inner voice. His decision to subject himself to the auction proceedings is not merely political, but also very personal. By assuming full responsibility the sultan achieves enlightenment. Initially amused at the situation he has thrust himself into when he agrees to follow the lady, he acts on the assumption that once the first step is taken he cannot retreat. The irony of finding himself in the house of a lady of ill repute melts away when he discovers that she really is intelligent and virtuous. His greatest enlightenment, and one that brings no tragic consequences, is achieved as he acquires consciousness of the dichotomy between his public and private selves.

To eliminate any doubt as to the authenticity of his decision, al-Hakim's sultan tries to extricate himself from following the chief cadî's counsel. In contrast, at the opening of the play, he complied with the vesîr's opinion. When the chief cadî prevails and the sultan finally accepts the moral superiority of the law, his decision is convincing, for it is undoubtedly the result of a reasoning process. We sympathize with his dilemma because we know it is not of his making. Being the subject of the argument between the vesîr and the chief cadî, he vacillates between either position, but once his decision is taken, he makes sure he

is solely responsible for all the ensuing acts.

The lady is another positive female character of al-Hakim's late period. Endowed with feminine curiosity, she sacrifices her fortune to meet a ruler brave enough to comply with the law even if it means to be sold as a slave. As the second act proceeds we become more convinced of her moral superiority over the chief cadi. The false rumors about her are disproven, and from her conversation with the sultan we discover other virtues in her character. She is a cultured lady who would not have bothered to reveal her real personality had the sultan not inquired. However, by choosing to ignore the rumors about her character and by not attempting to clear her image she suffers public disdain. Her portrayal has parallels to the Pirandellian concept of the public and private selves. Al-Hakim, however, does not explore this subject fully, and unlike Pirandello, al-Hakim is not bitter about the conflict and does not voice despair at the ignorance of the people and at their inability to look beyond the mask. In this respect al-Hakim accepts the autonomy of the private self, yet he does not shun the public self and the decision of the sultan to dispel the rumors about the lady leads to no tragedy.

The chief cadi and the vesir are types who represent the antithetical forces of the law. At the beginning of the play they deceptively appear as different, but as the play proceeds differences begin to vanish when both are ready to uphold the status quo at any cost. We are temporarily heartened as we witness the chief cadi ready to risk his life to defend the law against the use of force. Later on, however, he is exposed as a manipulator, ruthless in his drive to win the sultan's favor. The vesir, on the other hand, resolutely advocates the use of force in matters of state. He is more consistent than the chief cadi.

Unlike earlier plays, the Sultan's Dilemma avoids direct statements, and its language becomes a more effective tool for the dramatization of al-Hakim's ideas. Al-Hakim uses literary Arabic and avoids local dialects, and except for a few scenes, the dialogue is direct, functional, and controlled. Still, it would perhaps have been more suitable to have taken into consideration the fact that the shoemaker and the wine merchant are not on the same social level as the chief cadí and the sultan. A slight variation in their vocabulary and sentence structure would have rendered the auction scene more realistic.

Al-Hakim sets his play in the city square, amidst a variety of shops and flanked by the lady's house. The setting reflects al-Hakim's new austere approach and his reliance on action, dialogue and thought. However, this austerity does not reduce its effect; on the contrary, it helps the audience to realize that it is the situation and not the visual effects that is important. The opening scene of the play, when the condemned man is seen tied to a pole, creates a sense of doom and foreboding that is in deep contrast to the ironic exchange that follows. As the conversation between the condemned man and the executioner continues, we become convinced that despite the gravity of the situation the denouement will not be tragic.

### The Tree Climber

The Sultan's Dilemma is not al-Hakim's final vision of man in the universe. In his next play, Ya Tale' al-Shajarah (The Tree Climber, 1926), a more personal statement, al-Hakim experiments with different techniques and theatrical traditions.

He borrows from the Theatre of the Absurd, uses symbolism, and twists a folk song into a new formula. Constructing his plot around a skeleton of a detective story, he manages to remove all barriers of time

and space and allows his characters to move from one place to another without any recognition of the laws of probability. The stage is a barren board on which two groups of characters (sometimes the same character in two places) are enacting two different scenes in two different places and periods. Language and logic assume a nonsensical process in which two characters are reminiscing in "stream-of-consciousness" monologues that poeticize the drawing-room absurdity of such a play as The Bald Soprano.

As the play opens, a detective enters carrying his chair onto an otherwise empty stage, followed by a maid who carries a table for him to work on. Trying to discover clues about the missing lady of the house, he interrogates her. She assures him that the couple have never disagreed on anything, and to convince the detective, she recalls a typical conversation. The wife enters, carrying her chair, and sits down in a corner. She calls her husband inside since it is getting chilly. Husband Bahadir enters with his gardening tools and tells her that the Lady Green, the lizard, has entered her sanctuary under the tree. He sits down, and a dialogue ensues. While the wife knits a dress for an imaginary daughter, aborted forty years ago, and talks about the experience, the husband answers in a manner that appears logical, but in actuality he is talking about his orange tree. The recollection ends when the detective dismisses the maid. He then calls the husband, but fails to elicit a satisfactory answer from him. The husband explains that he is not worried since he used to work as a conductor and was therefore the only person on the train who never cared whether it arrived on time or not. Admitting hypothetically that, like any husband, the idea of killing his wife had occurred to him, the husband awakens the detective's

suspicious. To demonstrate to the detective how his work on the railroad did not worry him, he recalls a typical day on the train. From one side of the stage Bahadir's assistant enters, carrying a window of a train car, and sits down. Presently Bahadir\* appears and rebukes his assistant for sleeping while on duty. The assistant assures him that he came earlier to show him the passenger list but found Bahadir looking out of the window daydreaming. A group of school children on an outing passes by singing "O' Tree Climber."\*\* The assistant tells him that all passengers are accounted for except a dervish who had no ticket and talked in an incomprehensible manner.

The dervish is brought in, and when asked about his ticket produces a birth certificate instead. On being told that he must show a ticket, he stretches his hand out of the window and presents ten tickets. Amazed at the dervish's supernatural powers, Bahadir begins to question him about the future and is told about a house in the suburb of Zeitona where he will meet his future wife and of a little garden with an orange tree that "in winter produces oranges, in spring apricots, in summer figs, and in autumn pomegranates." Meanwhile the detective and Bahadir are commenting on the scene that is being enacted in front of them. The detective asks Bahadir whether the dervish may be questioned about the missing wife and Bahadir agrees to summon him. The dervish enters and in a vague manner suggests that if Bahadir has not killed his wife already, he will do so in the near future. Bahadir is outraged, while the detective's earlier

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\*The younger Bahadir does not show his face during the recalled scene so that Bahadir will feel free to comment on the train scene to the detective.

\*\*The title for the play is taken from a folk song about a poor man who asks another who is climbing the tree of success to bring down something for him. Al-Hakim is using the title in a manner that has only a surface affinity with the theatre of the absurd.

doubts are confirmed. He is convinced now that Bahadir killed his wife and buried her under the tree to fertilize it, and the act ends as Bahadir is taken to prison.

The second and last act opens as the detective is giving instructions to an unseen digger in the yard. At the same time the maid is talking to the milkman about the latest rumors concerning the missing wife and how she was buried under the tree. Suddenly the doorbell rings, and to everyone's surprise the wife is at the door. She is angry with the detective for allowing the digger to destroy her husband's tree. The detective calls the prison and asks that the husband be released. When he arrives, the detective apologizes to him and departs. The husband questions his wife about her three-day absence, but she believes an answer would be irrelevant. The husband does not suspect infidelity, yet he is obsessed with the idea of living the rest of his life without knowing what happened during those three days, and for the rest of the act he tries to wrest an answer from her. Finally, enraged beyond control, he murders his wife, who to the last breath persists in refusing to tell him about her three days' absence.

At first he thinks of calling the police, then he drops the idea and instead carries the corpse and places it in the freshly dug grave. At that moment, the dervish is heard knocking at the door. The husband confesses to him, but when both go out to the yard to complete the burial they discover it has disappeared. Instead they find the carcass of Lady Green, the lizard, lying in the grave.

The moment the detective enters carrying his chair we become aware that the play is not a drawing-room play. The seemingly routine investigation becomes more complicated as the maid's answers add to the confusion.

The slow tempo evident in the first scene continues as the maid recalls a typical conversation between husband and wife, which also contributes to the confusion. Despite the slow pace, audience interest is kept alive by the inexplicable happenings. When the husband enters, the action moves faster and we realize that the detective story is merely a cover. But, as in any detective story the audience is confronted with leads and false leads, anticipations and doubts. The detective's doubts are misleadingly confirmed by the recall of the train scene and the actual arrival of the dervish, and the first major complication occurs when the husband is led to prison.

The second act opens with the same slow pace. Two dialogues are taking place at the same time, one between the milkman and the maid, the other between the detective and the digger. The maid's gossip informs the audience about the latest rumors and helps to fill the gap between the two acts. The detective's instructions to the unseen and inaudible digger keeps us in suspense while anticipating the discovery of the body. With the wife's unexpected appearance, we are relieved and led to believe that a happy ending is possible. Steadily the pace builds up. After the departure of the detective and others, the husband's innocuous question becomes the basis for a heated inquisition. In a quick crescendo the major crisis develops and climaxes in the strangulation of the wife. But al-Hakim has yet another trick in his bag: when the audience is beginning to share the husband's anxieties and frustrations that ended with the obstinate wife, al-Hakim ends the play with an undecided and perplexing note amenable to varied interpretations.

In real terms the plot takes twenty-four hours, and background information is supplied by the maid and the husband, as well as by scenes recalled from the past. The action progresses on two different levels:

on the one hand we have the real world portrayed by the detective and his efforts to solve the mystery of the missing wife, and on the other we have the world of dreams and fantasy depicted by the husband and his efforts to create an eternal tree. These worlds are contradictory yet they complement each other. The two lines of action which those worlds represent meet when the murder takes place.

The theme is a recurrent one in al-Hakim's plays. The artist is again confronted with the dilemma of trying to create the absolute in art; a merging of ever-changing life with art, eternal but lifeless. To avoid the confines of the art form Bahadir incorporates formlessness (his wife's body) with form to produce a tree that will yield one kind of fruit for each of the seasons. Like Pygmalion, Bahadir is torn between his need for human love and the inevitability of the mundane and his aspiration to create an immortal work of art; and like him Bahadir kills his alter-ego who embodies his "lower" half. However, while Pygmalion failed to achieve his dream or solve the contradictions within himself, Bahadir approximates the realization of his dream with the tree. In spite of the fact that The Tree Climber does not end with the failure of the artist, the value of the sacrifice nevertheless remains inconclusive, for the wife's body has never brought forth life. In its totality the play is an allegory of the tragedy of modern man who continues to use his mind for creation, thus trying to outdo the gods even if it means the death of his fellow men.

In my thematic analysis I have emphasized the artist's dilemma. Equally important, however, is the theme of death and resurrection with which al-Hakim dealt in The People of the Cave and Isis. I believe, however, that the richness of the play lends itself to different interpretations and allows the spectator to see in the play what is most essential to him personally. Thus, on the social level al-Hakim is ridiculing the mechanical rituals of living which create the illusion of life but are,

in fact, a parody of it.

Al-Hakim's ridicule of social rituals is accomplished through use of some of the techniques of the theatre of the absurd. He borrows from the absurdists their emphasis on the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of communicating through language, and their disregard for temporal and spatial limitations to human activities. Al-Hakim agrees with the absurdists that man constantly questions the universe, but never gets an answer. On the other hand, al-Hakim asserts that the problem is as old as time, and that the absurdists' conclusion that life is itself absurd is a form of defeatism.<sup>17</sup> From the very first few lines of the play we are aware of the lack of communication:

Detective: When exactly did your mistress disappear?  
 Maid: Just as the lizard returns 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.<sup>18</sup>

and the pattern continues for a while. The detective is concerned with the chronology of the events and his persistence induces the maid to recall the scene between the couple. It is impossible to listen to the conversation between Bahadir and his wife without recalling the absurd conversation between the Smiths in Ionesco's Bald Soprano.

Wife: (Turning to where the window is supposed to be) Come in, Bahadir! Leave your tree now and come! It is chilly outside.  
 Husband: (Enters carrying gardening tools) I know. When it begins to turn chilly, the venerable Lady Green goes into her sanctuary. But what I don't understand is that, though there is no wind today, some of the oranges are falling. What could have brought them down?  
 Wife: (Busy knitting) It was I who brought her down. It was the first fruit and it was I, with my own hands, who aborted her. At that time he didn't want her. It was because of poverty -- he didn't yet own anything apart from the small grocery shop. He hadn't yet worked as a commission agent for land in this area, which was waste at the time. He said to me:

'Have patience! Don't involve me now in the worry of having children.  
 Husband: (Cleaning the gardening tools) What really worries me is that there was no wind today and yet. . . .  
 Wife: And yet I listened to what he had to say, and I did it.<sup>19</sup>

Where the maid and detective are unable to communicate, husband and wife have the illusion of communication. For Bahadir, words have lost their social connotation and have become a very personalized form of expression, regardless of whether he is understood or not. When the detective objects to the husband's pronouncement that he is perfectly happy with his wife and says that he "calls things by the wrong name," the husband retorts, "names are of no importance to me."

Husband: The meaning of things? What are these meanings? You want me to regard understanding and happiness as you comprehend them and not as I do.

Detective: As everyone comprehends them.

Husband: And what business of mine is everyone? . . .<sup>20</sup>

In the second act we witness the complete collapse of the detective's logic. Faced with the appearance of the wife he is unable to believe his eyes because, according to his analytical mind, she should be dead. He desperately tries to convince her that all indications pointed to her husband as the murderer. But we smile with the knowledge that his firm convictions are invalid. Later on, he tries to explain how it was that the dervish further strengthened his belief:

Wife: What a muddle! Do you understand what you are saying?

Detective: No.

Wife: Neither do I.

Detective: The fact is that I don't understand what I was saying. It appears to be quite meaningless.

Wife: Of course.

Detective: And yet it happened. The dervish came along and said a lot of things your husband agreed with. He didn't agree about everything. . . .<sup>21</sup>

The detective departs before he is infected with the mood of the insane household.

The other characteristic that bears similarities to the theatre of the absurd is al-Hakim's elimination of the concept of time and space, or rather his rendering them as relative concepts, removed from the absolutism of the real world. Again, the detective's question in the first line of the play gives us the clue: his concern about the exact time. After that, the detective is unable to function as he did in the outside world but accepts the fairy tale atmosphere of fluid space and time. When the maid recalls a typical conversation between the couple, al-Hakim makes good use of the cinematic technique of flashback. He continues to shift the action from the present to the past and from the living-room to the train, but the fact that this technique has similarities to the theatre of the absurd does not place it in the same category. Al-Hakim had dealt with the inability of man to cross the barrier of time in a human relation, whether social, economical, or emotional. In Shahrazade he dealt with space and claimed that it is the total relation of man to his environment. Al-Hakim's new approach stems from his attempts to do away with a ready-made myth as the springboard of his ideas and replace it with works that are his creation.

To enhance the mythical atmosphere, al-Hakim uses multifaceted symbols that are as fluid as his temporal and spatial manipulations. For the husband, Lady Green is the embodiment of life's charms and temptations, and he describes the lizard in a very suggestive manner.

Husband: . . . I know the way she moves, the way she glances about her, her gestures -- also her features.  
 Detective: Her features?  
 Husband: Yes, her features. For nine years I've been watching her everyday . . . I love her.<sup>23</sup>

It seems that the aborted foetus, the lizard, and the tree are manifestations of the same idea. They represent the attempt of the artist to

create the eternal and the unchanging in art. In Pygmalion the efforts of the artist failed because his statue was too close to human form and had to be destroyed for that very reason. In The Tree Climber the aborted foetus was destroyed because, being too similar to Pygmalion's statue, it could not express the artist's yearning for the eternal. The lizard stayed much longer because it approximated the artist's vision, and Bahadir reiterates her immutability by repeatedly referring to her as the lady green. The tree, however, is the only possibility on which the artist's hopes hold promise. It is supposed to symbolize the artist's ultimate creation, being able to bear a different kind of fruit in each of the four seasons.

The dervish is another of al-Hakim's composite characters. In a blending of folk figures with modern traits, he is both the Muslim mystic and the vagabond. His supernatural powers are not presented for the sake of entertainment but rather to highlight the absurdity of man's everyday concerns. His verbose, yet convincing logic, reduces Bahadir's rules and regulations to mockery. He seems to symbolize Bahadir's repressed artistic aspirations. As such, the dervish represents Bahadir's alter-ego and his prophecies seem to echo the latter's desire to achieve the sublime in artistic creation. If one can assume that the dervish is to Bahadir what the three witches were to Macbeth, is the dervish, then, the tempter who incites Bahadir to crime or is he the sounding board of Bahadir's unspelled inner thoughts? From evidence in the play it seems that the dervish is a repressed voice that has been brought to light.

The dervish announces that crime for philosophical reasons is the epitome of the twentieth century, meaning that men do not kill for money or passion anymore, but rather for intellectual reasons. The dervish was slightly incorrect in his historical assessment; Faust, for one, stands

out as an example from the Renaissance. Bahadir is only one among many who stop at nothing to achieve the utmost in human endeavor. His readiness to kill his wife in order to bury her under the tree, for the sake of creating the eternal tree, places him among a group of artist-scientist visionaries who sacrificed everything for the ultimate creation; a hidden desire to emulate the gods from ancient Greece to modern times.

The husband assures the detective that his conversation with his wife is not an exception, ". . . this is something which always happens between husbands and wives, in every household . . . with everyone . . . with you for example."<sup>24</sup> He insists: "I have been living with her happily and comfortably for nine years." However, the reasons for his happiness are rather unusual, for he states that he never had a "disagreement" with her; he does not say that they had always been in agreement. One is led to believe that there never was a dialogue between the two, but rather monologues spoken in the presence of the other, not necessarily with the intention of communicating a thought. The only time they did have a dialogue is in the final scenes and it led to "disagreement," followed by crime. His insistence on knowing where she was during the three days reveals that his reasons are purely intellectual, and her refusal is equally so, but he confesses to his wife that he is unable to live with her without knowing. His mistake was to have posed the question, for now he must know the answer or else the "lack" of disagreement will be replaced by outright discord.

Killing his wife is not only the realization of an artist's dream, it also constitutes a severing of his ties with his other self and the world of humans. By separating himself from any forms or conventions, he is left alone with his dreams. His loneliness was foreshadowed when he

announced to the detective that his prison stay was an enjoyable experience and advises the detective to try imprisonment:

Husband: The feeling that you are a foetus who has returned to his mother's womb, feeding and breathing from within. Waiting for a hand to drag you out at some time or other.<sup>25</sup>

Like Beckett's tramps in his early novels, Bahadir cherishes the womb, the source of all creation and cradle of primordial bliss.

In spite of many influences, The Tree Climber remains essentially Egyptian and its characters, although imbued with European traits, the product of al-Hakim's experience. His language bears some similarities to that of the theatre of the absurd, but in color and tone it remains essentially Egyptian. Innovative and experimental by nature, al-Hakim continues that trend in his later plays.

#### The Fate of a Cockroach

Prior to 1966 Maseer Sarsar (The Fate of a Cockroach) had been published in two parts, a one-act play, The Cockroach as King, which became the first act in the later version, and a second play consisting of two acts titled The Cockroach's Struggle, and The Fate of a Cockroach. The first act deals with the danger faced by cockroaches who are being threatened by ants, and ends with their king trapped in a bathtub. The second and third acts deal with human counterparts, faced with a trapped cockroach.

The first act opens on a bathroom floor with the outer wall of a bathtub in the background. The king of the cockroaches is calling his queen to wake up and start her night of work. From inside her "palace" she asks her husband whether darkness has fallen. When she finally appears from a crack under the bathtub wall she rebukes her husband for not allowing her to finish her make-up. From the argument that ensues we

discover that the king has appointed himself to that post simply because he has very long whiskers. The argument about the danger posed by the ants becomes crucial when the minister appears to announce that his son had fallen on his back and, unable to turn over, was killed by the ants. The minister demands that a solution be found. A decision is made to encourage the organization of a cockroach "squadron" specialized in rescuing trapped cockroaches. The savant and the priest arrive, join in the discussion, and approve the plan. However, when an army of ants appears dragging the body of the minister's son nobody tries to attack the ants and retrieve it. Instead, the king accompanies the savant to the top of the bathtub to survey the extraordinary scene. Soon after, the savant returns to announce that the king has fallen into the tub and is unable to climb out. None volunteers to save him, and the act ends with the queen's cries for help.

The second act shifts to the world of human beings, and the action takes place in the bedroom of the same house, early the following morning. Samia and her husband Adil have just awakened and begin to argue about who is going to have a bath first. The domineering Samia, who works with her husband in a factory, insists that she will have hers first while he prepares breakfast. She rushes to the bathroom and locks herself in. Soon after, she opens the door in fright and asks Adil to help her because there is a cockroach in the bathtub. Once inside the bathroom Adil locks himself in and, instead of killing the cockroach, becomes interested in its efforts to climb out of the tub. Enraged at her husband's behavior, Samia explains to Adil's friend, who happens to call on the phone, what her husband is doing. Adil's friend does not comprehend the story and, thinking that there is something wrong with his friend, calls the company doctor and directs him to Adil's house. When

the doctor arrives, Adil refuses to open the door until the physician himself asks him to come out. When the doctor hears Adil's story about the cockroach, he give him sick-leave for the day and departs.

The third act opens moments later when the doctor returns, apologizing for his hasty departure. He asks to be left alone with Samia, and then explains to her that Adil is sympathizing with the cockroach because she is treating him badly. The doctor advises her to be more understanding of his feelings. When both rejoin Adil, Samia is so kind to him and to the cockroach that Adil begins to suspect that they have conspired to treat him as a lunatic. When Samia leaves them alone and goes to prepare coffee, Adil explains to the doctor that he does not feel inferior to her, but that he submits to her will out of love and compassion, and to satisfy a deep need in her. Adil's depiction of the cockroach's herculean efforts and its determination arouses the doctor's interest. When Samia returns she is surprised at the doctor's sudden and complete conversion to the cause of the cockroach, and she now believes that even the doctor has lost his mind. While the argument was going on in the bedroom, the cook turned the water on and the cockroach drowned. Looking at the dead cockroach as it is being dragged away by an army of ants, Adil and the doctor regret its fate but cannot help admiring the ants' social talents. Once again the maid cleans the bathroom, this time killing all the ants. When they realize what has happend, Adil and the doctor are seized with a feeling of despondency. Finally the doctor leaves and Samia takes her bath. Depressed, Adil listens to her as she gives him instructions about the chores that await him, since he will be staying home. In a final note of despair he asks the cook to "bring the bucket and rag and wipe me out of existence."<sup>26</sup>

The use of the cockroaches in the first act and their subsequent role in the second and third acts is not only essential to the meaning of

the play, but also is a structural device that links both its parts. Thus, in spite of their disappearance as dramatis personae in the second and third acts, they remain the central issue behind Adil's and Samia's activities. The second and third acts become a parody of the first act, and the audience is forced to compare the struggle between Adil and Samia to that of the king and queen of the cockroaches.

When the second act opens we become involved in the conflict between Samia and Adil, yet we never forget that there is a cockroach in the bathtub. When Samia rushes out of the bathroom and asks Adil to help her in getting rid of the cockroach, both parts of the play are rejoined and the cockroach's fate becomes central. As spectators we wonder why al-Hakim has interrupted the continuum of the action by introducing us to a new world and a new species; however, as soon as the couple reassumes their argument we realize the playwright is simply magnifying the already existing world. It is implied that the play is about the "fate of a cockroach" yet the second and the third acts are concerned with the "fate of Adil" and use the first act only as a reflection and a point of reference.

Although the three acts were written separately, and the first or the last two acts could be staged as separate plays, al-Hakim must have had the first act in mind when he wrote the second part. The titles of the second and third acts do not refer to Adil but to the cockroach, yet they are applicable to Adil as well. By shifting to the world of human beings al-Hakim departs from a world of fables and fairy tales to enter one of symbolism and allegory. We almost witness the artist's mind at work by listening to Adil and Samia parodying the behavior of the insects. As the action proceeds we are forced to measure Adil's dilemma against that of the cockroach. Without the first act and the eventual reference to the cockroach in the

second and third acts, Adil's interest in the fate of the cockroach would seem fabricated and unreal. The continuous shuttle in the last two acts between the world of men and the world of insects ironically contrasts the insects' intellectual concerns with Adil and Samia's involvement in their daily routines.

Al-Hakim's ultimate aim is to portray in microcosm the state of man in the universe. His view of man is bleak; he allows the cockroaches to assume a grand posture, but exposes their frailty at the first opportunity. When their king is caught in the bathtub, they immediately succumb to helplessness and despair, and all they do is pray for his relief. When confronted with their human counterparts we simply witness the monarch's wranglings on a larger scale. Thus, when Adil and the doctor watch with enthusiasm and anticipation the cockroach's efforts, they are watching the human struggle for survival, and when Adil asks the cook to wipe him out of existence, his fate and that of the cockroach become one. In its final message the play reflects the anxiety of the time and the uncertainty of modern man's beliefs.

Throughout the play al-Hakim does not miss an opportunity to direct his biting remarks at the apathy of the political system and the indifference of the people. The king, portrayed as a weak and indecisive man who appointed himself on account of his long whiskers, becomes the symbol of the cockroaches' will to survive and fight back in the second and third acts. The minister is appointed for devising disconcerting problems. The priest is appointed for his completely incomprehensible utterances. As for the savant, he was appointed for his extraordinary knowledge of things that do not exist outside his own mind. The king accepted them as his court because "they were in need of someone to whom they could pour out their absurdities, whereas I am in need of close companions who

will call me 'Your Majesty'."<sup>27</sup>The king's subjects have no objections to the court as long as they are left alone. When the minister tries to convince a passing cockroach that there is an important problem to be considered, the cockroach simply remarks, "and who asked you to think for me? I think for myself."<sup>28</sup>

Al-Hakim's life-long preoccupation with the struggle between the two sexes is brought in from the beginning. He cannot allow an opportunity to pass without commenting on the queen's delay. When the king complains about his queen's slowness in waking up, she insists that she was not sleeping and that he must remember that she has her toilette and make-up to do. However, al-Hakim balances his criticism by commenting on the king and his court. When we are faced with the world of humans, the balance evident in the first act is no longer there and the scale is tilted in favor of the thinker, Adil, who is contrasted with his wife, whose main concerns lie in everyday activities.

Al-Hakim starts with an insect and ends up with a potentially tragic hero. The oscillation between the cockroaches and the humans influences the action and requires continuous mental adjustment on the part of the audience from the wide and general strokes of the parable in the first act to the particularity of the second and third acts where Adil is depicted as an individual. Al-Hakim places his hero in the bedroom and moves him to the humbler setting of the bathroom. From an initial and petty squabble with his wife as to who is to take a bath first, Adil reaches an unexpected resignation from life in the final moments of the play. Al-Hakim invests him with the remarkable gift of seeing, in contrast to all others, the remarkable efforts of his counterpart, the king of the cockroaches. The transition from the wrangling husband to the

epitome of man is produced without our anticipating it. His sudden realization does not strike us as strange but rather as a natural development, and his final decision to be swept away reflects his new-found belief in the absurdity of human existence.

The doctor's initial conversion is made impossible by virtue of his professional appraisal of Adil's condition. However, when he listens to Adil's version of the story, he realizes that Adil is concerned with the cockroach's attempts on a purely intellectual basis and not for psychological reasons, as he first thought. After watching the cockroach for a while, the doctor begins to admire it and asks Adil: "What hope has it of escaping?" and Adil answers: "None, of course."<sup>29</sup> When Samia appears with the coffee the doctor shows his conversion by wishing that he "could become like the cockroach."<sup>30</sup> Samia, on the other hand, is unable to see the validity of Adil's interest and remains adamant. Although she is correct in realizing that there is nothing extraordinary in the presence of the cockroach, it is the artist's ability to see the unique and the extraordinary in everyday activities that is manifested here. Al-Hakim, as an artist, chooses an everyday incident and confronts us with an unexpected analogy between human and insects' dilemmas. Thus, Samia is reduced to an ordinary person, unable to perceive the tragedy of man as enacted on a small scale in a humble setting like the bathtub. Her desire to dominate is made ridiculous by Adil's revelation that he is acting submissively only to satisfy her need to compensate for her weaknesses.

It is fair to assume that al-Hakim was influenced by European literature that dealt with animals in a symbolic or allegorical perspective, such as Kafka's Metamorphosis or Ionesco's Rhinoceros. However, al-Hakim had an example in Classical Arabic literature from which it is said that LaFontaine

had drawn his Fables, The Book of Kalila and Dimna, in turn derived from the Sanscrit's Fables of Bidpai. The author of the Arabic version, 'Abdullah Ibnu 'l-Muqaffa', made several other translations from the Pehlavi or Middle-Persian literature, and his translation of the Fables of Bidpai is considered the oldest prose work in Arabic.<sup>31</sup>

Although the influence of Kafka's Metamorphosis is detectable and al-Hakim's play parallels Kafka's in many ways, The Fate of a Cockroach creates its own cause and its own symbols, avoiding an actual metamorphosis. Gregor Samsa's dreams of the previous night, triggered by his dissatisfaction with his past life, materialize in his metamorphosis. Adil, on the other hand, rebels against his wife's domination by identifying himself with the cockroach's struggle for freedom. And Adil does get carried away when Samia informs him that the doctor is in the house. His immediate reaction is to ask Samia if the doctor is an entomologist, and when she tells him that the doctor is for him, he answers: "Entomologist for me?"<sup>32</sup> Like Samia, he begins to see his past life in a new perspective; Adil, witnessing the struggle of the cockroach, experiences an awakening to the horror of his spiritless existence. Adil's "change" or "metamorphosis" occurs after watching the cockroach's unceasing attempts, and he becomes aware of the aridity and monotony of his previous life. Adil, more verbally than Samia, deploras the fact that he has been exploited by a wife who desires equality in everything except the sharing of responsibilities.

Very early in the play we become aware of their conflicting personalities. Thus, while Adil's concern is with the utilitarian function of the clock, his wife is concerned with it as a material object that regulates her life. Her everyday concerns are contrasted with Adil's fundamental question: "Who am I?" to which Samia blandly replies that the

answer is to be found on his identification card. Yet he has a different concept of himself, "I am the world,"<sup>33</sup> he says. Time in Kafka's Metamorphosis disintegrates and only the seasons indicate the passage of time. In The Fate, two diametrically opposed approaches to time are contrasted. While Samia is concerned with chronological time and with being on time to work, Adil disregards time to concern himself with fundamental questions about his identity.

Although Adil insists that he has no feeling of inferiority, his actions constantly betray him. He confides to the doctor that he has been merely playing the role of an obedient husband, yet a while later he confesses that the cockroach in his relentless struggle is superior to him: "I am unable to attain the magnificent level reached by cockroaches,"<sup>34</sup> he remarks. His point is tragically confirmed when he accepts defeat. Al-Hakim seems to be saying, in effect, that man's logic and common sense lead to despair, while animal instinct continues to struggle.

Unlike Samsa's, Adil's metamorphosis is realized towards the end of his life. Sitting alone at the end of the play, the cycle about to be repeated -- as his wife's demands ominously foreshadow -- he realizes the absurdity of his existence when he sees the cook carrying the remains of the cockroach and he asks her to sweep him away. Whether he admits it or not, Adil feels guilty and distressed at the knowledge that the cockroach was swept away against its will. We are unable to resist a feeling of immediate relatedness, of strong and uneasy identification with Adil's dilemma. We become aware of our precarious position in a world that is inauthentic, aware that to attain a true understanding of the mystery of life we risk discovering the absurdity of our existence. Adil's last words are also reminiscent of Joseph K.'s throughout The Trial. Adil's desire to be swept away resembles Joseph K.'s resigned attitude at the end. They both realize the futility of struggling any more. Adil goes a

step further and refuses to rescue the cockroach from imminent death, in effect, refusing to act as god. Later on, when the cook sweeps the cockroach away, Adil realizes that his refusal to act as god does not prevent others from assuming such a role. More significantly, he realizes that man's freedom of choice is limited.

Ionesco's Rhinoceros becomes relevant when we hear the king of the cockroaches assure the minister that their species never assemble for a cause because they are an individualistic breed. Essentially, al-Hakim is ridiculing the concept of individuality as much as he is ridiculing the aggressive nature of the ants who resemble the rhinos; Berenger, likewise, refuses to join the masses who became rhinoceros because he believes in individuality and condemns conformism. The cockroaches are portrayed as a breed of individualists, and Adil, an artist who sees himself as an outcast, a man who refuses to be swept away with less sensitive people but who is able to realize the absurdity of his own heroism, becomes their symbol.

In The Fate of a Cockroach, al-Hakim avoids long speeches and verbal gymnastics and resorts to a more direct and expository dialogue. By using a realistic dialogue to describe an unusual action, al-Hakim forces us to accept a reality alien to our everyday life, yet paradoxically woven out of that daily reality. What appears to be an ordinary conversation between husband and wife at the opening scene of the first act accelerates to a direct confrontation between species. By the time the minister arrives and announces his plight, reality is set forth in the guise of the dead cockroach. The particular incident is exploited to become the basis of a strategy for the solution of the age-old dilemma. The contrast between the cockroaches on stage and their utterances in a rational debate

becomes a source of effective theatrical presentation. The tempo accelerates towards the end of the act, climaxes when the savant calls for help, and is diffused later by the demand for prayer.

The pattern of speech does not change when we see Samia and Adil in the bedroom. This continuation allows the spectator to form symbolic links between the character, the scenery, and the dialogue. As the second act continues, language becomes a means of contrasting Samia with her husband; when she pretends to sympathize with the cockroach, her insincerity is apparent:

Samia: Look at its whiskers . . . they are beautiful.

Adil: Whose whiskers?

Samia: The cockroach's, of course.

. . . . .

Adil: Are you making fun of me?

Samia: Of you? No, no -- I swear to you, Adil. Please. . . .

Adil: And since when did you discover its whiskers were so beautiful?<sup>35</sup>

The manner in which she asserts her sympathy is of course incompatible with her previous refusal to share his point of view.

Our amusement at seeing a bathroom setting subside as we become accustomed to it and shift our attention to the issues at hand. We begin to share with the cockroaches the agony of seeing their fellow cockroach being dragged away by the ants, and the bathroom floor becomes to us, as to them, a battleground for survival. Imagining the efforts of the cockroach in the bathtub, we are totally engrossed. But when the scene shifts in the second act, the bathroom diminishes in proportion and becomes a part of the whole rather than the focus.

No matter what reassurances Adil gives the doctor, his feeling of being persecuted by his wife is never dispelled, and his insistence that his interest in the cockroach's struggle is purely intellectual is contradicted by his final desire to be swept away. In the doctor Adil finds an

ally who can confirm his sanity and with whom he can share his concern and anxiety. His alliance with the doctor sanctions his identification with the cockroach and when he later refers to the cockroach as "brother," he further confirms his affinity with the insect.

### Other Plays

Since the main purpose of this study is to show not only the effect of al-Hakim's European experience on his works of art, but also his development as a playwright, I have not analyzed some of the plays that may have more obvious signs of influence. Nevertheless, some mention should be made of those and other plays which for reasons of space could not be included in this study. In his Rihla Ila al-Ghad, (Journey to the Future, 1957), the influence of H. G. Well's The Time Machine, and Aldous Huxley's Chrome Yellow is detectable. However, al-Hakim seems to favor Huxley's concept of the future, viewing man as coming into the world with preconceived ideas and believing that he should first live and then reconcile his ideas with the world. Journey to the Future is about the experience of two prisoners condemned to death who are given an opportunity to redeem themselves if they fly a spaceship to a distant planet. Agreeing to the proposal, the prisoners, a doctor, and an engineer land on the planet and discover not only that they are its only inhabitants but that its very nature makes it unnecessary for them to eat, drink, or breathe; they actually need nothing at all. When one of them suggests that they build a house for themselves, the other reminds him that there is no need for it. They are frightened at the idea of not needing to work, "This mind," says the second prisoner, "must work . . . because if it stops we are finished . . . the human in us is finished . . . and we enter into the realm of things."<sup>36</sup> They not only need to work, they need the company of their fellow men and an audience in order to make anything seem worthwhile. Without a frame of reference

their freedom becomes meaningless, and only when one of them suggests that they repair the spaceship do they regain their purpose in life.

In the fourth act, they manage to repair the ship and return to earth. Back on earth they discover that three hundred years have passed since they left earth; again al-Hakim utilizes the passage of time as he did in The People of the Cave. Peace and prosperity have replaced wars and poverty, and the government satisfies the people's every need. Two political parties are struggling for control; one advocates the domination of science, the other the return to a past when man was an individual. And so the ex-prisoners discover that the planet they have escaped from is now duplicated on earth, the only advantage now being that they are in the company of fellow human beings.

The play fails as theatre because it emphasizes complete incompatibility between science and human emotions. It suffers from generalizations and stereotyped pronouncements. The shallow images of men stripped of their humanity because they are controlled by science, and the sentimental cliches about art's superiority over science transform the play into a journalistic report. Al-Hakim confines science to the laboratory and does not recognize its social role. In his vision al-Hakim neglects the fact that Huxley's vision has been brought about as a result of over-saturation with science, and that this is not the state of affairs in Egypt.

Al-Ta'am li-Kull Famm, (Food for Every Mouth, 1963), could be considered as a science fantasy, mostly influenced by H. G. Wells' The Food of the Gods in its conception as scientific utopia. In its use of the folk art of the "Shadow Play" and its emphasis on the didactic play one can assume Brechtian undertones. The play starts when a couple realizes that there is water leaking from the apartment above and forming a big spot on the wall. They complain to the tenant and ask her to have the leak

repaired. As they are leaving their apartment, the couple realizes the drying spot on the wall is beginning to take shape. Instead of going out and spending their time uselessly in a cafe with their respective groups, they stay home and begin to watch the unusual phenomenon. The dried spot materializes into an animated picture of a living room where a young man and a young woman are seated with their mother. The son has just returned from abroad, where he was completing his studies, and has been thinking about a project that will eliminate hunger and produce enough food for everyone on earth. We discover that the daughter is trying to reveal a long-kept secret: the mother, after the death of her first husband (who fathered both) married her cousin, whom she always loved, but had been unable to marry. Nadia is convinced that her mother and her lover have killed her father and insists that the mother be handed over to the authorities, while Tariq, the son, argues that revenge is the justice of Hamlet and Electra, and as such does not apply to the modern world. Instead, he argues that justice in the modern sense is to feed every human on earth and to eliminate poverty and inequality. To punish their mother both children leave her without exposing her, thus allowing progress to triumph over outmoded ideas of "an eye for an eye . . ."

The play within a play ends, and we are left with the couple staring at an empty wall. Learning a lesson from what they have witnessed, the couple decides to use their time more wisely. In this manner al-Hakim solves the problem depicted in Journey Into the Future, where science and human reality were incompatible, by making science a useful tool in bringing happiness to society. The play succeeds because al-Hakim avoids previous stereotyped generalizations and allows his characters to develop without contrived utterances or sentimental declarations on "art versus

utilitarianism," etcetera. His use of the "shadow play" technique can be found in contemporary European theatre, but this does not make his play an imitation.

From The New Woman and Ali Baba to The Fate of a Cockroach al-Hakim moved a long way from a pure imitator of European plays and an entertainer of largely unsophisticated audiences, to a thinker and master designer who writes for audience who have become trained and are now more demanding in their taste. One cannot avoid asking whether such a change would have been possible without al-Hakim's trip to France. A brief glance at the development of his art confirms the impact of his European experience.

In my analysis of al-Hakim's works I have at times emphasized the literal influences of European literature; at other times I chose to ignore such influences when they did not point towards a real development of his art. That he witnessed Pitoeff's productions of Pirandello's plays in 1923 is almost certain; that his choice of adapting de Musset's Carmosine is indicative of romantic temperament is hardly arguable, and his fascination with the theatre of the Absurd is self-evident. I believe, however, that the aim of my study is to show not only how the European experience has shaped al-Hakim's development, because that will be exposing only one side of the coin, but also to present the growth and development of an artist who opened his mind to a new medium of expression. The results were not balanced all the time but were always colored by his cultural background. At times he succeeded in blending the two cultures, and the product approximated a masterpiece; at other times he stumbled and failed, but his failure was that of a child who is venturing on his feet for the first time in its life, and in a land that is strange

and unexplored. Yet, no matter what we think of that child we have to admire his efforts.

Al-Hakim ventured into a realm where respectability was denied, where success was dim, and where material gains were elusive. He struggled against odds, family objection, and social disdain. He abandoned a profession that could have assured success. Instead, he succumbed to the artist in him, and in doing so he, along with others, managed to elevate an art that heretofore had been considered an occupation for idlers and other disreputable characters\* to heights unknown.

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\*Until recently, the arabic word for ladies of ill fame was a transliteration of the French "artiste."

## NOTES

## Chapter III

- <sup>1</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Braxa Jura, Part II, (Cairo, 1960), pp. 107-108.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 121.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 109.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 165-166.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 168.
- <sup>7</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Al-Safaqa, (The Deal), (Cairo, 1965), p. 107.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 55.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 88.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 32
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-63.
- <sup>14</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Al-Sultan al-Ha'er, (The Sultan's Dilemma), Trans. Denys Johnson-Davis, (London: Heinemann, 1973; Arabic ed., Cairo, 1965), p. 125. (The play was published in a collection of plays translated from Arabic under the title The Fate of a Cockroach.)
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 97.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 117.
- <sup>17</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Interviews, "Akhbar al Ya'wm," p. 104.
- <sup>18</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Ya Tali' al-Shajara, (The Tree Climber), Trans. Denys Johnson-Davis, (London: Oxford University Press, 1966; Arabic ed., Cairo, 1962), p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 6.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 52.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>26</sup>Maser Sarsar (The Fate of a Cockroach), Trans. Denys Johnson-Davis, (London: Heinemann, 1973, Arabic ed., Cairo, 1966), p. 66.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>31</sup>Reynold A. Nicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Great Britain, 1930) p. 346.

<sup>32</sup>The Fate of a Cockroach, p. 44.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>36</sup>Tawfiq al-Hakim, Rihla Ila al-Ghad, (Journey to the Future, 1957)

## CHAPTER FOUR

## KATEB YACINE

Another aspect of European and American influences on Arabic literature is seen in North Africa, especially Algeria. Algeria was open to European influence after the French occupation in 1830; before that time only local forms of dramatic presentations, such as performances by street players and shadow plays, were available to the general public. At the turn of the twentieth century, Algerian theatre began to develop; at first, purely imitative works were written in Arabic; later the works were more original as Algerians came into direct contact with French culture.

A distinction should be made on the one hand between French writers who used Algeria as a setting for their works (Andre Gidé) as well as those who were born in Algeria (Albert Camus) and, on the other, indigenous Algerian writers who used French or Arabic. In this study only indigenous Algerian playwrights who used French as medium of expression will be discussed.

Although George J. Joyaux, in an article on indigenous North African writers, points out a few common features that characterize their works, some of these features apply to some more than to others. He cites the impact of the American novel, which resulted in what he called the American slant: "The subject matter of much of their works tends to be drawn from first-hand acquaintance with everyday life."<sup>1</sup> I believe, however, that such a characteristic is too general to attribute solely to American influence; it could also be a result of their direct experience with the social problems that faced their people. His further assertion

that North African writers "have not escaped the anguish or isolation of contemporary man"<sup>2</sup> cannot be a result only of a contact with American and European literature; it also can be the result of an identity crisis that confronts artists in colonized countries who often are unable to reconcile the cultural differences that exist between the adopted French culture and their Islamic heritage and the national aspirations of their people.

Mr. Joyaux is correct about the American slant in regard to the North African writers' "adaptation of the modern techniques of novel-writing, generally attributed to the authors of the 'lost generation'"<sup>3</sup>, such as Faulkner's reversibility of time. To these Mr. Joyaux adds the common themes of exile to France, the class struggle, and social and religious conflicts.

As in many other countries the renaissance in literature was accompanied by a rise in nationalism which, in turn, culminated in a struggle for independence. The case of Algeria was particularly important since the French attempted to achieve complete integration. Writing of the North African writers' experience in the face of French domination, Isaac Yetiv stresses the cultural impact. "The alienation of the North African," he says, "is not metaphysical; its remote causes may be found in socio-politics or in economy but its pretext is essentially cultural, due to the shock of the historic encounter of two different civilizations and their clash in the inner self of the individual . . . a subjective feeling of being 'alien' to one's society."<sup>4</sup> Malik Haddad, an Algerian writer, echoes the same sentiment stressing the cultural disorientation of the Algerian people:

We are committed. Other writers [European] might be concerned with the philosophy of the frustrated and alienated modern man. But we [Algerians] opened our eyes to witness the tragedy of our people, therefore, we could not follow the steps of those writers. Instead, we found it necessary to revolt against the French colonizers, the French settlers, and the native middle class which benefited from both, the oppressor and the oppressed. We revolted because the French defiled our language and make us speak another which is strange to the ears of our fathers.<sup>5</sup>

The most notable Algerian writers recognized by European critics and intellectuals are Kateb Yacine, Dris Chraïbi, and Mohammed Dib. I have chosen Kateb Yacine as the subject of this part of my study because he is able to universalize the political theme in a manner that transcends his nationalism by emphasizing the effects of colonization on the individual without plunging his characters into pathetic sentimentality. Although he uses his native land as the stage for his works and the struggle for independence as the theme, he is never a narrow-minded nationalist. By means of folk legends and symbols he attempts to explore both his own and his people's identity.

Born in Conde-Semendou (near Constantine) in August 1929, Yacine was sent to a school in Setif and was later imprisoned for participating in the 1945 demonstrations against the French. The brief imprisonment caused him to leave school and begin working. He published his first collection of poems in 1946, travelled to France in 1948, and in 1949 worked as a correspondent for the Algerian newspaper "Al-Jamhuri'yya," which gave him opportunities to travel to Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, and the Soviet Union. After his father's death in 1950, Yacine was obliged to abandon a career in journalism and seek more profitable employment to support his family. The fact that his father was a Taleb (a Koranic

teacher) accounts for Yacine's deep-rooted experience in Islamic culture and his choice of writing as a career. Because of poor economic conditions in Algeria, Yacine had to go to France again for higher-paying employment and there worked as a docker and at other menial jobs.

Yacine's first breakthrough as a writer came in 1954 with the publication of Nedjma,\* a novel in prose-poem form that deals symbolically with the publication of Algerian people. Today Yacine is still an active writer in both Algeria and Europe. In addition to a collection of plays, Cercle des représailles, which includes three plays, Le Cadavre encerclé, La Poudre d'intelligence, and Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité, he published in 1970 a long play, L'Homme aux sandales de caoutchouc. The first and third plays of the collection represent a continuation of the novel Nedjma and they will be the subject of this chapter. Except for his comic works his plays are poetic, with a tragic mood akin to the Greeks. In his treatment of the French colonization, Yacine's allegiance to his country is clear beyond doubt, but his world is never black and white. His exposure to the Western culture became the source of constant struggle and the inspiration for creating an imaginary world in which various forces try to reconcile the old and the new. Commenting on his French education, Yacine says: "Thus, I had lost at the same time my mother and her language, the only treasure inalienable yet alienated."<sup>6</sup>

In an interview in the Egyptian monthly al-Majallah, Yacine elaborates on his art and life during the final years of the Algerian revolution. Yacine mentions that his first poems, "Soliloques", were published when he was sixteen years old. He explains why he and other Algerian writers

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\*The novel was made into a play under the title La Femme sauvage.

use French language instead of Arabic:

The colonizer wanted to destroy our nationalism by attempting to destroy our language. They (the French) closed schools which taught Arabic, persecuted teachers of Arabic, and burnt Arabic libraries. Thus, whoever wanted to educate himself had to attend French schools, so much so, that intellectuals cannot express themselves in Arabic.<sup>7</sup>

Yacine, however, does not consider the experience as a waste. He compares the use of French language to captured weapons which the revolutionaries used against their enemies:

We use the French language -- it is simply a tool by which we can transmit our ideas to Algerian intellectuals who are unable to understand literary Arabic. It is also a tool by which we reach the world opinion in order to assist in our cause. We even try to attract some French liberals to our side. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Yacine denies that Algerian literature written in French is an extension of French literature:

Algerian literature written in French is independent from the language it uses, and is rid from any emotional or racial relations. It (Algerian literature) expresses its own conditions, and its spirit has the wisdom of the Algerian people with its revolutionary determination to liberate itself from imperialism. . . .<sup>9</sup>

It would be unthinkable to discuss any of Yacine's works without bearing in mind his social and political milieu during the years of the Algerian revolution. Most of his works were written during the tumultuous years of the revolution or during the period following independence, also characterized by political infighting. Thus, as an artist his works reflect the world around him. On the other hand, it is incorrect to assume that his writings are the product only of political and social upheavals and that they will lose their relevance with the passage of time. The importance of his works stems not only from the anger and frustration he voiced against the French colonizer, but also from his feeling of tragedy; they are a portrait of man caught in a pluralistic

cause. His groping for an answer involves not only the struggle of the oppressed but also the dilemma of the oppressor: men caught in a vicious circle of violence for which they are not individually responsible and from which they are unable to extricate themselves. The idea of a vicious circle must have been on his mind when he called the collection of plays Circle of Reprisals. His works reveal a tortured self constantly attempting to transcend its agony into a universal hymn for peace.

The two plays which will be discussed in this chapter, Le Cadavre encerclé and Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité form the second and third parts of what could be considered a trilogy, the first being Nedjma.\*

A knowledge of the major outlines of Nedjma and a brief analysis of its characteristics will help in understanding the two plays. The novel is not discussed in detail because I am basically concerned with the dramatic works of Yacine, The Encircled Corpse and The Ancestors in particular. A brief analysis of Nedjma will assist in clarifying a picture that would otherwise be incomplete. It is true that many of the characteristics of Nedjma are utilized in the dramatic works, but only to a point, and will be referred to when the occasion arises. The novel recalls the epic of Yacine's people, peasants from the east of Constantine, living through the Turkish and the French conquests. The work revolves around the men and women descended from the Kéblout, the first ancestor who migrated from the eastern regions of the Arab world. The tribe grew and in time became powerful, so powerful the rulers of Algeria

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\*The two plays under discussion in this chapter form a continuation of the plot and theme in Nedjma. The plot deals with the lives of a group of Algerians under the French colonization, and the theme deals with the effects of colonization on them.

stationed a garrison near it to protect themselves. The French did likewise in the beginning and later sent their spies to find a way to liquidate the tribe. The tribesmen awake one morning to discover the bleeding bodies of a man and a woman inside the mosque. Immediately after, soldiers arrive and start a massacre that culminates in the execution of six of the tribe's leaders.

After the massacre, a messenger from the French central government in Algiers arrives to apologize to the tribe and absolve them of any guilt. To compensate for the mistake, the central government promises to appoint the children of the six leaders, when they grow up, to certain government positions, thus guaranteeing their future. The tribe recovers from the shock only to realize that they have been left without leaders or a mosque and that most of their homes have been destroyed. The French scatter the tribe by giving to one group of survivors lands removed from the tribal grounds, and to another tribe government jobs in distant regions; both groups are compelled to marry outside the tribe, thus effectively severing their ties to it. A third group manages to survive on the outskirts of the tribal land and start to build again.

As mentioned above, the survivors represent different groups. The first group is represented by Ahmed, who spends his money on French prostitutes and on drinking bouts. After being evicted from his land, he is killed in a car accident while with a French woman, leaving behind him his Keblout wife, Zahra, and his two infants, one of whom is Lakhdar. Zahra returns to the tribe and marries a rich merchant, Taher, who is known for dealing with the French.

Mohammed al-Shareeb, a lawyer, and an agent of the French, embodies the second group. He dies of consumption, leaving behind his wife,

Wardah, in a sanitarium, and his son Mustapha, a friend of Lakhdar. The third group is represented by Nedjma, the daughter of a French woman who was attacked by two Keblout men, one of whom fathered Medjma after killing his rival. Nedjma spent her childhood torn between her French mother, her Keblout father, and the barren woman who adopted her. One day, however, the father kidnaps Nedjma and takes her back to the tribe before he dies. She becomes the center of attention among the young men in the tribe and is pursued by them, especially Lakhdar and Mustapha.

Nedjma, which means star in Arabic, symbolizes Algeria itself, torn between the Algerian heritage and the attraction of French culture. Lakhdar, which means green in Arabic, symbolizes the Algerian hope for independence. Most of the characters, in fact, have symbolic names, Zahrah means flower, Mustapha means chosen, and Taher, ironically, means pure.

The legend of the Keblout tribe centers around two themes: the curse of the Keblout [the founder of the tribe] upon his people for betraying Algeria to its conquerers, and his prophecy that one of his descendants will rise one day to avenge the honor of the tribe. Lakhdar seems to fulfill that prophecy. Whether the legend has any historical source or not, Yacine creates a probable myth that draws the reader back to the distant past. Yacine tries to uncover what is primal and common to all his people and makes the mythical past acceptable by showing the cycle of history repeating itself in the present. We recognize in the past the core for the present, thus making the myth an expression of the conflict in which the individual attempts to assert his identity against forces as ruthless as they are uncontrollable. The hostile and capricious gods, the mysterious forces of Greek mythology, are replaced by

the individual's inner conflict resulting in a more painful tragic feeling since man becomes more responsible for his own downfall. Yacine's depiction of the present in a mythical manner confirms the ability of the artist to see the world as a mystery relevant to a child's awakening to the world around him.

Throughout the novel, Yacine voices his grievances and denounces the injustices his people have suffered at the hands of the foreign invaders. Yet Nedjma remains the central figure around whom the play turns. The use of Nadjma as a character and as the symbol of Algeria's duality becomes a force that continues in the second two works. Against such a background and the characters' oscillation between Algeria and France The Encircled Corpse draws us closer to the present and the final stages of the Algerian revolution.

The Encircled Corpse takes over where Nedjma ends. The struggle against the French continues and, significantly, the play opens on the rue des Vandales in Algiers beside some Roman ruins. A vendor is sitting in a corner after a skirmish between demonstrators and the police. The street is filled with wounded men lined against the wall. Light is focused on the wounded, as their groaning grows more and more distinct. The noise fades and we hear Lakhdar's voice. He is wounded and delirious. He speaks of his pain and agony at his fellow men's suffering, and of his love for Nedjma. The scene moves to Nedjma, as she is leaving one of the houses in search of Lakhdar even though Hassan and Mustapha have unsuccessfully tried to dissuade her. She is weeping and tearing her veil in distress. Taher, Lakhdar's stepfather, is silenced when he objects to Lakhdar's friends. A messenger from the political party brings orders to the group to stay inside their homes and avoid

the police since the police will try to provoke the demonstrators and start another massacre.

Nedjma, who returned to the house during the messenger's scene, is still worried about Lakhdar and leaves the house to look for him again. Meanwhile, Hassan and Mustapha inform us that Nedjma and Lakhdar have quarreled the night before and that Lakhdar left her in anger. Back in the street, Lakhdar is trying to move but is unable to do so because of his wounds. Nedjma recognizes him but becomes transfixed with fear. As he is about to fall, Nedjma approaches to help, but he refuses her and the two become separated by another attack on the demonstrators. Shortly thereafter Mustapha and Hassan appear, and Nedjma tells them how she was separated from him. They question the vendor, and his answer is recreated in the next scene.

A French woman, Marguerite, is able to stop her car before running over Lakhdar. She takes him to her house where he becomes alarmed on learning that her father is an officer. Nedjma enters, followed by Hassan and Mustapha, and attempts a reconciliation. When Marguerite's father appears he is killed by Hassan. Marguerite controls herself and helps to move Lakhdar and her father out of the house.

Nedjma starts to relate an incident from the past, and she fades away as the scene shifts to a local cafe. She describes how Lakhdar used to see his stepfather wasting his time with other men. We see the youthful Lakhdar entering the cafe and avoiding his stepfather. Later on, when addressed by him, Lakhdar asks to be left alone. A lawyer at Taher's table explains that the leader of the party has been sentenced to prison. The scene immediately shifts to the prison, where we find

Lakhdar, Mustapha, and Hassan. As soldiers enter the prison, three prisoners are symbolically executed in the street. Back in the prison we hear Lakhdar's screams while he is being tortured, but he refuses to confess. They let him go, hoping that the torture will discourage others from revolting.

Back in the street, the chorus comments on Lakhdar and on Marguerite, who is trying to support him. In this marketplace atmosphere a veiled woman takes Lakhdar by the hand and asks him about Nedjma. The lights grow dim, and she unveils herself; she is Nedjma, in the company of Marguerite and a drunken Taher. When Lakhdar appears to be walking in a daze, Nedjma pulls Marguerite away from him.

Taher, who disappeared during that sequence, reappears and stabs Lakhdar with a knife. Lakhdar leans against an orange tree to prevent himself from falling and is surrounded by other men. A woman comes close to him and asks if he is Lakhdar, telling him that her son left her to go to France many years ago. As Lakhdar is in the agony of death, a chorus urges the men to go to the mountains and carry on the fighting. Mustapha and Hassan appear and, realizing the gravity of Lakhdar's condition, depart for the mountains leaving him behind. Mustapha's mother, dressed in a white hospital robe, appears immediately after her son's departure; she calls for him in vain. Lakhdar falls, and his body slowly disappears with the dimming of the light. The play ends with Nedjma asking her son to come down and drop the knife.

The play is not divided into acts or scenes; the only indications of divisions are through the use of lighting and the shift of focus from one part of the stage to another. Added to that is the inherent

dramatic technique of exits and entrances either of a character or group of characters. Yacine starts the play on a street filled with dead and wounded. He builds a first impression by focusing our attention forcefully and visually on the lonely figure of Lakhdar. Lakhdar's first words, "Ici est" appears to be an act of reporting factual information to the audience. Yet with those first few words Lakhdar starts a most personal monologue in a most impersonal manner. Soon after, he drops that tone and the street becomes "la rue de Nedjma mon étoile." To stress the importance of Lakhdar, Nedjma speaks of him in the following scene. And still later, in the house, the other characters talk about him, which establishes his pivotal relation to the others. The first two scenes disclose the fundamental problems of the play. We become aware of the basic relations between the major characters and their attitudes towards each other. The succession of impressions, from Lakhdar's first soliloquy to the cafe scene, forms a complete theatrical picture that predicts the tragic fate of the protagonist in the struggle.

To sustain the emotional momentum, the ebb and flow of Lakhdar's feelings are punctuated by the sound of gunfire and the rush of demonstrators. However, to prevent the audience from being overwhelmed by such movement, Yacine alternates the sequence of events from the street to the house and from the prison to the marketplace or the cafe, with each locale serving either a functional role or representing a state of mind. A contrast is achieved by reserving the street, which is a place of public happenings, for private thoughts, while the house and the prison cell are kept for public affairs. Unexpectedly, the final act of tragic violence takes place in the street, and Yacine prepares his audience for it from the very beginning. Lakhdar's first soliloquy

anticipates future events; he even anticipates his resurrection in the next play: "mais dans l'attente de la résurrection, pour que, Lakhdar assassiné, je remonte d'outre-tombe prononcer mon oraison funèbre."<sup>10</sup> Even Nedjma calls herself a "widow" in the following scene, ominously predicting her lover's death.

The "American slant" which Mr. Joyaux points out is argued within the context of the novel. However, I believe that it is applicable to the dramatic technique of the two plays under discussion as well. The American influence is most evident, as Mr. Joyaux says, in William Faulkner's departure from the straight chronological presentation to a calculated scrambling of the time dimension.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Yacine abandons linear time in favor of a circular concept in the arrangement of the incidents and the structure of the plot. The device of dimming parts of the stage assists in making the transition acceptable to the audience. The dialogue itself consistently refers to past and present, making it part of our understanding of events and preparing us to accept the visual flashback as convincing. Thus, when Nedjma begins to relate the cafe sequence, the transition occurs on two levels: the visual shift to a cafe atmosphere in which people are seated at table with more youthful faces, and Nedjma's narrative of the episode. The characters' memory helps us in reconstructing the past for ourselves, and after a time we begin to feel that they are rooted in real situations. However, the shift to the past is not always maintained through straight narration and recall of incidents. At times, Yacine uses the technique reminiscent of the interior monologue as when Lakhdar moves from the present to his childhood and back to the present:

J'entends vivre le bruit du sang, je retrouve le cri de ma  
 mère en gésine, j'entends vivre la smala sous le sirocco à mes  
 veines parvenu, et je m'élève au crépuscule vers les ancêtres  
 peupliers dont la stature remue feuille par feuille,<sup>12</sup>

Lakhdar goes further back, and in his memory all the invaders become one, as he imagines his ancestors fighting the Romans: "dans la nuit en marche, la cavalerie dispersée des Numides\* à l'heure du Maghreb renouvelant leur charge."<sup>13</sup> In such instances, Yacine allows us to participate in the immediate thought process of his protagonist, thus sharing with him the tragic loss he feels moment by moment. We begin to see in him a symbol not only of a man suffering but also, as he himself says, the history of his country passing through time to reach the point where man regains the will to fight like his ancestors, the Numidians. When Lakhdar speaks of the "ruins of time" he is referring to the Romans who left behind them nothing but the memory of a suffering man. Yacine places the first scene in the play beside the Roman ruins as a reminder that this is not the drama of the struggle against the French but rather the destruction, moral and physical, that invading armies leave behind.

By the time we reach the cafe scene the fusion of past and present has become familiar, and each is defined and understood only in relation to the other. After watching the cafe scene, we accept Lakhdar's experience and those of his friends as a result of their childhood and the impression they have of it. We are able to overlook the need for a realistic representation of life in favor of a poetic one in which the mirror is not placed in front of the character but rather inside him. Yacine's experience is presented to us in an aesthetic dimension where past, present, and future are rarely conceived in a chronological manner.

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\*Numidia is an ancient country in what is now called Algeria.

We take Nedjma's narrative of Lakhdar's past not only as a recreation of the past but also as an integral part of the dramatic structure. It magnifies and explains the repeated statement about the fathers and their attitude towards the French. Furthermore, the past is not presented to us as a fossilized sample to be viewed separately; rather, it is reinterpreted within the framework of the present experience. The past assumes a power of its own and affects our perception of the present, and the action presented is always colored by that perception. When we hear Lakhdar's mother trying to discover whether she is talking to him or not, and when she describes how she was left alone after her son left for France, our feelings toward Lakhdar cannot be the same, because a piece of the past has been dug and a new facet of his character has been revealed. When the three friends are in prison their memory of school days with its tender innocence makes the reality of their present more distinctively cruel. We begin to view them as victims of an unjust world that forced them into the path of violence.

Like time, space for Yacine is a personal universe; he molds it according to his own conception and in order to suit his circular structure. Lakhdar's first soliloquy defines space in a factual manner, and his first sentence resembles the opening of a novel. However, the second sentence removes that illusion and widens the space to include any place in North Africa. Yacine creates a world subject only in the eyes of the protagonist. With functional and creative ingenuity Yacine manages to shift the action from one scene to another by the use of music and lighting, and by relying on audience imagination to make the transition.

Although abandoning the linear development is a stylistic device that affects the structure of the plot and its development, Yacine employs it in a manner that shapes the other elements in the play. When Lakhdar speaks about the prison and the scene shifts there, we are witnessing not only stage-craft technique, we are actually exposed to the dreams and fantasies of the character himself. Yacine leads the audience to believe that the character on stage is not only an actor in a drama, but also the maker of it.

The technique becomes a means to emphasize the contradictory and irresolvable conflicts in the subject matter. By replacing linear development with shifting perceptual planes, Yacine presents the action as it is perceived in the consciousness of the major characters. Thus, in Lakhdar's soliloquies we move with him forward and backward, or may stop to interject the present with a memory. Nedjma in her first soliloquy (p. 20), starts with "Voyez la poitrine aveugle," lamenting her unrequited feelings, and goes back to her dream of the previous night. What might seem an impressionistic sequence is actually an attempt to capture the human process of thought and growth which rarely moves in a logically arranged manner. A character, like Lakhdar, looks around him, sees the blood of dead and wounded, feels his mortality, remembers his childhood, recalls his birth, and looks forward into the future; all these thoughts occur at the same time, without the next arrangement that one assumes in linear development.

Rather than presenting the facts, Yacine portrays their perception by the protagonist, and when they are pronounced they form interpretations and judgments colored by his memories, fears, hopes, and love.

Thus, Lakhdar's version of the massacre in his first soliloquy describes the fear of the people in a manner that reflects his present condition and his feelings towards them: "Durant toute la nuit, jusqu'à la lueur matinale qui m'éveille à présent, les habitants restèrent claquemurés, comme s'ils prévoyaient leur propre massacre, . . . ils connurent un nouveau sentiment pour les obscurs militants dont le flot mugissait encore à leurs pieds."<sup>14</sup> The absence of chronological time and spatial delineation assists in creating a dream atmosphere in which reality becomes irrelevant. Furthermore, the vagueness that results from such a technique becomes an expression of the protagonist's own confusion in the face of various antagonistic forces. It mirrors a mind torn in its search for identity. The street, the marketplace, the house, and the prison lose their reality and become a playground amidst which the protagonist's mind roams freely. Lakhdar's path from the bloodied street to Marguerite's house and back to the prison echoes his ambivalence toward his enemies and friends. In a play based upon a political theme universality is enhanced by the release from spatial confines, which, in turn, allows the audience to view the play without any desire for identification.

The language in The Encircled Corpse alternates between prose and poetry, and even the prose is poetic except when it is informational or used to further the development of the action. Poetry is used to express the major characters' feelings toward their surroundings and towards each other. Yacine was a poet before he became a playwright, and even his first novel was classed as a prose-poem. In this play, the use of poetry is justified since it carries and particularizes the hero's

experience. Depth and intensity, which are characteristic of the poetic method, insure our appraisal of Lakhdar's dilemma. The "precision" of the poetic method can evoke the proper reaction from us since Yacine's subject cannot reflect his hero's experience by the use of realistic details. Instead of listening to or watching Lakhdar we are introduced to his inner thoughts and begin to share with him; the power of the poetic imagery purifies thoughts and feelings in us that are otherwise inexpressible and indefinable. Lakhdar expresses his will to fight back despite all the odds:

Et me voici doublement abattu. Mais seul je me relève, pareil  
aux statues mutilées que ressuscitent les séismes, ébranlant  
et secouant les univers par fulgurantes fureurs contre  
l'aveugle profanation du temps, de la mort, de la débâcle, dont  
rien ne délivre nos esprits survivants, sauf peut-être l'instant  
qui m'est échu enfin, l'instant sans durée ni retour de se  
mesurer à d'innombrables essais, aux avant-postes du destin.<sup>15</sup>

He evokes the lessons of his people's history in a manner that forces us to share the experience with him:

Au fond des grottes nuptiales!  
l'amour, la mort et l'âme:  
Remords enfouis par les ancêtres,  
eux qui dénoncent leur vie<sup>16</sup>

In the same passage Lakhdar rebukes Nedjma for being unfaithful to him and he transfers his personal feelings into the sorcerer that is called destiny.

Furthermore, poetry in the play is used to heighten the alienation of the protagonist; it suits the personal idiom and relates more closely to his understanding of the social and political milieu. When Lakhdar sees a wall between himself and the city he is expressing his inability to relate to the world around him,

"C'est alors qu'un mur immense est élevé entre la ville immense et moi. Je sors enfin de cette Mort tenace et de la ville morte où me voici enseveli."<sup>17</sup>

When Lakhdar compares himself to a dead fish that saw itself being born again, he communicates to us a childhood devoid of parental love being left alone to fight his way through life. And later he feels exiled from the rites of spring,

laissé en friche par la sentence du printemps, dans une odeur de maquis fracassé; de même le porc-épic abandonnant la défensive, savoure dans son terrier la douleur des balles perdues, humectant lentement le sol de son inaccessible agonie.<sup>18</sup>

As a reflection of the author's experience, Lakhdar is molded by each subtlety of the language. He is trying to stand up with his clothes and face full of blood, and he starts a long soliloquy with "Je me retrouve dans notre ville."<sup>19</sup> During that time Nedjma was present, transfixed by the horror of the scene, and even more so by the profundity of his words. When he is about to fall, Nedjma interrupts and rushes to help him. Seemingly unaware of her presence, he continues to express his feelings. Instead of the gunfire heard in the earlier scene we see Nedjma interrupting with a variation of "Je ne veux pas entendre!"<sup>20</sup> He is finally unable to bear it anymore and shouts "Va-t'en, séparons-nous sans peine de nos coeurs monstrueux."<sup>21</sup> Nedjma does not try any longer to stop him; her reaction is "Je t'ai guetté au fond des gorges, et j'ai connu dans l'intimité des assassins la chasse au porc-épic. Toujours tu m'as perdue."<sup>22</sup> The sequence is basically a "love" scene, but the poetic language raises that level by means of its visual and verbal symbolism. The two do not simply express themselves by clichés. She expresses her resentment with "Jamais tu n'as voulu achever ma conquête."<sup>23</sup> His resentment of her encouragement of others was so painful that he spent his days "dans une fosse, à épier ceux qui ne tombaient pas dans tes pièges."<sup>24</sup>

Poetry succeeds in expressing Lakhdar's different states in a way that blends language and character. Thus, the physical strain Lakhdar feels and the helplessness of his efforts are verbalized in, "Je me tais. Toute chaude je t'ai sur le bout de la langue, et je rame en silence afin de t'aborder à marée basse. Comme un récif, ton sein me paralyse."<sup>25</sup> His desperation in relation to her is: "ô fleur tout agitée près du nectar vomie" to "gerbe de cerveaux obscurcis."<sup>26</sup> Verbal imagery becomes an echo of the visual imagery; the sight of Lakhdar with the dagger stuck in him could not be better clarified than the image of Lakhdar as the:

Moi le dernier des paysans  
à mon arbre sacrifié  
. . .  
. . . et je ne suis qu'un chat  
Par une chouette écorché sur la branche la plus fragile.<sup>27</sup>

The intensity of Lakhdar's language amplifies the imagery springing from his desire to return to the source, to his mother and his tribe,

et je retourne à la sanglante source, à notre mère  
incorruptible, la Matière jamais en défaut, tantôt  
génératrice de sang et d'énergie, tantôt pétrifiée  
dans la combustion solaire qui m'emporte à la cité  
lucide au sein frais de la nuit.<sup>28</sup>

Lakhdar returns further into the source, and blood reminds him of the moment of birth:

ici même abattu dans l'impasse natale, un goût ancien  
me revient à la bouche, mais ce n'est plus la femme  
qui m'enfanta ni l'amante dont je conserve la morsure,  
ce sont toutes les mères et toutes les épouses dont  
je sens l'étreinte hissant mon corps loin de moi, et  
seule persiste ma voix d'homme pour déclamer la plénitude  
d'un masculin pluriel;<sup>29</sup>

Nedjma's feelings at the prospect of losing Lakhdar are feminine and dark:

Voyez la poitrine aveugle  
 Loin de l'amant sévère  
 Jamais ne sera mûr  
 Le sein noirci par l'absence  
 Plus une bouche ne saura m'écumer.  
 Lakhdar, s'endort avec d'autres que moi. 30

Through these words and the imagery one can feel a burning passion, a feeling of feminine frustration, and the resignation of a woman who has been neglected too long.

Yacine's debt to European and American literature, directly or through the French examples, is obvious, and will be discussed in detail later. However, I believe that Yacine was able to assimilate those influences in a manner that reveals a special flavor, as a result of his attempt to express an essentially Islamic ethos through Western tools. The Arabic and Muslim influences are most evident in the imagery that fuses local motifs, as in Mustapha's description of Nedjma as she leaves to go to the street: "La feinte la plus subtile de la gazelle en fuite n'est souvent qu'un halte à portée de fusil"<sup>31</sup> Lakhdar yearns for the smell of coffee from his tribal days, essential to the life of the Arab. When Lakhdar feels the blood in his veins while he is bleeding, the memory of the Sirocco wind with its scorching heat is also felt in his veins. Yacine employs the word to assert the depth of Lakhdar's deep-rooted attachment to his ancestral traditions. It is hard to imagine the experience of man sitting under a tent while such a wind is blowing but Yacine uses it within the context of a man in pain and the feeling of hot blood flowing from his wounds. Without screaming or complaining of pain, Yacine forces his audience to sympathize with the protagonist.

Influences of Arabic literary traditions are evident in the major ideas that relate to the theme itself. Lakhdar's feelings to Nedjma are

reminiscent of classical Arabic poetry (related also to medieval love poetry). Lakhdar's jealousy brings to mind the tradition of the Arab poet who kept a watchful eye on his beloved (see note 20). In conventional classical Arab poetry, the poet sings the beauty of his beloved and the fire that her beauty brings in him. He sings the agony of being unable to attain contentment in order to quench the fire in him. Perhaps the most celebrated poetry of the pre-Islamic era is the Mu'allagat or "Suspended Poems," so called because they were given the honor of being affixed to the door of the Ka'ba, and the honor was given to few poets only. One of those poets is 'Amr Ibn Kulthum who in his Mu'allaga "describes his grief at the departure of his beloved, whom he sees in imagination arriving at her journey's end in distant Yamama:

And oh, my love and yearning when at nightfall  
                   I saw her camels haste,  
 Untill sharp peaks uptowered like serried sword-blades  
                   And me Yamama faced!  
 Such grief no mother-camel feels. . . .<sup>32</sup>

In the post-Islamic era, love poetry still adhered to the classical poetry in many ways. The poet Jamil was called "Jamil Buthayna" because of his love for Buthayna. His love for Buthayna became a legend. In the following poem he bemoans the bygone days of joy:

Oh, might it flower anew, that youthful prime,  
 And restore to us, Buthayna, the bygone time!  
 . . .  
 I have spent my lifetime, waiting for her to speak,  
 and the bloom of youth is faded from off my cheek;  
 But I will not suffer that she my suit deny,  
 My love remains undying, though all things die!<sup>33</sup>

Not all love poetry sings of yearning for the beloved. Many poets knew better ways and sang of the beauty of being with the beloved. Yet one can sense the strain in some poems and assume that the poet fears

the reality of physical love because it is too earthly for his Platonic feelings. Thus Lakhdar's "Mais je ne voulais pas atteindre ton altitude, sachant que le vide était au bout." Here is a fusion of the contemporary Western motif of emptiness (which resembles the "nothingness" of the existentialists) that Yacine experienced with the "lost generation" of the post-World War II Philosophy. Another convention from classical Arabic poetry is to blame the rivals who envy the poet for being the favorite of the "beautiful one." Lakhdar is Nedjma's favorite but he blames her for encouraging his rivals; and in the conventional love poetry the beautiful one did precisely this in order to arouse the jealousy of her beloved.

Yacine seems to be influenced by yet another aspect of classical Arabic poetry, which also was a landmark in pre-Islamic poetry. The convention of the Qasida was so rigid, says R. A. Nicholson, that they did not dare to overstep. He cites an early Arab historian who thus accounted for the contents and divisions of the Qasida [ode in English]:

"I have heard," says Ibn Qutayba, "from a man of learning that the composer of Odes began by mentioning the deserted dwelling places and the relics and the traces of habitation. Then he wept and complained and addressed the desolate encampment, and begged his companion to make a halt, in order he might have the occasion to speak of those who had once lived there and afterwards departed."<sup>34</sup>

Although not all the Odes conform to that description, Labid, a true Bedouin poet was renowned for his "fresh pictures of desert life and scenery."<sup>35</sup> The poet in this passage describes the desolate encampment of his beloved, but the motif is applicable to the Ibn Qutayba's description:

The camp in Rayyan's vale is marked by relics dim  
Like weather-beaten script engraved on ancient stone.  
Over this ruined scene, since it was desolate,

Whole years with secular and sacred months had flown.  
 In spring 'twas blest by showers . . .

. . .  
 I stopped and asked, but what avails it that we ask  
 Dumb changeless things that speak a language all unknown?<sup>36</sup>

In a similar manner, Lakhdar bemoans his deserted tribal land: "sur un arbre éperdu s'évertue ma riche famille, riche de sang et de racines, la tribu au mausolée désert qui vécut avant moi dans un arôme de café grillé;"<sup>37</sup> And in the same soliloquy Lakhdar recalls the encampment of his tribe (see note 12).

The question might arise as to whether the poetry in the play and the soliloquies of Lakhdar and Nedjma might affect the development of the action or whether it might slow it. Yacine avoids such a possibility by alternating between realistic and poetic dialogue. To the former he leaves the task of development. Poetry establishes the mood of the scene and defines the pace of the action. When the play opens and we see Lakhdar among the wounded, his soliloquy prepares us for the tragic events that follow. When the scene shifts to the house we receive some details about reasons behind the bloodshed in the streets. The house scene exposes the main conflict between the older and younger generations on the one hand, and between the French and the Algerians on the other. After the house scene we are back in the street with the exchange between Lakhdar and Nedjma.

The chorus is introduced toward the middle of the play, and its speeches begin to direct and dominate the play step by step. At first it merely echoes the characters' final lines and mirrors their sufferings. Later, when Marguerite is rejected as a sympathizer with the revolution, the chorus assumes a separate entity. In other instances

the chorus splits into two groups, each representing one character's point of view. Toward the end of the play, the chorus becomes the spokesman of the masses as it urges them to join the revolt and flee to the mountains. Together with poetry, the chorus helps to create the mythical atmosphere characteristic of Yacine's serious works. Although Yacine must have been influenced by Greek tragedy in his conception of the chorus, there is evidence that tribal dirges and songs might have had their influence as well. However, in The Encircled Corpse such tribal songs are less evident than they are in The Ancestors. In my discussion of the second play I will attempt to elaborate on this point.\*

Whether through direct influence or not, Yacine's theatre seems to parallel some of the characteristics of Federico Garcia Lorca's poetic theatre. His attempts to blend a highly poetic language with alternation of mythic and realistic atmosphere are manifest in The Encircled Corpse. Mustapha's attitude toward Nedjma, for example, changes in the same passage from a purely factual reference to a poetic one: "Nedjma! Il ne faut pas la laisser partir. Appelle-la! N'oublie pas que Lakhdar l'a laissée ici, même s'il n'a pas prévu qu'elle resterait sous notre garde. . . ."38 His tone changes to: "Regarde-la enjamber les morts. La stupeur ni la crainte n'ont appesanti sa démarche. La voici qui s'arrête devant l'impasse macabre. Son voile flotte dans la nuit; on croirait, chavirant, une barque immobilisée pour nous révéler l'horizon. . . ."39 Lakhdar's expression of his love for Nedjma is accentuated by the use of modern metaphors and imagery and the fusion of natural forces and elements reminiscent of Garcia Lorca:

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\*I am indebted to Mr. David C. Gordon in his book, The Passing of French Algeria, for drawing my attention to the idea.

Va-t'en séparons-nous sans peine de nos coeurs monstrueux.  
 L'âme seule suffit pour traverser le monde, si peu qu'on  
 parle en son dernier soupir. Je me tais. Toute chaude je  
 t'ai sur le bout de la langue, et je rame en silence afin  
 de t'aborder à marée basse. Comme un récif, ton sein me  
 paralyse.<sup>40</sup>

Like Lorca, Yacine approaches the theatre as a poet and not as a dramatist, inventing drama by placing dramatic dialogue within a framework of action. And like Lorca, his poetry turns the external landscape into a solidified image of the inner landscape where all emotions have been depersonalized. In "The Ballad of the Little Square" Lorca sees in the pomegranate ". . . a tiny hive that drips / With live blood soaking through its mesh."<sup>41</sup> And in "Canada Infidel" the beauty of the flower inspires him to say: "I watch the lilies wither / At the contact of my voice."<sup>42</sup> It is true that Yacine was not as much concerned with the natural landscape, but his poetry expresses the reaction of his inner self to the world around him. The grain of wheat reminds him of his crushed soul, and like that grain his soul struggles to come to life again despite the sickle's blows. The street with wounded men reminds him of his drained veins.

Both poets demand the conscious participation of the audience [similar to the Brechtian demand, but through different techniques and for different ends], a kind of commitment to the poetic experience that transcends the mere audience identification with the character. In the works of both poets, the audience cannot sit back and detach themselves by sinking into their own reveries. They are addressed directly by the characters and are made intimate participants in the personal outpouring of the characters' feelings; Lakhdar does not have another character with whom he can communicate: the audience is the other character.

Metaphors and imagery in general are not mere decorative tools, they are an extension of the meaning of plays. When the fiancée in Blood Wedding says: "I was a burnt woman, full of sores outside and within," she is expressing the irresistible passion against which she cannot struggle. The burning passion is the cause of the tragedy and forms the basic meaning of the play. In the same manner, Lakhdar compares himself to the broken statues that attempt to come back to life after an earthquake. The metaphor becomes an embodiment of the Algerian people's attempt to rise from continuous defeats and regain their own identity.

Although the imagery is stylized, it is never fixed. The secret lies in the fluidity of the substance. When Mustapha compares Nedjma to the gazelle which is not aware of the danger that awaits, he sparks a chain reaction in the mind of his audience that continues while the image of Nedjma is moving through the dangerous street looking for Lakhdar.

The similarities in the works of the two poets can also be found in the influence of Arabic poetry, especially the Andalusian Arabic poetry of Medieval Spain, such as in the case of Lorca. The short lyric, a form of Qasida (or Casida) shows an obsession with erotic love, reinforced by the Platonic notion of chastity. This attitude toward love was popular among Bedouin tribes in the pre-Islamic period. Later it dominated the Arabic lyric in Andalusia and even later influenced European love poetry. Perhaps more than any other poems, Lorca's Poema del Canto Jondo, Lament for the Death of a Bullfighter, and Romancero Gitano reveal the influence of Andalusian poetry. In Romancero Gitano Lorca describes two frightened women:

In the bower of an olive tree  
 two old women weep.  
 The bull of argument  
 climb over the walls.  
 Black angels were bearing

. . .  
 Juan Amtonio Montilla, dead,  
 is rolling down the slope,  
 his body full of lilies,<sup>43</sup>

In Maria Pineda there is a note of resignation in her words:

Through this love true  
 that devours my simple soul  
 I am turning marigold  
 through suffering for you.<sup>44</sup>

And in Don Pedro's words about Spain:

Spain buries and treads on her old heart  
 her wounded heart of an errant peninsula  
 and we must save her soon with our hands  
 and our teeth.<sup>45</sup>

One can go on quoting passages from plays and poems which show similarities between the two writers. Whether we use the word "similarities," "echoes," or "parallels," the two writers share a fascination with Arabic poetry, and one can detect a temperament that is similar in the two poets. The raw flesh which their characters expose in their imagery and the nudity of their feelings are exposed by juxtaposing different, and sometimes contrasting, elements that bring to the surface a quality of what might sound like primitive verbalism at the first sight, but actually is the result of a mixture of life in the city with a deep yearning for the elemental nature. Beside Lakhdar's reference to blood in the first few scenes of the play, one can sense the raw flesh when the image of the "circumcised boys"\* is evoked and

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\*Circumcision was, and still is in many communities performed by practitioners who were barbers in real life. The operation involved painful procedures without the benefit of anesthetic. Yacine's reference to the bride and the circumcised boys has something to do with the concept of maturity, since circumcision is a sign of adulthood, and marrying is a sign of manhood.

"the brides who married a few days ago." Lakhdar speaks of "la poitrine des insectes que le vent et le gel fouillent jusqu' au matin."<sup>46</sup> He compares the short life of his father to a dead fish which saw itself born out of its mother's womb.<sup>47</sup>

In both poets one can sense a feeling for their countries, not as geographical entities, but rather as multitudes of cultural traits that transcend the folklore toward the human in earth, not only the foundation of homes and the roots of trees but also an extension of the human body and soul.

The characters exhibit a passion for the basic in human nature, no matter how sophisticated they are. In Blood Wedding, La Novia and Leonardo, knowing in advance the tragic fate they have to face, elope because their passions exceed the limitations of social norms. In a similar manner Lakhdar leaps through all the rhetoric of the revolution and is attracted to Marguerite, forgetting all the mistakes of his father's generation.

It is essential to point out, however, that Lorca's social milieu is basically different from Yacine's. Although the two poets were facing polarities within their society as a result of political strife, Lorca was not directly involved and his country was not facing foreign domination. Yacine, however, was facing a dual struggle, one a struggle against the French and the other the gap between the older and younger generations. Furthermore, Lorca, unlike Yacine did not have to contend with the need to reconcile a cultural paradox.

One of the ironies of colonization is that the colonized experiences love-hate feelings toward the colonizer. Love is usually manifested in the colonized's attraction to the culture of the colonizer.

It might be the task of psychologists to probe deeper into reasons and manifestations of such a phenomenon, but I believe I can safely assume that Kateb Yacine is one of the colonized who was sensitive enough to recognize the dichotomy and reveal it in his writings. It is ironic that Yacine uses French as the language of his literary works. He speaks Arabic, but he cannot write it or even adequately express himself in it. The irony comes from the impossibility of abandoning a culture he admires, yet resents for forcing him and his people to turn their backs on the past and the traditions of their fathers. The clash between these two realities creates an unresolved tension that is nowhere more deeply expressed than in Lakhdar's reply to Marguerite:

Marguerite: Non, je suis sûre. Vos paroles étaient  
incompréhensibles. Mais c'était du français.  
Lakhdar: (rougissant) Ce que c'est d'être allé à  
l'école . . .  
Marguerite: Vous dites?  
Lakhdar: (se reprenant) rien.<sup>48</sup>

The tension between the Arabic ethos and the French language is also found in the imagery itself. When Mustapha speaks about his duty to protect Nedjma because Lakhdar entrusted her to him, he is returning to one of the pillars of tribal tradition -- hospitality -- which a host will kill or die to uphold. For a twentieth century European man that concept is nearly incomprehensible.

Like many other North African writers, Yacine is concerned with the plight of his people, and the theme of the play deals with the effects of political, economic and cultural domination by the French. "Two thousand wine merchants share the profits while we drank water," says Yacine of the French colonizer. "We ride on donkeys though our iron

in Ouenza produces the best light steel for the manufacture of jet planes."<sup>49</sup> Such journalistic pronouncements are more subtly presented in the plays. His anger is directed not so much against the obvious evils of colonization but rather at what one might call "cultural rape," a direct consequence of French attempts to integrate Algeria with the French mainland, and the lost generation of cultural hybrids which is represented by men and women like Lakhdar and Nedjma.

This "cultural rape" represents the central theme of the play: Yacine's view is that the imposition of French culture and language and the attempts to wipe out all aspects of the Algerian heritage are the reason for his alienation from the world of his fathers and that of his peers. For his generation what might seem a blessing -- the ability to speak French -- is a source of alienation, as Marguerite points out when she remarks to Lakhdar that he is different from the others. That is why Lakhdar is more fierce in his hatred of the French colonizer (and is also sympathetic to people like Marguerite); he knows what it feels to be an outsider from his own culture and rejected by his enemy. The French are to be blamed most, for they have encouraged men like Lakhdar to follow their ways, yet when such men sought equality they were snubbed as inferior by the colonizer and rejected by their countrymen as "Uncle Toms" and traitors to their culture and tradition. Marguerite, who is an outsider to the atrocities of her own people, remarks to Lakhdar that the others (meaning the other men in the street) are dirty and that she cannot look at them. Lakhdar does not respond to her remark except to say that he will sleep with his comrades, but Marguerite's words must have aroused a sensitive nerve.

Yacine does not spare his countrymen, and his anger with the older generation is no less harsh:

Mustapha: Nous sommes nés dans cette rue, tous. Ce n'est pas la police qui nous en délogera. Quant aux cadavres, la vieille rue en a vu d'autres . . . Vous-même, pauvre vieillard, elle verra passer votre corbillard. Et tous nous passerons par là. Ce n'est pas le nombre des morts qui pèse sur notre rue, c'est la mort solitaire des lâches, . . . Vous les pères attardés qui trahissez les ancêtres. Vous croyez assurer vos vieux jours en nous envoyant des chantiers et des écoles d'où nous sommes perpétuellement chassés par ceux dont la domination vous est devenue chère.<sup>50</sup>

Yacine is also no less outspoken against his own generation, and Taher lashes out at Mustapha for chastising him, "Qu'avez-vous fait avec vos drapeaux, contre les mitrailleuses?"<sup>51</sup> Later on, Taher hits his target when he attacks the younger generation for abandoning its heritage, "alors vous avez, pour la plupart, quitté le pays, et vous êtes partis pour la France; vous avez mangé à la table de vos ennemis, vous avez parlé leur langue et porté l'uniforme sous lequel on vous avait pourtant canardés."<sup>52</sup> Taher's point becomes more evident when Lakhdar and Marguerite begin to develop an attraction to each other.

The theme of the play is organically related to the structural elements. By presenting the older and younger generations, and by speaking of the future, Yacine integrates the temporal arrangements to suit the theme. He sees the older generation as a capitulating force that did not have the will or the means to fight. His generation is portrayed as lost and alienated, with an outmoded yet proud past and a humiliating yet progressive present. When, at the end of the play, Lakhdar voices his deepest expression of loss and frustration, he is reaching the

summation of a lifetime of experience, "Adieu, camarades! Quelle horrible jeunesse nous avons eue!"<sup>53</sup> Lakhdar's final statement forces the reader to reassess the commitment and validity of the shedding of blood and of spending one's youth in hatred and fighting. Yacine is telling us that these young men have missed the simple pleasures of life. They have moved from childhood to death without going through the natural stages of growth. Lakhdar's love for Nedjma had to exist on the fringes of his political struggle, resulting in a frustrated and often tense relation between the two.

The love theme in The Encircled Corpse is also related to the Algerian struggle against the French. The unrequited love between Nedjma and Lakhdar, and the love triangle among the two and Mustapha on the one hand, and among Lakhdar, Nedjma, and Marguerite on the other is a direct result of the disorientation that plagues the young men and women of Algeria. Mustapha knows that Lakhdar is Nedjma's favorite, and whenever the three are in the same room tension develops among them. Yet they are silent about it because even more than friendship, it is the code of honor that a friend does not trespass on another friend's territory. Nedjma, however, uses that tension when she senses the secret glances between Lakhdar and Marguerite and tries to stir Lakhdar's jealousy by looking at Mustapha.

The theme of the deserted family is evident in the disintegration of family ties because the young men either go to France or join the revolt against the French. There are frequent references to the older generation about the young men deserting their families to go to France, and remaining apart from their families even when they came back. We

know that economical problems were partly responsible for the exodus, but no explanation is given for the young men's reluctance to see their families again. Is it their feeling of shame? Or is it that the young men believe that their parents are responsible for not resisting the French colonizer? No matter what the reasons, one cannot justify the act when seeing the mothers of Mustapha and Lakhdar.

In his characters, Yacine portrays the thematic forces in the play; the old generation is represented by Taher, the younger generation by Lakhdar and his friends, the future by Ali,\* the characters who play lesser parts are given professional names, like vendor, lawyer, policeman, and so on, and the French by Marguerite, her father, and the officers in the prison. The major characters, on the other hand, have symbolic names, both literally and dramatically. These characters and what they represent are dramatically and structurally functional. Edouard Gissant, in his introduction to the play, points out the effectiveness of those symbols: "Il s'ensuit que les symboles (celui des Ancêtres, par exemple) n'interviennent jamais ici comme de creuses parades, propres à masquer le réel. Un grand théâtre est à ce prix."<sup>54</sup> Symbolically, Lakhdar is admired by his friends as the leader of their group and is loved by Nedjma, who refers to him as her only friend. To his friends, he is the organizer who is ready to sacrifice his life for the revolution, yet he often mystifies them by inexplicable behavior. Mustapha tells Nedjma that Lakhdar sometimes does not answer a call, but he does not explain why. This facet of Lakhdar is revealed to the audience through his soliloquies and when he is alone with Nedjma; it is

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\*Ali, the son of Lakhdar, is not developed in this play or the second. His role remains more of a symbol than an actual participant in the drama.

the private Lakhdar. Within that context, Lakhdar is engrossed in the drama of his own inner life, which seems to be a psychological extension of the artist himself. Although Lakhdar is not a biographical reproduction of Yacine there are enough facts in the play which could be attributed to his life. As a symbol of human vision he grows "un grain de blé dur tombé sous la faux pour onduler plus haut à l'assaut de la prochaine aire à battre,"<sup>55</sup> to a myth stretching across time to signify the consciousness of a whole nation.

From the very beginning of the play, Lakhdar reveals himself to us both as the actor in a game he believes in and as a manifestation of the political upheaval. To him Nedjma is not simply the woman he loves, she is also the symbol and history of Algeria; "Oui, j'ai passé mes jours dans une fosse. . . ." <sup>56</sup> expresses his failure not only with Nedjma but also with his country, the real source of his agony. In the final stages of the play, Lakhdar sees himself as the sacrifice presented by his father; however, he does not grant his father the privilege of being an Abraham; "Pas même l'assassinat, pas même le geste du sacrifice, / Car il est loin d'être Abraham."<sup>57</sup>

Lakhdar cannot be judged in real life terms, since this will only distort our notion of him. What is essential is that he remain consistent within the doubts and fears he has about himself, the people around him, and the world. His alienation arises from the cultural contradictions he lives, but more so from his knowledge of the waste that he sees around him translated into young men dying and of women lost without sons or husbands. His feeling of loss becomes more agonizing when he

sees his love for Nedjma trampled by the chaos of the revolution. His declaration of "What a terrible youth we spend" borders on the anguish of the absurdists in which he dies without knowing whether his death has contributed anything to the cause of liberation. His acceptance of Marguerite's help, and his willingness to drink with her and his other friends, reveals a human spirit able to transcend the traditional boundaries of nationality, enmity, and language.

The portrayal of Lakhdar is not without some irony. For a brief moment we see him about to repeat the tragedy of his father's generation when he exchanges smiles with Marguerite, and for a moment we sense an attraction developing between the two. When Lakhdar leaves the prison, he is assisted by Marguerite, and the doubts of the bedroom scene are confirmed. Yacine is saying, that in effect no matter what our political ideology human relations could transcend one's immediate concerns. But the cycle of history is being repeated, and the young men's argument against the older generation is a matter of perspective and is never an absolute. If Nedjma can be considered the symbol of Algeria's extrinsic characteristics, Lakhdar is the epitome of Algeria's human psyche; the forces that play within the social structure of its revolution.

Nedjma is the symbol of Algeria, a woman left with no family and a past split between her French and Algerian parents. What remains of her traits from the novel Nedjma is that she is still loved and wanted by men around her. She is the prize of the dueling knights seeking the hand of the lady fair. She loves Lakhdar most and calls him her only friend, but she feels he is not giving her enough of himself, that he devotes all his time to the revolution. When he interprets her concern

for him as spying, as she follows him out of Marguerite's house, she answers with all the anger of a humiliated woman:

Trop loin je t'ai suivi. Ce n'est pas moi qui te garderai.  
Toujours tu gis abîmé dans ton propre regard, si on peut  
appeler regard cette araignée qui court sur ton front. Je  
te poursuis pendant que tu m'aveugles et que tu me frappes.  
Sur moi pèse ton âme cruelle, et je porte le deuil, mais tu  
n'es mort que pour moi.<sup>58</sup>

From the very beginning, Nedjma is concerned only with Lakhdar's fate. Even when she is with Mustapha and Hassan her mind is occupied with his fate, and her frequent wandering in the street prompts Mustapha to ask Taher to look after her. She is torn between her anger and her love at seeing him wounded, and when he ridicules her for expressing her need for him she attacks his manliness, "Jamais tu n'as voulu achever ma conquête. Souviens-toi du matin où tu m'as quittée, avec des sarcasmes en guise d'adieu."<sup>59</sup> Her jealousy towards Marguerite turns into friendship at the end of the play. Her attitude toward Lakhdar becomes vague as she asks Marguerite to stay away from "that mad-looking man." She remains pliable to the end because she represents Algeria. At the end of the play, she appears to be the mother of Lakhdar's child but, throughout the play, Yacine keeps the relationship between Nedjma and Lakhdar vague and we are forced to form our own concept of the relationship from hints the other characters give about the two. In her portrayal, one can sense echoes of Garcia Lorca's female characters in his tragedies, Maria Pineda in the play of the same title and La Novia in Blood Wedding.

Mustapha remains in Lakhdar's shadow but, unlike him, he survives the revolution and continues to ride the waves. He is more practical than Lakhdar, and his kind is able to carry on the struggle without allowing idealism to interfere with duty. If he is suffering because of

his love for Nedjma, he does not show it. Occasionally we are aware of the private side of Mustapha in which a poet is hidden, but it quickly disappears with the business of carrying on his duties:

Le sommeil n'est plus de ce monde  
 Pour celui qui verra l'aurore toute nue  
 Comme un amant défiant la nuit à la course . . . 60

The fact that Mustapha does not express himself often does not necessarily mean that he is an uninteresting character; he might be suffering even more than Lakhdar. The fact that he invokes the code of honor, in which the pain he suffers while he sees the woman he love constantly paying attention to someone else while he is unable to express himself.

Taher is the epitome of the compromising generation. He has accustomed himself to the status quo for so long that he has come to accept it as fact, leading him to self-righteousness and perhaps, self-disrespect. Like the rest of his generation, he is aware of the tragedy, but his answer is submissive resignation. Symbolically, his generation is as much the enemy as the French, as the killing of Lakhdar signifies. The cafe scene reveals the state of affairs that led the older generation to become subservient; their idleness and their lack of enthusiasm must have convinced the French that they had a nation of sheep, born of the fabricated stereotype of southern regions where men are supposed to be lazy and unwilling to work. Their idleness was at the root of the younger generation's outrage which led them to revolt against their masters. Historically, this notion is not wholly true, for the older generation did attempt to revolt on many occasions and their attempts were crushed. What sets the older and younger generations apart was the latter's readiness to learn the French way of living. By learning French and traveling to France, the younger then were able to

see that the French people were free to protest and that the Algerians were treated like slaves. They adopted what the French people consider their greatest historical achievement -- the French revolution -- and hit the colonizers with slogans of that revolution. The case became more sarcastic after the Nazi occupation of France and the Algerian revolutionaries began to compare themselves to the "Resistance" of World War II.

On a realistic level, the mothers are the victims of the tragedy; their concern for their children and husbands supersedes all others. They are unable to comprehend their children's desire to leave the family and go to France or join the revolution at home. Their concern is not qualified by profit, idealism, or self-serving ends. They are portrayed as victims on both ends of the rope, husbands who seek male company in the cafes or mix with French women, and sons who seek freedom outside of family life. Nothing could be more humanly agonizing than a woman standing in front of a dying man unable to tell whether he is her son or not:

Une femme: Moi j'avais un fils dont le nom seul m'est odieux . . .  
 Revenu jusqu' à mon délicat secret de jeune fille,  
 Le nom du fils perdu pèse bien plus à mes entrailles,  
 Bien plus qu'au temps où il dormait à l'abri  
 Avant d'être coupé de la sphère charnelle,  
 Contraint à l'atterrissage  
 En ce désert où il manque sa faim à ma bouche,  
 Et je hais jusqu'au nom qu'on lui donne  
 Pour le ravir encore à mon secret  
 Et je ne guette plus la course des années  
 Avec l'ancien désir de plénitude,  
 Moi qui perdis trois saisons sur quatre  
 Pour accoucher d'un monstre fugitif.<sup>61</sup>

Yacine insists on naming Lakhdar's mother "Une femme." He sees in her the archetype of all mothers who suffer for the loss of their children.

Her suffering is the primordial possessiveness of motherhood. She held Lakhdar in her womb three seasons out of the four; a reference to nature's cycle that delineates life and growth in nature.

The woman becomes more agitated when Lakhdar mentions something about a widowed mother and a stepfather. In pain and dying, Lakhdar asks her to leave him alone, but she insists, hoping that her secret is with him; "Dis-moi seulement si Lakhdar est mort. Car le deuil est mon privilège, et je pose à toute agonie cette question cruelle."<sup>62</sup> She does not care anymore; she wants to know whether he is dead or not for she has the right to mourn him; she wants to put her agony to rest and relieve herself.

The French are portrayed as the enemy, symbolized by the officers who are in charge of torturing or the army and police who attack the demonstrators. They are aware of the history of Algeria and they refer to the struggle of the Numidians against the Romans. However, they assure themselves that they have the edge in their modern weaponry. They reveal a feeling of superiority toward the natives, equating their resistance with that of animals. Marguerite is the only individual character among the French. Her sympathy towards the Algerians is a symbol of the young men and woman of France who refused to accept their fathers' domination of Algeria. Yet her sympathy is tainted with the stereotype she inherited from her father's generation. Her attempts, however, came too late to affect the years of hatred and mistrust. Nevertheless, Yacine's portrayal of Marguerite affirms his belief in the plurality of the dilemma and places his views in a human dimension. Hassan senses Marguerite's sincerity, and when Nedjma, out of jealousy, dismisses Marguerite's show of friendship, Hassan answers:

Tu as tort de la détester. Ce n'est qu'une étrangère, simple fille dépaysée, désœuvrée, réduite à la vie de caserne, étouffée par l'esprit de caste auprès d'un père sans pitié. Sa solitude l'a jetée parmi nous comme une somnambule. Elle passe à la jeunesse comme on passe à l'ennemi, marchant sur son propre sang, sans connaître ceux dont elle choisit le camp, tirée de sa réclusion par un de ces coups du sort . . .<sup>63</sup>

### The Ancestors Redouble Their Ferocity

Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité (referred to from now on as The Ancestors) is a continuation of The Encircled Corpse. Like The Encircled Corpse, it is not divided into acts or scenes, and the scenes change without regard for temporal or spatial arrangement. The atmosphere is more mythical, the action more stylized, and the characters more symbolic and less individualized. The chorus assumes a larger role in the action and in the structure of the plot. Almost the same characters from The Encircled Corpse play the major roles with the exception of Nedjma and Lakhdar, whose names are now changed.

The play opens in a prison cell where the jailer is making the evening roll call of the prisoners; among them are Mustapha and Hassan. After the jailer leaves, we discover that the two are digging a hole in the wall to escape. When the other prisoners in the cell try to participate in the digging, Hassan and Mustapha warn them that the escape might be dangerous since a spy might be planted among them.

The scene shifts to the outside of the prison, where we discover Mustapha among the masked chorus of men and women. He and Hassan are trying to find weapons and ask the chorus for directions to the home of Taher who has prospered after becoming a favorite with the French authorities. We next see them dressed in French army officers uniforms

outside of Taher's residence. Deceived by the uniforms, Taher goes out of his residence to meet them. After their identities are revealed, they force him to disclose the whereabouts of Nedjma (the Savage Woman). Taher tells them that she lives in the valley of the Savage Woman, where she is visited by a vulture she calls Lakhdar. Mustapha kills Taher to avenge Lakhdar, but he is rebuked for wasting a bullet on Taher, since he might need it to defend himself in the future. Hassan tells him that cutting Taher's nose would have been enough humiliation, since to the Algerians the nose symbolizes the honor and dignity of man. Mustapha, however, assures him that such a man does not care for the code of honor and he cites an incident in which a prisoner's character did not change after he had his nose cut off for killing a Jew in the prison.

Hassan and Mustapha are now in the Valley of the Savage Woman, and a chorus of women point to an orange tree where the Savage Woman lives. When the chorus asks the Savage Woman for arms, she tells them that they can find the Vulture themselves. The Vulture appears on a screen and proclaims that he is the spirit of their ancestors; he wants to make sure that the wrongs committed against them are corrected and avenged. Two men appear and the women throw down their jewelry in exchange for weapons. A battle ensues in which the men and the woman participate. When the battle ends, we see Hassan and Mustapha crossing a desert. They talk about people who had crossed the desert to Al-Maghreb and had been betrayed there by the Sultan. They join a caravan, and among the travellers they discover a man who had tried to capture the Savage Woman, and they kill him. Nedjma calls to Lakhdar to save her from the

Sultan's army; some of the women drop, unable to proceed. The Savage Woman's veil is removed, disclosing the beautiful Nedjma. Hassan and Mustapha realize that one of them must die so that the other can have Nedjma; they both shoot, and Hassan falls.

The scene now focuses on a group of men representing the ancestors. They are carrying a banner that reads, "The Central Committee of the Ancestors." The soldiers appear and Mustapha is unable to defend himself or Nedjma, since he has used his last bullet. He fears for Nedjma's honor but is not sure he should kill her with a dagger found in Hassan's pocket. The image of soldiers on the screen becomes clearer, and the fallen young men and woman begin to revive and follow the chorus leader. When the Vulture appears, the leader asks the women to run away. In the darkness we are told by the leader that the Vulture and Mustapha are fighting and that the Vulture is flying away with blood dripping from him. The light is on the chorus who are fighting the soldiers, and Mustapha's face is full of blood. He feels his way towards the Savage Woman (Nedjma) who is being kicked by the soldiers to make sure that she is dead and, perhaps, to show Mustapha that he does not have to kill her. Mustapha is handcuffed while trying to reach Nedjma. The Vulture appears on the screen again while the prisoners and the soldiers leave the stage. The chorus reappears to proclaim that the fighting will continue.

The Ancestors is a shorter play than The Encircled Corpse and although different in many ways, there are a few similarities between the two. The analysis of this play will be briefer and might appear unbalanced when compared to The Encircled Corpse. However, so many of

the similarities have been discussed in relation to The Encircled Corpse that further discussion would be repetitious. In The Ancestors Yacine is moving into a new atmosphere and a new setting. The world he creates departs further from reality and his technique becomes more abstract and more suggestive. The images come closer to pure surrealist metaphors in which no relation is sought or established except in the mind of the author, to be impressionistically grasped by the audience.

There is heavier reliance on visual effects to compensate for the lack of realism and to accentuate the surrealist techniques and atmosphere. There is almost a sense of arbitrariness in shifting from one scene to another. One can sense more clearly the influences of "la nouvelle école du roman" in which the plot becomes a means of expressing one's own understanding of the world and conventional techniques of realistic exposition are disregarded.

This summary of the plot is not exhaustive, and only a careful reading of the play can familiarize one with it. Yacine does not seem to attempt to create a plot, only a skeleton. The play basically seems to consist of a series of visual impressions of a confused mind. The play begins with a perfectly realistic scene in a prison: a jailer on his evening roll call before lights are turned off. Yet, as soon as the action moves outside the prison we move from the world of reality to one of fantasy. Undoubtedly the story points toward the continuation of the struggle against the French, but the revolt is more abstract than that in The Encircled Corpse. Actually, to say that the play is about the struggle against the French is like saying that Robbe-Grillet's Voyeur

is a detective story, or that Samuel Beckett's Molloy is about a man in search of his mother.

The action alternates between the purely realistic, which helps to develop the plot, as in the scene of Hassan and Mustapha's visit to Taher, and the poetic and mythical atmosphere as we arrive in the valley of the Savage Woman where she and the Vulture rule. Episodic in nature, the surrealist scenes resemble the recreation of the memory or the magnification of a statement about the ancestors and Nedjma, culminating in the final confusion of death and retribution. In the play Yacine expresses Lakhdar's solitary existence, his anguish, and his chaotic mind. Through the use of elliptical structure, we thus come to the end of the play with a feeling of ambiguity and uncertainty.

In The Ancestors, Yacine's concept of time and space is almost completely eliminated. He opens the play in the prison cell, and, when we meet Hassan and Mustapha in the second scene, there is an indication in Mustapha's comment that 10 years have passed, "C'est vrai. J'y étais, il y a dix ans."<sup>64</sup> After that there is no actual return to the past except in allusions by the characters to their past, and in historical references about the struggle against conquerors. However, in the rest of the play there is no definite chronological progression. The only indication which becomes a characteristic of change in time and space is a change in the stage direction, "Noir, Coups de gong prolongés. Lumière."

The same device is used to change the action from one place to another. More than in The Encircled Corpse, Yacine uses the technique

whereby answers are recreated rather than related. Thus, when Hassan and Mustapha shoots Taher after inquiring about Nedjma, his answer is also given by shifting the scene to the Valley of the Savage Woman. Aside from the practical function that such a device performs, it enhances the surrealist atmosphere that dominates the play.

Although there is more freedom in employing a time-space concept, it is practically related to the structural and thematic concepts in the play. Thus, in the structure of the play flashbacks are not enacted on the stage. The past is mentioned to remind us of the recurrence, as in the evocation of the Sultan's treason of Abdul Kader. On the other hand, the theme is related to the time-space concept in the general meaning of the play, which is indicated by the title of the play itself. However, the struggle between the older and younger generations is less evident than in The Encircled Corpse. The Ancestors relies on the previous play as a background, as much as The Encircled Corpse relied on Nedjma.

There are a few references to the period of the action in the play, as in the reference to the air piracy of Morocco.\* The setting, however, is vaguely defined. There is a reference to the desert and to caravans travelling, probably to Morocco. Except for the prison scene, the action takes place in the open, either in the streets or outside the city. There is a starkness in the final scenes of the play that gives an eeriness to the story.

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\*In the early 1950's an airplane carrying five leaders of the Algerian revolution was forced to redirect its route while flying over Morocco to France. The five leaders were imprisoned until the independence of Algeria, and the King of Morocco was accused by the Algerians for being responsible for allowing the French to highjack the plane.

Except for a few realistic scenes in which prose dominates the dialogue, poetry is the primary medium of expression in the play. Poetry in The Ancestors magnifies the intense feelings of the characters and makes us aware of their exile into a helpless state. Furthermore, the accumulation of impressions expressed in poetic images, permits us to form a picture that does not simply give a single effect but, rather, a total state. A magic world is created by style and statement, myth and symbol, so that at the end we feel that the past of Lakhdar is irredeemable and the future is inevitable. Seeing Lakhdar hovering on the screen, we realize that death is never simply the end, it also is an act of purification. There is a didactic tone in the sentence structure, that verges on the teaching drama. Language assumes a purely imagistic and symbolic color when feelings become undefined. When the chorus refers to the orange tree as "Oui voici l'oranger aux fruits amers. / La stérile abondance de ce pays!"<sup>65</sup> the contrast between "fertile" and "sterile" does not neutralize the orange tree, it merely expresses the uncompromising forces that form the essence of the people's dilemma.

The end of Lakhdar assumes a strange rite, "Rite miraculeux, nuptial et funèbre où c'est le disparu qui ranime / Et la veuve qui vient au monde une seconde fois. . ."<sup>66</sup> The ritual of death and wedding (which is also a celebration of the possibility of birth and new life) become one; in them, the artist projects the precarious character of life and the power of death as the unifying element. The concept of the nuptial rite reaches a clearer definition, and the Vulture describes it in an ecstatic manner,

Et comme on respire dans l'étreinte un sang tout chaud  
 Horriblement proche, et comme si, dans la confusion charnelle,  
 On s'était soi-même dévoré dans une autre bouche!<sup>67</sup>

The use of contrasting words, like wedding and death, sterile and fertile, and fatal and ecstasy expresses Lakhdar's longing from beyond the grave.

Only in a few instances does real dialogue take place. It does not function as a communicative medium between the characters, but simply reflects their feelings and reactions rather than a logical cause-effect process. Nedjma's continuous attacks on Lakhdar does not create a feeling of hatred, since we sense in her words a cumulative unconscious rather than a conscious process of thinking.

The play defies logical explication. Yet, through its stylistic language, verbal ambiguities, and allusions, we grasp the vast universe of the play. Through such devices Yacine leads us to accept the vague and ethereal atmosphere of the play. The poetry itself becomes the tool through which the author compensates for the vague activities of the characters and the inexplicable shift from one situation to another. Yacine uses an abstract language to express a political subject, the sorrows of the people are experienced without the use of pathos and sentimentality.

Some of the characters, who had a resemblance to reality in The Encircled Corpse, are now replaced by pure symbols, in Lakhdar's case by a bird. Hassan, Mustapha, and Taher, however, remain the same. The chorus assumes a larger role and shares the action with the rest of the characters from the beginning of the play. The love relationship in The Encircled Corpse between Nedjma and Lakhdar is transformed into a spiritual bondage that hovers between horror and love. Through vacillating

responses of sympathy and disbelief, Yacine is able to dramatize his abstract discussion. In The Ancestors, there is a further stylization of characters by the use of masks and ritualized movements. Their actions are almost choreographed. Even the minor characters do not break the cold and objective pathos of the forces which move the characters and even give them a universal value.

In this play, Nedjma becomes the Savage Woman who, in the words of the chorus leader, is "encore sous l'empire du démon!"<sup>68</sup> She becomes the leader and spokeswoman for those who were widowed and are seeking freedom and an end to the bloodshed which is the reason for their miseries. She still seeks Lakhdar, who for her becomes "Hiéroglyphe solaire / Le désert est son juste milieu."<sup>69</sup> Like an albatross, Lakhdar hangs over her forever, "Sa tête roule dans mon coeur avec un bruit de chute éternisée."<sup>70</sup> The tragedy of her mother's generation is repeated in a symbolic manner, "Son orphelin, tout comme lui, fantôme en réduction, court les chemins, / Et je n'ai plus de lui le moindre souvenir."<sup>71</sup> Like the other women she possesses the outstanding characteristics of "Le deuil et le fardeau", and she adds a new one "ferocity."

Nedjma's pain develops into loneliness, for she knows that Lakhdar is a phantom for her. Yet in time of danger, she reflexively calls to Lakhdar for help, as when the Sultan's men attack her. In the end, she becomes the sacrificial offering needed to save the honor of the tribe. Mustapha's hesitation about killing her is understandable but ironic:

"Faut-il laisser la rose aux tempêtes de sable, au baiser du vautour?"<sup>72</sup>

His inability to kill her demonstrates the symbol she has been for

everyone, "Quel assassin ne redougerait cet assassinat sans coupable. / Puis-je ici mutiler le féminin visage, la prestigieuse fatalité?"<sup>73</sup>

Lakhdar's spirit, the Vulture, becomes an everpresent menace, a reminder that the spirit of ancestors demands vengeance, but his wings, which are the source of his freedom, are also the shackles that make of him an observer and never a participant. More than in The Encircled Corpse, his portrayal in this play affirms the obsolescence of psychological analysis in characterization and the possibility of creating characters as an expression of a personal poetic vision of man. Lakhdar announces his arrival on the scene in a prophetic and negative tone, "Il n'y a plus d'amour, il n'y a plus personne, il n'y a plus que moi, / Il n'y a plus que moi, l'oiseau de mort, le messager des ancêtres."<sup>74</sup>

The depth of his pain is revealed when he tells the chorus that they cannot hear him and he cannot speak to them, that his pain is too strong and too ancient to communicate. The frustration of his love is referred to when he describes his heart of steel as shattered, "Ce coeur d'acier qui se détrague, j'en ai perdu la clé."<sup>75</sup> He almost begs for fraternity of human beings, "Pourquoi ne pouvons-nous sur une même planète / Ressentir en commun la promiscuité d'un voyage?"<sup>76</sup> His love becomes more of a destiny and not the life-force of the previous play. He realizes the eternal unity that death claims; their nights are spent in each other's dreams.

At the end The Vulture flies away dripping with blood, an enigma, a tragic symbol, and in the words of Edouard Glissant, "exemplaire de cette Tragédie moderne que j'ai dite, par quoi l'art, en l'occurrence l'art théâtral, essaie d'approcher le monde, de le concilier à lui-même, et peut-être d'éclairer ainsi le destin commun de tous les hommes."<sup>77</sup>

Mustapha remains living in the shadow of Lakhdar, wasting one of his last bullets to avenge his friend's death. Yet his love for Nedjma is deep enough to make him hesitate before attempting to kill her. As ever, he rides the waves, and the chorus describes him as the one who will not die but instead will spend his days in prison. The mothers of The Encircled Corpse are replaced by a chorus of young women who are not satisfied with mourning their men, but seek to take their place and fight. Their anguish is not a resigned and passive one, it is active and cold in its determination.

The theme of the play not only depicts the struggle against the French, but also demonstrates the monstrous and chaotic effect of colonization in a symbolic manner. Men and women move like shadows in a terrain devoid of life. The tragic effects are not manifested in poverty, ignorance, or sickness but, rather, are depicted in the spiritual disorientation of every one involved: young men forced to kill the symbol of their fathers (Taher); friends facing each other as enemies, guns in hand; lovers, like Mustapha, trying to kill the women they have loved all their lives, something incomprehensible in western culture, but deep-rooted in tribal culture. Yacine does not absolve his neighboring North African countries. He refers to the recent and early history when in the nineteenth century the Algerian leader Abdul Kader was betrayed by the neighboring Sultan of Morocco after 17 years of fighting.

In evaluating the two plays one might ask whether they fulfill their intentions, and what those intentions are. Yacine is communicating a personal but committed message, one that extends beyond the

boundaries of his native land to reach his adversaries. He succeeds in expressing his ideas through direct exposition, through the relations between the character, and through poetic imagery. The power of the play comes from the quality of its exploration of man's diverse responses in the face of inhuman situations, situations that brutalize man beyond the power of control. Its sense of proportion is achieved by balancing poetry with prose, realism with poetic imagination, and by remaining objective between two diametrically opposed and antagonistic forces. Yacine edges close to Brecht in demanding from his audience a conscious participation in the dramatic activity, inviting us to share his experience and to weigh it against our conceptions or misconceptions. His debt to European and American theatre is unquestionable. His contribution is still to be felt by the coming generations who, it is hoped, will try to forget the enmity and see in his theatre the glorification of man beyond the lines of national boundaries.

## NOTES

## CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>George J. Joyaux, "Driss Chraïbi, Mohammed Dib, Kateb Yacine, and Indigenous North African Literature," Yale French Studies, (Summer, 1959), no. 24, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Isaac Yetiv, "The Crisis of Identity of the Native North African Writer," The Twentieth Century French Fiction, essays for Germain Brée, ed. George Stambolian, (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1975), p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>Malik Haddad, "Introduction," Al-Juththa al-Mulawwathé, (Le Cadavre encerclé), Trans. into Arabic by Malak Abiad al-Isa, (Damascus, 1962), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Isaac Yetiv, op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>7</sup>Malak Abdul Aziz, "The Literature of North Africa in French Language," al-Majallah, no. 62, (Cairo, 1962), p. 46.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Kateb Yacine, Le Cadavre encerclé, in a collection of plays by the same author, Cercle des représailles, (Paris, Edition du Seuil, 1959), p. 29.

<sup>11</sup>Joyaux, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>12</sup>Yacine, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 30.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 32.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 59-60.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 17.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 18-19.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>32</sup>Reynold A. Neicholson, A Literary History of the Arabs, (London, 1907; rpt. London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 111.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 239.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 77.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 119.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 121.
- <sup>37</sup>Yacine, op. cit., p. 27.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 20.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>41</sup>Federico Garcia Lorca, "Ballad of The Little Square," in Edwin Honig's Garcia Lorca (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions Books, 1944) p. 49-52.
- <sup>42</sup>Lorca, "The Faithless Wife," p. 57.
- <sup>43</sup>Lorca, "The Gypsy Ballads," p. 67.
- <sup>44</sup>Lorca, Mariana Pineda, p. 116.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup>Yacine, op. cit., p. 27.

- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 28.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 36.
- <sup>49</sup>Kateb Yacine, in Joyaux, p. 39.
- <sup>50</sup>Yacine, op. cit., p. 23.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 23.
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 62.
- <sup>54</sup>Edouard Glissant, "Introduction," to Yacine's Cercle des représailles, p. 12.
- <sup>55</sup>Yacine, op. cit. p. 17.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 31.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 60.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 37-38.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 32.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 57.
- <sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 58.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 42.
- <sup>64</sup>Kateb Yacine, Les Ancêtres redoublent de férocité, in Cercle de représailles, p. 126.
- <sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 132.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 131.
- <sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 136.
- <sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 132.
- <sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 135.
- <sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 137.
- <sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 139.
- <sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>77</sup>Edouard Glissant, "Introduction," to Yacine's Cercle des représailles,  
p. 11.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of influence proved to be more complicated than I had anticipated, and in the case of al-Hakim diverse and often contradictory factors were operative in the process of charting his literary course. From his childhood on he was attracted to theatre and music and his move to Cairo during his high school and college years gave him an opportunity to indulge in theatrical activities. As a result he wrote plays and musical comedies to entertain his public, reacted to social issues, and adapted plays from French. After his return from France he began to view theatre from a different perspective and wrote plays like The People of the Cave and The Fate of a Cockroach.

Al-Hakim was a pioneer in almost every aspect of drama in Arabic literature. He was the first to use Arabic, Islamic, and ancient Egyptian legends and myths in Arabic drama. He was also the first to call for and succeed in introducing drama as a genre in Arabic literature. Al-Hakim experimented with the Greek theatre, the romantic, the symbolist, the theatre of the absurd, and the folk traditions in Arabic literature.

Although al-Hakim is known for his dramatic works, his other works are equally important. His fiction, The Diary of a Public Prosecutor has already been mentioned. His autobiographical works have inspired many young writers and are still considered among the best in modern Arabic literature. His theoretical writings, among which Fann al-Adab (The Art of Literature, 1952) is the most influential.

In almost all his theoretical and autobiographical writings, al-Hakím acknowledges his debt to Western literature for opening his mind to new trends and techniques. Yet it would be misleading to neglect the other, equally important, factors that helped in shaping his drama. His Islamic upbringing is responsible, not only for adapting Islamic legends but also for the process of his thoughts and the treatment of his themes. His relation to women, starting with his dominating mother through a neighbor during adolescence, from whom he developed his ideal image of woman, to his relation to the ticket seller at the Odeon Theatre in Paris, which he called the "complete relation," dominates his treatment of female characters from The New Woman to The Fate of a Cockroach.

European theatre and philosophy at times affected his writing in a reverse or negative manner. The emergence of man as the new god in European philosophy prompted him to react with Sheherazade and later Pygmalion, in both of which he emphasized the futility of man's desire to emulate the gods. At the same time, his religious beliefs could not prevent him from experiencing and expressing the polarity and contradictions that made him vacillate between East and West. For although he could rationalize the new trends in Western thought, his religious feelings were too strong for him to accept them. He accepts, for example, the concept of the theatre of the absurd, yet he refuses their philosophy, and he utilizes only their techniques. However, in plays like The Fate of a Cockroach and The Tree Climber one can detect a certain acceptance of the concept of futility of man's attempts to find meaning in life.

Although many of al-Hakim's plays found popular response, his audience consisted mostly of the elite. Especially after his return from France, al-Hakim rarely tried to satisfy the public by entertaining it. The social and political changes that occurred after the Egyptian revolution of 1952 made the theatre more accessible to the general public. The government encouraged the arts with the goal of educating the public and at the same time propagating its policies. On a few occasions al-Hakim responded to such changes and wrote plays that reflected his belief in the validity of the new society. Nevertheless, al-Hakim tried to steer away from any particular ideology and avoided identifying himself with the current.

It seems fair to conclude that without the European experience al-Hakim would be a different man and a different writer. At its best, the European experience inspired in him a need to establish a new tradition in Arabic literature. Yet this experience also prompted him to assume a missionary role and attempt to fill the 2000 years absence of Arabic drama. His belief in the need for Arabic literary theatre blinded him to the requirements of theatre and his theatre suffered from too many ideas and too little theatricality. Yet when he managed a balance between thought and structure his works approximated perfection. In any case, his failures and successes inspired younger generations of playwrights to avoid his mistakes and surpass his achievements. It is perhaps a sign of his prominence that a major theatre in Cairo is named after him, a sign of honoring not only him but also the art of the theatre.

Similar contradictions exist between Kateb Yacine's Eastern heritage and his Western media. However, Yacine's dilemma was compounded by an ongoing war between his people and France. As a poet who dealt with political subjects he tread on precarious ground between overt nationalism, which might rob his plays of their universal appeal, and avoidance of his people's struggle, which might stamp him as an escapist. His task was to dramatize his people's dilemma without compromising his aesthetic principles, and to deal with the subject of colonialism without forgetting the human perspective in his material.

In his poetic approach to drama, Yacine transcends his national boundaries and reaches out for a wider audience. The history of his people becomes a legend in Nedjma, and places the political theme outside the limits of immediate history. By "encircling" the corpse of Lakhdar with the older and younger generations of Algerians and French he appeals to the human element in his audience. By creating a surrealistic atmosphere in The Ancesters Redouble Their Ferocity he reveals the chaos of his people's unending struggle.

Yacine writes in French, and his plays are difficult to translate into Arabic. Until the independence of Algeria, his audience consisted of Europeans and of Algerian elite. He was even accused in some Algerian intellectual circles of being an elitist. I doubt that his early plays could be comprehended by the general audience for linguistic and stylistic reasons. Yet I understand that on at least one occasion he wrote a play which was performed in Algerian Arabic dialect, Mohammed, prends ta valise (1972), which deals with the problems of migrant Algerian workers in France.

Yacine's drama is the product of an interrelation inherent in colonization. He is aware of the duality of his characters as a result of confusion between the two cultures. It would be up to the younger generations to extricate themselves from the complexes of post-independence. The trend is to start anew and leave the past behind, learning from it but not allowing it to overshadow the future.

My research should not be construed as the final word about the impact of European literature on the development of Arabic drama, as evidenced in the works of Tawfiq al-Hakim and Kateb Yacine. Actually more research is needed not only to further investigate the cultural relations between contemporary Arabic literature and Western literature, but also to stimulate more interest and critical appraisal of Arabic drama. Without the adoption of Western methods of research, serious students of comparative literature in the Arab world will be continually hindered and frustrated. Western Arabists, therefore, should apply and lend their expertise to the least glamorous of the scholarly tasks by suggesting methods to improve the system of research in Arabic literature. Arabic academic institutions also should pay more attention to modernizing their library systems to meet the demands of serious research in Arabic literature.

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