

**BERNARD SHAW AND TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Bernard Shaw and Tawfiq Al-Hakim stand out as two great landmarks in the history and development of modern drama. Both were greatly responsible for inception and enrichment of intellectual drama in their respective countries.

The Arab dramatist acknowledges his indebtedness to the works of the senior Irish dramatist. A close analysis of some of Al-Hakim's plays of ideas reveals Shavian influence on him; at the same time, due to social, cultural and linguistic differences, Al-Hakim at times parts company with his Western counterpart. This aspect of their writings is clearly demonstrated in how both artists interpret Greek myths, especially in the case of **Pygmalion**.

Bernard Shaw and Tawfiq Al-Hakim stand out as two peaks in the field of modern drama. The Irish dramatist and the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, are the founders of the drama of ideas in Europe, whereas Al-Hakim occupies an almost equally prominent position as being the architect of intellectual drama in the Arab world.

Tawfiq Al-Hakim, born in Alexandria in 1902, relates the story of his life in his autobiography **Sijn al-Umr** (The Prison of Life). His father was an Egyptian peasant, his mother a "strict and puritanical woman" (Mandur, n.d.: 9) of Turkish descent, in character not unlike the haughty and proud mother of Bernard Shaw. Like Shaw, he felt starved of affection, and thus like the Irish dramatist his characters often display hostility towards their mothers.

Since his family was well-off, Al-Hakim was sent to Cairo for his schooling. Away from the restrictive atmosphere of home he began to reflect on the problems of society, particularly on the role of women, a subject which captured his imagination throughout his life, and which he took up in **Awdat al-Ruh** (The Return of the Soul), **Tahta Shams al-Fikr** (In the Light of Thought), **Tahta al-Misbah al-Akhdar** (Under the Green Lamp), **Min al-Burj al-Aji** (From the Ivory Tower), and others.

Having finished his secondary schooling, he joined Law School. But since he had little interest in his studies, he squandered much of his time attending new dramatic performances which arrived in Egypt from Syria and Lebanon. At that time there was a rich output of productions with such leading dramatists as Marun Naqqash and George Abyad dominating the scene. Al-Hakim wrote his first play, **Al-Dayf al-Thakil** (The Burdensome Guest) when he was twenty-one. He was then under the influence of anti-British nationalistic movements that were sweeping across the country, and though he could not openly express his ideas, he satirized the British in the play using symbolic language to conceal his intended meaning. The plot involves a lawyer who receives a guest, supposedly for the night, and then finds that he cannot get rid of him. He tries insinuation, open hostility, trickery — every means at his disposal — but to no avail. And to add insult to injury the guest starts exploiting this situation to amass money. He begins to impersonate the lawyer, inviting the clients into the house and extricating advance payments from them. The point of the play is that occupation and exploitation invariably follow each other; the second is a natural follow-up of the first. The guest is quite obviously a symbol for the British occupation who came as guests to protect the rights of the Egyptians but eventually decided to take over the whole country.

After graduating from the Law School, al-Hakim was sent in 1925 to Paris to pursue a course leading to a Ph.D. in Law. From the rich

experience in the French capital and the incredible diversity of ideas, literary genres and artistic forms, al-Hakim formulated a philosophy which is clearly demonstrated in his writings, specially in his plays of ideas. Describing the experience of the theatre in Paris in those days he says in his autobiographical novel **Sijn al-Umr (The Prison of Life)**:

At the beginning of my life in Paris I frequented the Boulevard theatre with its comedies, operettas, and popular plays. I soon became tired of this form of art, and I found myself more inclined to follow in the footsteps of a group of modern and revolutionary dramatists such as Ibsen, Pirandello, Bernard Shaw and Maeterlinck. I realized at the time that the course taken by these great masters was not an easy one, for they themselves had encountered no end of obstacles before they gained recognition. Such a recognition would not have been possible were it not for the intellectuals who hailed them as great artists, and who incessantly preached and propagated their art. (Al-Hakim, 1964 :224)

Here we have the first reference by Al-Hakim to Shaw's dramatic work and his intention to imitate him. He later in the same novel gives us a description of the time he went to see a Shavian play:

During my stay in Paris I saw Ibsen's plays performed on a small stage with a very tiny audience watching them. I also went to see **St. Joan**, Shaw's latest play staged for the first time in Paris, again before a small audience, half of whom could not make head or tail of it. This daring performance was accomplished at the hands of the Russian producer George Pitoiv. I remember him standing on the stage before the curtain was raised to announce the beginning of the play and to request from us to bear with him, and ending with these words, which I will never forget: 'Please, remember that I am now treading on a tightrope.' (Al-Hakim, 1964 :224)

After three years of a full cultural life in Paris, but hardly any serious work towards his studies, he left the French capital without the law degree he was sent to acquire.

Al-Hakim was nothing if not a prolific writer. He did not limit himself to one form or genre; his work encompasses the drama, the short story, the novel, criticism, and diaries. All in all he wrote some seventy plays, displaying a variety of techniques from the traditional realistic play through the symbolic and onto the absurd. He has gained recognition on both Arab and international levels, with many of his plays translated into a number of languages, such as French, Spanish, Italian, English and Swedish.

From the preceding sketch of Al-Hakim's life one can detect landmarks in his life which remind one of Shaw's life. Both had "a devil of a childhood" (Terry and Shaw, 1931 :215) as Shaw called it, devoid of affection and happiness. The attitude of both towards their haughty and unfeeling mothers is almost identical, and naturally this is reflected later in their works. Both again left their home countries to come into contact with a new and dazzling culture, but while Al-Hakim unwillingly had to return home, Shaw decided to stay on in his new environment the rest of his life. Both read extensively and had almost the same interest in literature, art and music. Again, at the outset of their literary careers they experimented with all forms of literature, the novel, the short story, criticism and so on, but eventually decided that their genius lay in the field of drama. Moreover, they both came in contact with the poverty-stricken areas of their respective countries, and such an experience was recorded later in their works.

In addition to the ground they had in common which must have made Shaw all the more appealing to the Egyptian writer as a literary model, Al-Hakim time and time again in his autobiography and autobiographical novel pays tribute to Shaw and acknowledges his debt to him. In his ninth letter to a French friend, for example, he speaks about Sophocles, James Joyce, and then he comes to Bernard Shaw. He says:

I am now reading Shaw in English, and I am relishing his biting satire, his humour and I am enjoying his plain and lucid style, which throbs with life and vitality. (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 103-4)

He later in the novel speaks of Shaw's works as "a kind of intellectual adventure, in particular his play **Back to Methuselah**". (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 104)

The one Arab critic to assert emphatically Al-Hakim's debt to his contact with French culture and to Ibsen and Shaw is Muhammad Mandur, who says:

It is a certainty that had it not been for al-Hakim's stay in France, and his separation from the local currents that prevailed in our theatrical milieu then, and his contact with world literatures, and his encounter with the intellectual theatre at the hands of its great pioneers such as the Norwegian Ibsen and the Irish Shaw and others, he would never have taken such a course in playwriting. (Mandur. n.d :19)

Mandur's assertion is borne out by the fact that al-Hakim himself makes it very clear that it was the impact of 'modernism' as represented by dramatists such as Ibsen, Shaw and Pirandello that made

him adopt a new approach to drama. This is how al-Hakim explains such a turning point in his dramatic career to his French friend Andre:

But why did I choose this arduous course? Why did I follow the example of this group of dramatists? What reasons impelled me to embrace this calamity? What forces placed me at a distance from easy success and the limelight? The easy success that I could have painlessly achieved in the Boulevard Theatre? Is it this hankering after life and art? Or is it simply my intellectual dramatic art? And it is a good thing that I did what I did, for when I returned home to Egypt there were only two dramatic currents dominating the theatre: the comic and the plaintive, and there was a pressing need for a third intellectual trend. Thus in 1935 I founded the avant-garde theatre which began a season of performing some of my plays as well as the classical plays of Greece and Rome, Shakespeare and others. (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 225/6)

But what exactly does al-Hakim mean when he speaks of intellectual dramatic art? A good explanation of this dramatic art is provided by himself in the introduction to **Pygmalion**, he says:

Today I set up my theatre within the mind, converting actors into ideas which move in the realm of the absolute dressed up in symbolical garments. It is true that I still preserve the spirit of the 'coup de theatre', but that is no longer in the action as much as it is in the idea... That is how the gap between me and the stage has widened and now I find no means of putting these words across except through the press.

Some people have been questioning: is it not possible for such works to be presented on the stage? To answer this, I must admit I never thought of that when I wrote such plays as **Ahl al-Kahf**, or **Shahrazad** or **Pygmalion**. (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 9/10)

Thus for al-Hakim the "idea" rather than the action is the focal point in his drama. And here, like Shaw, he succeeds in attracting attention to the idea through brilliant dialogue, wit, and humour. In addition to these qualities, as Muhammad Mandur observes, "the enchanting poetic spirit which emanates from some of his intellectual pieces such as **Ahl-al-Kahf**, and **Shahrazad** and **Pygmalion**, there is the subtle satirical spirit which brings out the fine dramatic ironies in situations, behaviour and man's emotions." (Mandur, n.d.: 101)

To see further how al-Hakim's intellectual drama and Shaw's play of ideas are related I intend to take some of al-Hakim's plays and examine them. The most appropriate play to take first is **Pygmalion**, a

title used by Shaw and al-Hakim for their two plays.

To start with, let us return to the ancient legend of Pygmalion in order to see how these two writers relate to the legend and to each other. The original myth narrates the story of Pygmalion, who was King of Cyprus and had a keen interest in the arts, particularly sculpture. It all began when Pygmalion, struck with the beauty of one of his own works, appealed to the gods to bring the statue to life. Aphrodite, motivated by a love for power, decided to grant him his request, thereby bringing him under her domination. Pygmalion calls the beautiful woman Galatea and marries her.

Taking the title of Shaw's play one would expect the subject-matter to be different. However, it is the theme that Shaw borrowed from the original and not the plot. The title was meant to be a "pot-boiler," as Shaw puts it, and he even goes as far as to subtitle the play a "romance." There is nothing romantic about it; the epithet "social" would be far more accurate. The plot is simple, which accounts in part for its popularity, and Louis Crompton summarizes it as follows:

"... as all the world knows, (it) is the story of a flower girl who passes as a duchess after taking phonetic lessons." (Crompton, 1971 : 141).

Tawfiq al-Hakim's **Pygmalyun** is closer in spirit to the original myth. In his Preface to the play he refers to his desire to write a play **modelled** on Shaw's subject. His first interest in the legend sprang up **after seeing** Jean Raoux's painting of Pygmalion and Galatea in the Louvre. He later saw Gabriel Pascal's production of **Pygmalion** and was filled with an irresistible urge to write a drama using the same legend as a basis.

When I wrote this play I was fully aware that this legend has been exploited in almost every branch of learning, and has certainly been dramatized in various plays, although my sole knowledge of this story was based on the play written by the Irish dramatist. (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 15-16)

In the Arabic version the protagonist is portrayed as being puffed up with pride after seeing his creation. He decides that he now has a right to rank with the gods, for not only has he created, but also his creation is superior to those of the gods for his is pure beauty. But he finds that pure beauty is not enough to satisfy him; he wants life. With life, however, come problems and the beautiful Galatea soon tires of him and makes off with Narcis, the handsome young man and the servant and helper of Pygmalyun. Once again, Pygmalyun is forced to appeal to the gods. This time he appeals to Apollo. Not contented with

beauty and life, he asks for wisdom. Galatea is thus turned into a loving, faithful and sensible wife. For a short time Pygmalyun finds the bliss he was looking for. But soon his sensibilities revolt as he sees his beautiful statue going about the housework and carrying out menial tasks. Before long he can bear it no longer. For the last time he turns to the higher powers for help. The woman, Galatea, becomes a piece of sculpture again, beautiful, but lifeless. A part of him is gone, and he is filled with a horrible loneliness which eats at him and finally destroys him. In a fit of grief he destroys the statue, resolving to create something better. But he never does.

We can see the differences between Shaw's Professor Higgins and Tawfiq Al-Hakim's Pygmalyun. Higgin's attitude to women is clearly that of a man who finds them convenient but thinks no further on the matter. He never concerns himself, for example, how to treat Eliza. She is the guinea-pig in his experiment; otherwise she does not exist. He views her with the cold detached attitude of an experimenter and a scientist.

Al-Hakim's Pygmalyun cannot do without Galatea. He pines for her and suffers until she is brought to life. But he, too, is unwilling to accept her as a person. She always remains his own creation, and as such he has the right to dispose of her as he wishes. He views her as a work of art and thus when she does not fit in with his ideal vision of her he demands that she be turned back into marble. Higgins is quite frank and honest about not desiring marriage. He is aware of the problems involved in dealing with women and thus decides to steer clear of them and devote his life to research, whereas Pygmalyun is sentimental and vacillating and cannot decide whether he would prefer to be married to a woman or a piece of stone. He wants to marry Galatea but is not prepared to put up with the problems this marriage would entail. Even before she comes to life he has resolved to marry her:

Oh, most beautiful Venus, you who preside with supreme command on the throne of beauty! You who were born on the foaming crest of the waves and among the wonderous treasures of the sea. You the unparalleled pearl, I implore you to bestow on me a smile from your divine lips!

(Venus softens as Pygmalyun continues to pour forth his impassioned pleas.)

Venus, Venus, oh, most beneficent, grant me one wish! Breathe warm life into the statue of Galatea! My wife, the ivory Galatea! Grant her life, oh goddess of love and life! (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 40)

The moment the reality of his 'ivory wife' deviates from his image of

her, he is disillusioned and wants her changed.

Similarly, Higgins only becomes aware of Elisa's existence as a woman when she turns against him at the end of the play, when her function has ended and he no longer has any use for her. Almost as if addressing Pygmalion, Higgins comments: "Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble. There's only one way of escaping troubles and that's of killing things." (Shaw, 1965: 749). Which is exactly what Pygmalion does.

It is obvious that al-Hakim's Pygmalion is intended to represent the idealist who lives in an ivory tower far from the problems and conflicts of everyday life and fights against the intrusion of reality even if it means destroying the things dearest to him. He lives in a world in which his most important contacts are the gods. On the other hand, Higgins leads a somewhat different life. It is because of a bet that Higgins first decides to work on Elisa, and subsequently the whole re-molding of her character is society-orientated. He has no intention of keeping his creation to himself, as Pygmalion clearly has. Higgins is active on the academic level and is fully aware of what is happening in the world around him, while Pygmalion gives the impression always of being trapped within the confines of his own mind. This may be due in fact to the outlook of the two dramatists; for while Shaw grew up in an atmosphere of poverty and deprivation, and therefore learnt to face them early, al-Hakim led a sheltered life and only came into contact with the poor and needy through his job as a public prosecutor. We only have to read his **Yaumiyyat Na'ib fil-Aryaf** (The Diary of a Country Public Prosecutor, 1937) and **Al-Aydi al-Na'ema** (The Soft Hands), as well as the whole body of his socialist writings to realise the impact this experience had on him.

It is noticeable in **Pygmalion** that the 'creation' can decide her own destiny in the sense that she has the ability of choosing whether to participate in the experiment or not, and the freedom to walk out any time without being obliged to return. Thus Eliza leaves Higgins and marries Freddie; Higgins has no actual claim over her. In al-Hakim's play, Galatea is totally passive. For her there is no question of choosing her own destiny. She is given life, but she is not given the emotions of a human being; basically, she remains what she always was; a beautiful statue. When Pygmalion questions her on the subject, she has this to give:

Galatea: How I feel now? That is a strange question. My feelings remain the same, exactly as they have always been.

Pygmalion: As they have always been? When?

Galatea: Pygmalyun ! Don't ask me such questions.
(Al-Hakim, n.d.: 52)

As the story emanates from a myth, there is inevitably an atmosphere of vagueness and mystery. Al-Hakim's Narcis resembles Eliza, so that he seems to be simply an extension of the theme, another facet of the same character: the statue. After Ismin vows to love him for ever, Narcis suddenly comes to life, showing the same burst of spirit and independence which Eliza displays:

Narcis: I've looked for you because I've discovered that I'm no longer a doll playing with others dolls.
Ismin: Is that so?
Narcis: I looked only for you, for I felt that I carry a great part of you in here (he points to his chest and heart). (Al-Hakim, n.d. 105)

Narcis made his choice. Rather than continue to live as a beautiful but lifeless puppet in the hands of Pygmalyun, he decided to start on his search for someone who would show him the true meaning of life. Having found Ismin, a girl from the city, who vowed to love him for ever, he abandoned his master without a thought for the perfection that he was casting away, taking action where the statue Galatea was powerless to act.

Thus the essential qualities of the character of Narcis owe a great deal to Shaw. Al-Hakim relied on Shaw in this as well as in depicting the relationships between Pygmalyun and Galatea. True, unlike Higgins, Pygmalyun actually falls in love with Galatea and marries her, but the attitude of both men is basically the same. Pygmalyun feels that it was he who brought Galatea into existence, and therefore he is justified in treating her as his property, as his own creation. Galatea protests, but rather weakly, by escaping with Narcis, but she remains under her maker's power and is forced to return. Following their reconciliation, Galatea still feels that she is not being treated fairly:

Galatea: Pygmalyun, my dear Pygmalyun! Ever since I returned home you have been treating me lightly and with much indifference. If this is intended as a punishment, remain assured that I have had enough of it! (Al-Hakim, n.d. :100)

This is an echo of the voice of Eliza who cries out against Higgins's cold refusal to see her as a person. And although Eliza put up with the slave-like existence she was subjected to for some time, no sooner did her attachment to Higgins begin to blossom than she came to the realisation that she wanted more than a master — servant relationship.

She had just as much right to exist as he had. The credit for her transformation was just as much hers as his. And therefore she demanded equality. The strength of feeling puts aside her fear, and with the fear gone, she can free herself from his power and thus emerge as an independent entity with a mind and will of her own. It is no longer Higgins the creator who interests her; it is Higgins the man.

A similar conclusion is reached by Galatea:

Galatea: I haven't forgotten that yesterday you were too cautious to talk to me about the things that were beyond my grasp because they used to scare me. Yes, I don't deny the fact that I used to fear you.

Pygmalyun: And now?

Galatea: No, I'm not afraid of you anymore now, because I love you, because I have come to know you and somewhat to know myself. (AL-Hakim, n.d. :105)

Comparing Shaw's *Pygmalion* with that of Al-Hakim, but with no mention at all of influence, Ikhlas Muhammad 'Azmi, , well-known Egyptian critic, concludes her article by saying that Shaw's play ends "with the artist as a creator"" whereas al-Hakim's ends "with the death of the artist." 'Azmi, 1964 :21)

To end this comparative study of the two plays, perhaps the best assessment comes from the pen of Muhammad Mandur who says:

In al-Hakim's play the reader witnesses a tragedy with his mind, because the characters are lifeless, stiff, and bent on solving an intellectual problem which leaves us untouched, (Mandur, 1942 :22)

whereas Shaw's play is fully alive, delightfully witty and profoundly meaningful.

In 1965 Al-Hakim used the *Pygmalion* theme once again in the play **Shams al-Nahar** (Sun of Day) which bears a greater resemblance to Shaw's **Pygmalion** than **Pygmalyun** did. The plot involves a princess, Shams al-Nahar, who decides that she will not accept as husband any man allotted to her by her father. To avoid the necessity of downright refusal she sets up a competition in which anyone can participate and compete for her hand. The suitors flock to the place, and she asks each the same question: how he would treat her were she to marry him. The reply of all suitors is almost identical as they all profess adoration, and promise all the worldly comfort and fun and that they will make her look like a sparkling jewel; in other words they all concentrate on

outward appearances and on pampering her, which makes her feel that she will be more of a doll than a human being, and naturally she refuses all of them. One day a commoner appears on the scene with his worn-out clothes and no title whatsoever. Asked the usual question as to why he wants to marry her, he answers that he does not want to marry her, all he wants is to be given the opportunity of helping her develop her character and let her prove herself. Hearing this strange reply full of promise, the princess accepts him and goes off with him. He does not marry her, but instead he sets out with her on a long trip during which she has to go through no end of hardship and discomfort. She is made to work, to find food, to cook, to wash, and to put up with the cold and the heat. She finally realizes that he is trying to impress on her that true joy in life comes to those people who toil and produce, and not through luxury and idleness. By the time she begins to enjoy facing the challenge of this new experience in her life, and to find pleasure in surmounting problems as they come along, she, like Shaw's Eliza has fallen in love with the man who has transformed her life completely. He, too, falls in love with her, but feels at the same time that his duty lies in serving his people. To put into practice the lessons she has learnt, she takes up the responsibilities as a ruler and makes it clear to her people that reform must begin with the individual citizen by making him learn the value of honesty, integrity and hard work.

Al-Hakim, like Shaw, makes no secret of the fact that the play is intended to be didactic and that the message is about to be delivered in the story. His intention is clearly set out in the introduction to the play as follows:

This is a didactic play ... and didactic works of literature and art from **Kalila Wadimna*** to the Fables of La Fontaine, to the plays of Brecht, to the works of others authors, are designed to direct individual or social behaviour. Such works do not usually conceal their intentions. They select the expressions that will readily reach and affect the minds of the individuals. Moreover, they choose the clearest and simplest modes of expression They are at variance with other works of art which disguise the faces, and give you a chance to discover what lies behind the faces. They unmask their faces and say to you:

'Yes, we want to preach — listen to us.'

Faced with such frankness we willingly listen. (Al-Hakim, 1965: 7)

* **Kalila Wadimna**, a collection of Oriental Fables translated from the Sanskrit into Arabic about the 8th century A.D. by Ibn al-Muqaffa.

Shaw is no less determined to teach a lesson in his play **Pygmalion** and he, also, gives us his intention in the introduction:

I wish to boast that **Pygmalion** has been an extremely successful play all over Europe and America as well as at home. It is so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic. It goes to prove my contention that art should never be anything else. (Shaw, 1965: 809)

Let us now consider the methods used by the two dramatists to put across their ideas. The return to the story of **Pygmalion** represents a return to the world of myth and the fairytale. Anything can happen. And that is perhaps the secret of the appeal of both plays. The advantage of such a method is that the dramatist is free to express his theme in the clearest way without having to worry about the probability of the plot. In Shaw's **Pygmalion** the poor and filthy Cinderella is turned into a princess, beautiful and charming. It is an ascent from the streets into upper-class society, so perfectly achieved that Eliza not only passes the test — she also makes an impact on her new class, starting a new fashion of speech which spreads rapidly among the younger people. Al-Hakim's Shams similarly undergoes a change in social position — this time from princess to pauper. Al-Hakim makes full use of folklore — a mixture of the Pauper-King and Beauty and the Beast themes. Added to that is the Arabian Nights setting and the suitor's scene which closely resembles Act II, Scene VIII of **the Merchant of Venice**. The most striking point in both plays is the willingness of both 'creations' to undergo this uprooting regardless of their own comfort or sacrifice.

Eliza, too, succumbs to Higgins and is put through a very arduous training programme. Both Eliza and Shams pass through more or less the same sequence of emotions. First there is a feeling of elevation; they are entering a new world and are eager to explore and discover. Then follows purgation — they become puppets in the hands of their teachers, feeling nothing, simply doing what they are told. Thirdly there is a period of illumination, when things appear suddenly to take on a shape and all that they have been through begins to pay off. Following that, both women realise suddenly that though they have become emotionally involved in the whole situation neither Higgins nor the commoner has changed his original attitude. This in turn brings on the last emotion, which is a new and sudden self-awareness, a new strength which enables them to rise above their plight and start a life of their own.

Thus the two women move from ignorance into knowledge, from

darkness into light. Through her tutor, Shams reaches understanding of life which she had never thought possible:

I am happy because everything around me is beautiful and new; as if I see the water and the trees for the first time. Everything new has a new meaning. (Al-Hakim, 1965: 70)

Critics have said that Eliza gains a new soul in the last two acts. The very idea that she can now dictate her own terms to Higgins in Act IV and then walk out when he declines is evidence of a very profound change which has occurred in the character of Eliza since the opening of the play. And what can be said of the development of Eliza's character can also be said of Shams.

The action in al-Hakim's **Shams al-Nahar** proceeds on two levels. The first, the social, deals with the idea of the rich becoming poor and the poor rich, the inversion of the classes and with it a change in social values. In this kind of naive story equality is reached, with the happy-ever-after ending which delighted the audience. The second is the woman-artist relationship, especially complex, as we have seen above, in **Pygmalion** but recurring here as it recurs in other works of Al-Hakim.

Shaw's **Pygmalion**, from the point of view of characterization at least, is more interesting than **Shams al-Nahar**. Shams as a character is far too patronising, and her idealistic treatment by Al-Hakim is far removed from the very human portrayal by Shaw of Eliza.

Shaw always injects into his heroines a spirit of defiance and determination which makes them memorable even after the plot has been forgotten. Similarly, the philosopher-beggar in al-Hakim's play is far too dogmatic, far too obviously a mouthpiece and utterly humourless. The Arab playwright is trying to put across the message that in everyone there is a potential for good, but an experienced and enlightened teacher is the only one who can bring these qualities out, and despite the flaws in his work he manages successfully to reach his audience. Al-Hakim also stresses the role of the individual in reform; it is through dedication and sacrifice that the evils of society can be reduced.

The theme of work and how productive work enriches and ennobles man's life is expressed in **al-Aydi al-Na'ema** (the Soft Hands), the first of his socialist plays in the wake of the 1952 Revolution in Egypt. Al-Hakim, like many of his contemporaries, felt that isolation and detachment from his society were no longer feasible. Time was ripe to turn his attention to questions of immediate significance to his country

In other words Al-Hakim felt the stress and urgency of committing himself to the problems and aspirations of his countrymen. Such a new trend of thinking is clearly demonstrated in this play.

The play portrays the position of the members of the Egyptian aristocracy following the outbreak of the Revolution. The Prince, who represents this class in the play, is now lost, with no property and no profession, not even the inclination to work. Being idle and bankrupt, his wanderings lead him to form an attachment with another idle young man who is a specialist in Arabic grammar, to be more precise, a holder of a Ph.D. degree in the uses of the Arabic prepositional particle "hatta" (until). The Prince is idle because he does not want to work, whereas the young man, Dr. Hammoudeh, is idle because he is unable to find employment. The two characters are highly comical and satirical. In their search for a livelihood the two go through various comical situations and contradictions. This kind of idle life binds the two together in an existence of mischievous adventures, swindling and feeling that they live outside the arena of their society. Indeed, these two characters appear at times like two big children who are having tremendous fun. For by clowning, and making the audience laugh, they succeed in putting across some biting remarks and shocking truths. This, in fact, as we have seen earlier, is a typical Shavian dramatic technique. Shaw has always maintained that the most telling way of communicating the writer's ideas to his audience is through comedy and laughter.

In this play Al-Hakim, again like Shaw, divides the people into two groups, the productive and the idle, placing in the first category everyone who produces, be it a capitalist or a servant, and in the second category everyone who is unproductive, whether rich or poor. We are given numerous character sketches to represent these two groups. There is the hard-working maize-seller, and the restaurant keeper, and Salim, of course, the poor car mechanic who worked his way to the top, thus becoming the proprietor of a large garage, and who succeeds in marrying the daughter of the once wealthy Prince.

All these hard-working and honest people are compared and contrasted with the elements in society such as the Prince, the Doctor, and others, who are unproductive. The picture that emerges from the play is that there is no room in the post-revolution Egypt for idle people. But an equally significant theme is the problem of class conflict, especially between the upper class and the working class. The approach to this question varies from writer to writer, and more progressive playwrights insist on the absolute isolation of the upper class, and refuse to see any possibility of a reconciliation between the two opposing classes. Tawfiq Al-Hakim in a reconciling attitude adopts

a Shavian approach. Eric Bentley in his excellent study of Shaw and his works explains this notion in its socialist context in these words:

The Socialism of Carlyle, Ruskin and Shaw, of what I have called the British 'aristocratic' line, is not scientific; it is ethical. Their belief in humanity is not faith in the common man but in the gentleman. For the gentleman is a synthesis of the democrat and the aristocrat, the follower and the leader. He is a living symbol of the fact that aristocracy is not something to be superseded but to be included in democracy, that the nobleman, if he has ceased to be a robber baron, is welcome in the new age. that we, as much as Louis XIV or George III, need men of light and leading. Moreover, the gentlemanly ideal is the golden mean between two rival types — the priest and the soldier, the pope and the emperor, or, in more recent language, the yogi and the commissar. (Eric Bentley, 1960: 24)

Al-Aydi al-Na'ema employs all the themes which Bentley discussed in his interpretation of socialism as conceived by Carlyle, Ruskin and Shaw. After reaching an agreement with Salim and the other members of the community, the Prince takes up a profession and thus becomes an active member of the community, earning his living on the same level as the rest. The community accepts him; the main thing is that "he has ceased to be a robber-baron." In this, both Shaw and the Arab dramatist have deviated from Marxist ideology. The aristocracy can be made to feel 'welcome in the new age' and 'included in democracy' as long as they are prepared to accept the socialist way of life and thought. It is then that the synthesis of democrat and aristocrat can be achieved, a result of the fusion of follower and leader.

Shaw's influence on Al-Hakim can be sought more in ideas than in the form he gives his literary works. The other sphere of influence to a lesser degree is the dialogue which helped in building his intellectual argument.

One central idea in Al-Hakim's philosophy is that which tackles the question of conflict between man and space and man and time. He tells us that before he embarked on writing **Shahrazad** he happened to read the theories of evolution expounded by spencer Lamarck and Darwin (Al-Hakim, n.d. :97), and definitely Shaw's **Back to Methuselah**, as he himself admits in **Zahret al-Umr** (Flower of Life). He said that Shaw's work is "a kind of intellectual adventure, in particular his **Back to Methuselah**" (Al-Hakim, n.d.:103-4), and one cannot help but observe the striking philosophical similarity between the end of **Shahrazad** and **Back to Methuselah**,

Towards the end of **Back to Methuselah** Shaw is making a choice,

a choice for survival: mind must outdistance matter, even though it painfully exists with matter, as the Ancients in Part V complain:

The She-Ancient: It is this stuff (indicating her body) this flesh and blood and bone and all the rest of it, that is intolerable. Even prehistoric man dreamed of what he called an astral body, and asked who would deliver him from the body of his death. (Shaw, 1965: 959)

The true salvation in a Platonic sense would be: no solution, but a programme, a method for solving. The goal is clear and we must become spirit, or mind alone.

The Newly-Born: What is your destiny?The He-Ancient: To be immortal.

The She-Ancient: The day will come when there will be no people, only thought. (Shaw :958)

Such a philosophy is reiterated by al-Hakim in the last Act of **Shahrazad**. It is true that Shahrazad with her boundless charm and the gripping suspense of her fairy tales, succeeds in making Shahrayar forget his barbaric method of disposing of virgins once he has finished with them. But there comes a time when he no longer is attracted by her charm and beauty:

Shahrayar: I will not return to your beautiful body. I will not be intoxicated by your kisses, by the fragrance of your hair nor by your hugging. I have had enough of bodies, I have had enough of them.

Shahrazad: Don't you feel anymore?

Shahrayar: I don't want to feel. I used to feel before, but I did not comprehend. Today I comprehend, but like the soul I do not feel. (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 69)

To him Shahrazad has become a great mystery which is beyond him to understand. And to unravel this mystery he would have to become 'pure thought' a soul without a body, and would have to sever all materialistic and emotional ties with life. To him 'nature' has become "a silent jailer who tightens his grip on my throat." (Al-Hakim, n.d. :66)

Shahrayar, like the She-Ancient, wants to escape from the bondage of his body; he wants to abandon all physical and emotional relationships with mother earth. To him death is equated with release from the slavery of 'place'. But what does he achieve once this release comes about? Nothing. We are told that: "He deserted earth but did not reach heaven. He is now suspended between earth and heaven." (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 122)

Moreover, the optimistic note struck at the end of **Back to Methuselah** is also evident in *Shahrazad*. Shaw maintains that the goal of the vitalist struggle toward a better species enunciated in **Man and Superman** and developed in **Back to Methuselah** is still distant, but attainable. The last words in the play are those of the Life Force, represented by Lilith:

Of life only there is no end; and though of its million starry mansions many are empty and many are still unbuilt, and though its vast domain is as yet unbearable desert, my seed shall one day fill it and master its matter to its utmost confines. And for what may be beyond, the eyesight of Lilith is too short. It is enough that there is a beyond. (Shaw, 1965: 962)

Surely Lilith's words "my seed shall one day..." etc. are those of *Shahrayar*, who also believes that despite the fact that he himself had been overtaken by old age, life will go on in another *Shahrayar*, a new *Shahrayar*:

He will be born afresh, tender and young, as for "this" he is the white hair that has been plucked. (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 171)

Another common experience which Shaw and al-Hakim shared was their experimentation with a new form of writing — the novel-play or what has been termed in Arabic the *Masriwaya*. Shaw turned to it in his **Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God**, and al-Hakim in **Bank al-Qalaq (The Bank of Anxiety)**. The latter, though it consisted partly of humorous, simple dialogue, was nevertheless not meant to be staged. It is made up of elements taken both from drama and the novel. There are ten chapters, each followed by a dialogue. The passages of prose narrative serve two functions; the first is that of filling in the background information on each character and the second provides an opportunity for commentary by the writer. As for the dialogue, it provides the medium through which to introduce and develop the theme and employ a large number of personages.

Shaw's Adventures of the Black Girl came after five novels and was followed by fifty plays, thus acting as a transitory phase for the Irish dramatist. Shaw, however, believed that he was anticipating a new form of literature; he predicted in the Preface to **Plays Unpleasant**:

The customary brief and unreadable scene specification at the head of an act will have expanded into a chapter, or even a series of chapters. No doubt one result of this will be the

production of works of a mixture of kinds, part narrative, part homily, part description, part dialogue, and (possibly), drama: works that could be read, but not acted. (Shaw, 1965: 725-726)

The description could easily refer to the Masriwaya form of Tawfik Al-Hakim. It is obviously a form which belongs to the printed page. No doubt it was an attempt on the part of Al-Hakim to escape the rigid restrictions of the drama without sacrificing the element of dialogue at which he excels. Whatever the reason, **Bank al-Qalaq** is tightly-knit and well-planned, and there is throughout a perfect balance of the two genres, novel and drama, neither of the two assuming prominence at the expense of the other.

This literary form, in fact, would fit very well into the pattern of Shaw's definition: it is a new type of literature which would be read and not acted.

Again in the dialogue of Al-Hakim we can clearly detect touches of Shaw's wit, racy style and satire, as we can see in the following scene:

Client No. 7: Do you know Hyde Park in London?

Adham: I've heard about it.

Client No. 7: When I was there I used to enjoy walking in that park, and to listen to speakers shouting at the top of their voices with no restrictions whatsoever. Have you ever been there?

Adham: No.

Client No. 7: If you only heard what is said in Hyde Park you would be stunned... Imagine one speaker demanding the cession of Scotland from England; another calls for doing away with monarchy; a fourth urges for nationalization; a fifth extols the Empire, and another wants to see all atomic weapons wiped out... and so on and so forth.

Adham: Such a park can exist only in England, for God has bestowed two qualities on the English: the first is their temperamental coldness and the second is that they preach what they never do.

Client No. 7: Perhaps so, but...

Adham: But, what?

Client No. 7: You must agree with me that the idea of finding a place to air your grievances....

Adham: A free zone for shouting your head off?

Client No. 7: If you wish.

Adham: A lung which pours out its polluted exhalation...

Client No. 7: Is far better off than the lung that suppresses it.

Adham: This in a nutshell is the function of Hyde Park. (Al-Hakim, n.d. :170-171)

To conclude this brief comparative study of Shaw and al-Hakim and to see the opinion of the Arab playwright of the senior Irish dramatist, the last words are those of al-Hakim himself:

To you, Bernard Shaw, I address these words. You who had the power once to lift up with your satirical and mischievous pen the gilded and tapestried robe of the British Empire and to reveal the ridiculous reality underneath! That was your might, and that was the secret of your international appeal. People the world over saw you as a writer in English who had transcended prejudice and who had defended justice against tyranny and had fought on the side of humanity against oppression. Egypt will for ever remember your heroic stand towards the incident of Dinshwai.* (Al-Hakim, n.d.: 257)

* This incident took place on June 13, 1906. Very briefly the story goes like this: a group of British soldiers, who were on a pigeon shooting trip, became involved in a brawl with the peasants of the village of Dinshwai, resulting in the death of an Englishman. Death sentences, flogging and long terms of hard labour were quickly passed on the attackers. Bernard Shaw defended the case of the villagers against the forces of occupation in a lengthy and strongly worded preface to his play **John Bull's Other Island**.

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