AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY OF THE PLAYS, NOVELS, AND STORIES OF TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM, AS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

A THESIS

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will provide an introductory survey of the plays, novels, short stories and other writing of Tawfiq al-Hakim, which have been translated into English. This work will be useful to English-speaking readers who are interested in learning more about Tawfiq al-Hakim and his literary works. The study will include a brief biography of al-Hakim together with an overview of the political regimes, geographical conditions, and the socio-economic environment that had an impact on the various phases of al-Hakim's life. An analysis of examples of significant publications spanning al-Hakim's writing career will be undertaken. The main focus of this thesis will be an discussion of the play *Fate of a Cockroach*, in particular Act One which could be read as a political allegory for the life and times of Gamal Abdul Nasir, the military conflicts during his political regime, and the rise and fall of the United Arab Republic (1958-1961). The discussion will include a synopsis of the play, a description of the characters, and a literary analysis of the play, explaining the political allegory.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I have loved theatre for as long as I can remember. My fascination with the Middle East began with a one-year working trip to Bahrain in 1977 which turned into a twenty-year residence in the Middle East, first in Bahrain and later in Saudi Arabia. I first discovered Tawfiq al-Hakim and Fate of a Cockroach during a class on Arabic Theatre and Film, offered by Dr. Edward Ziter at the Department of Theatre, The Ohio State University, in Autumn 2002. I expanded my knowledge of this playwright when I served as dramaturg to the OSU Department of Theatre production of Fate of a Cockroach in May 2004. I had the great privilege of working with Syrian director Naila al-Atrash who accepted the Department of Theatre's invitation to come to the United States to direct Fate of a Cockroach as part of "Identity Formation in the Arab World," a quarter-long series of Arab academic and artistic endeavors.

This thesis will provide an introductory survey of the plays, novels, short stories and other writing of Tawfiq al-Hakim, which have been translated into English. I intend this work to be useful to English-speaking readers who are interested in knowing more about Tawfiq al-Hakim and his literary works. Chapter Two will include a brief biography of al-Hakim. Woven in with this biography will be a timeline of the political regimes,
geographical conditions, and the socio-economic environment that had an impact on the various phases of al-Hakim's life. Chapter Three will contain an analysis of some of the major, significant publications spanning al-Hakim's writing career, including examples of his short stories, plays, novels and memoirs. Chapter Four will focus on *Fate of a Cockroach*, in particular Act One which could be read as a political allegory for the life and times of Gamal Abdul Nasir¹, the military conflicts during his political regime, and the rise and fall of the United Arab Republic. This chapter will include a synopsis of the play, a description of the characters, and a literary analysis of the play, explaining the political allegory.

Reading *Fate of a Cockroach*, and other plays by Arabic playwrights has reinforced my belief that there are some similarities between the struggles in the Middle East and the struggles in Ireland. My family heritage is Irish. Both my parents were born and raised in Southern Ireland and, as a child, I spent my summers there with my grandparents. My father was considerably older than my mother so both he and my grandfather were teenagers during "the troubles" in Ireland. I was raised on rebel stories and rebel songs. During my time in the Middle East I came to realize how much the Irish and the Arabs had in common. At first glance one might wonder what the relationships is between Ireland and the Middle East but if we look again we see that the peoples of both these lands have been dispossessed of their land rights by colonial powers over many hundreds of years.

For centuries the Arab lands have been occupied by various invaders; the Persians in 550BC, Alexander the Great in 330BC, then the Romans, the Byzantines, the Muslims and finally they became part of the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth century to the end of

¹ The correct spelling of an Arabic name is to be found in the Arabic script. All English spellings are transliterations of the Arabic script. For the purposes of this thesis I have chosen *Nasir* for my spelling of Gamal Abdul Nasir's name. Some scholarly quotations cited in this thesis use alternative transliterated spellings.
World War One (WWI). The twentieth century saw, perhaps, the greatest "carving up" of Arab lands by colonial powers in their history when the British and the French divided up the Middle East at the end of WWI. In the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916 the British signed agreements with Russia and France. If the Turks and Germans were defeated they would perhaps divide the Middle East amongst themselves. The British wanted the support of the Jews and in the Balfour Declaration (November 2, 1917) the British agreed that if they won the war they would create a homeland for the Jews in Palestine, despite the fact that only 10% of the people living in Palestine were Jews.

Syria was divided into Syria and Lebanon by the French. Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, went to the British. The British mandate of Palestine did not go smoothly. In World War Two (WWII) the Arabs took the opposing side to Britain and France who had cheated them in WWI. When the Nazis were defeated the Zionists wanted their immediate reward, i.e. a homeland, a Jewish state.

In 1947 the British government requested removal of the Palestine Mandate by the General Assembly of the United Nations (formed in 1945). The United Nations 1947 Partition Plan divided Palestine into two independent states, a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Arabs were in the majority so they were to get more of the land. The Jews got the smaller part on the sea shore, part by Galilee and part of the Negev. The Ghaza strip went to the Arabs. The Arabs rejected the Jewish right to Palestine saying that the UN did not have the right to give the land to the Jews. The Arabs then rejected the UN resolution. The State of Israel, however, was declared by the Jewish Agency in Tel Aviv on May 14, 1948. An Arab alliance of Jordan, Egypt, Syria/Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia attacked Israel to regain the land for the Palestinians.
The Christian Irish fared little better when it came to invaders and colonial masters. The Irish suffered at the hands of the Vikings in the eighth century and the Norman invaders from the twelfth century onwards. The cultural assimilation of the Normans was so successful that two hundred years later the Normans took steps to preserve their cultural and racial purity. The Irish continued to suffer under Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth I. But the worst treatment came under Oliver Cromwell who detested Catholicism and set about systematically butchering Ireland's Catholics. Catholics were dispossessed of their lands and were replaced with Protestants. By 1660 the vast majority of Irish land was owned, maintained and policed by Protestant immigrants. Several years into the restoration, Charles II passed the 1665 Act of Explanation requiring Protestants to relinquish one-third of their land to the "innocent papists" but the act was never put into effect.

With the rise of the House of Orange, came the enactment of the Penal Laws, dating from 1695 onwards. These were a set of ferocious laws aimed at the destruction of Catholicism in Ireland in response to the Irish support of James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. These penal laws remained in effect until late in the eighteenth century/early nineteenth century when a series of Catholic Relief Acts was passed in 1778, 1791 and 1829. All these acts required Catholics to take an oath supporting the crown, but Catholics were now able to inherit and purchase land. Tory William Pitt (the younger) and his Whig rival, Charles Fox, were pledged to support Catholic Emancipation, but they were both thwarted by the obstinacy of King George III, who insisted that agreeing to this would be a violation of his coronation oath. Catholic Emancipation was eventually forced on the British Parliament in 1829.
Not long after this came one of the most terrible events in Irish history, the blight of the potato crop and the ensuing famine. The potato famines of 1845-1851 were responsible for the loss of approximately 1.6 million Irish men, women and children through death and/or emigration. Money was raised by the British for the relief of Irish distress, but no destitute farmer could receive aid unless he had first given to his landlord all except one quarter acre of his farm.

In the 1880s the Land League was started with Charles Stuart Parnell as its President. The main objective of the league was the protection of the tenants from rack-renting (legally raising the rent when a lease ran out) and the introduction of tenant-ownership. By the end of the nineteenth century the British government accepted that tenant purchasing was the only solution to a difficult problem in Ireland, and money was made available on loans for tenants to purchase their holdings. Now that the Irishman had the ability to own his own land, his focus turned to gaining independence and his struggle over the next one hundred and twenty years would be towards the creation of the Irish Free State and a united Ireland.

The twentieth century particularly gave us many artists who use literature, poetry and drama to voice their political opinions and dissent in a peaceful manner. In Dr. Ziter's course on Arab Film and Theatre I was introduced to a play entitled Strangers Don’t Drink Coffee by Mahmud Diyab, written in the 1960s. The central character of this menacing, Pinteresque play is The Man whose horoscope promises a wonderful day. His day starts to disintegrate, however, with the appearance in his village of the anonymous authoritative figure who multiplies before his eyes. The strangers destroy every document and photograph The Man possesses, stripping him of every vestige of his home, his land, his
record of his life, his identity and his individuality. In a final gesture of defeat The Man retreats inside his home as the anonymous figures leave, their job finished. The strangers have completed the job of authoritarianism; they have deprived The Man of his civil liberties. But he rallies himself one last time and remembers things that the strangers do not know about, he and his wife once carved a heart with their names on a tree on the land; inside the house there are marks where he clung to the walls as he learned to walk, multiplication tables he carved on the walls for his son - solid, incontestable proof. The Man summons his courage; he will fight for his land; he will send a telegram to his son who works abroad and tell him to come home and to bring his rifle. They will fight together.

This play brought to mind the Irish play, *The Field* by John B Keane, written in 1965 which tells the story of "The Bull" McCabe, a tradition-bound Irishman who has been farming the land for generations. McCabe rents the four-acre field from a widow and hopes to purchase it when she puts it up for public auction. The field is McCabe's only access to water. McCabe bribes the local auctioneer, Flanagan, also the publican, to keep the auction secret so there will be no other bidders. Mrs. Butler will then have to accept McCabe's price. When an outsider, William Dee, who has returned from England, attempts to out-bid McCabe, the result is violence and death. Dee plans to cover the field with concrete and to manufacture concrete blocks there. McCabe hopes to scare Dee off by threatening him. When this fails, McCabe and his son, Tadhg, plan a midnight attack that goes horribly wrong and Dee is murdered. It is while they lay in wait we learn that the reason for McCabe's failed marriage is because his wife allowed a pony onto his land eighteen years ago. McCabe beat his wife badly and killed the pony and his wife has never spoken to him since. The murder is covered up by the villagers' silence and McCabe justifies the death because Dee
threatened his ownership of the land. Even threats by the Catholic Church of excommunication have little effect on the villagers; the threat of intimidation from McCabe is too great.

The two plays are both about old men who have an extraordinary love of land that has been in their family for generations, who perceive a threat to that land from an outsider. Land is a great source of emotion, particularly to those who experience diaspora and are displaced. The very act of leaving one’s land behind, or having one’s land wrenched from one’s possession by military conflict, seems to magnify its importance in one’s mind, and to make one more determined to return to it, or to reclaim it. We see this today all over the world, not just in the Middle East. Countries have been divided by politics and invasions, and inhabitants have been turned into refugees in their own lands. In talking of the land, John B. Keane says:

> I’ve seen men love land the way they love women - kneeling on their knees and stroking the fleecy grass of a young meadow, or catching a fist of wheat in their hands and rubbing it and sniffing it. I’ve seen them going down to an oat field and stroke the sheaves, the stalks of oats, the way they’d stroke a young girl’s hair, a daughter’s hair or a wife’s hair. It transcends affections and it transcends love as we know it. It’s a commitment to that which sustains them; it’s sacrificial in a sense and it’s their way of responding to the nerves of nature. (Kealey 95)

One important topic which Tawfiq al-Hakim deals with in his play *Fate of a Cockroach* is the conflict created by ownership and control of disputed lands. *Act One of Fate of a Cockroach* is a veiled attack on the policies and programs of the regime of Gamal Abdul Nasir. It deals with the various twentieth-century conflicts between the Arabs and Israelis and the prospect of yet another war that the Arabs would probably lose. Some of
the most important land areas affected by the conflicts include the Suez Canal, Palestine, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Suez Canal is a major conduit for goods between the east and the west. In the early 1950s it was a point of dispute between the Egyptians and the British and French governments. Palestine is the traditional homeland of both the Jews and Arabs, although, prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, the Jews were in diaspora for millennia. The decision to allow the Jews to reclaim their homeland in this area caused great resentment amongst the indigenous Arabs who were not consulted on the partition of their land. During the 1956 Suez Crisis, both the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip were areas of land of great political significance and were used as bargaining chips in peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt. Control of the Sinai gives access to the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. The Palestinians hoped to establish an independent state centered on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which is separated by the State of Israel. The Gaza Strip ended up as a land of Arab refugees as a result of the conflicts between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

Three of the major religions, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, have origins in the Middle East and the land in this area has been fought over for centuries. All three religions lay claim to the land in the West Bank as that is where Jerusalem is located, a city which is central to all three religions.

Although al-Hakim supported Nasir's political regime initially, he soon became disillusioned with Nasir's policies. He used his plays to alert Nasir to the mood of the people and to attempt to persuade him to change his policies. The significance of the Middle East land disputes, the associated political conflicts and their impact on the life and writing of Tawfiq al-Hakim will be addressed in subsequent chapters of this thesis.
I feel fortunate to have been exposed in my lifetime to two such powerful cultures as the Irish and the Arabs. The power of the Irish writers and the oral narrative of my father and grandfather influenced my world growing up. My life in the Middle East as an adult, and my reading and analysis of modern Arabic writers, such as al-Hakim have allowed me to realize that the two worlds, although thousands of miles apart, are united by common bonds, suffering, and experiences.
Chapter 2

A Biographical Perspective on Tawfiq Al-Hakim and His Times

Al-Hakim was born in Egypt, probably at the end of the nineteenth century. There is some debate regarding Al-Hakim’s birth date; it is given in assorted scholarly texts as between 1899 and 1903. Al-Hakim does not give a date in his autobiography, Siyn al-Umr (Prison of Life) (1964). In the book’s introduction, Pierre Cachia writes that in later years al-Hakim opted for 1899. This decision may be because he “took pride in his continued intellectual vigor at an advanced age, if only because he was still in secondary school in 1923.” Even allowing for the “vagaries of his formal education .......... the likelihood is that he was 2 or 3 years younger than he claimed” (Cachia, Introduction 1).

At the time of Tawfiq al-Hakim’s birth, Egypt was under Ottoman rule. In 1881 a military mutiny, led by Colonel Ahmed Arabi, took place against the Khedive (a title given to the Turkish viceroy’s ruling Egypt from 1867 to 1914). Arabi demanded a popularly-elected legislature and an increased budget for the army. The movement began among the Egyptian officers, who complained of the preference shown to officers of Turkish origin. The mutiny

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1 In al-Hakim’s autobiography, Prison of Life, he writes that his father kept a notebook in which he noted that he married on Thursday 25 April, corresponding to the night of 7 Muharram. He did not give the year of the marriage. The only two years around that time period on which 25 April fell on a Thursday were 1895 and 1901. In 1895 Muharram (1313H) fell in July; in 1901 Muharram (1319H) fell in April. It is probable, therefore, that the marriage took place in 1901 and that al-Hakim was born either at the end of 1901 or the beginning of 1902.
then expanded into an attack on the privileged position and predominant influence of foreigners and the European interference in Egyptian affairs. A British expeditionary force landed at both ends of the Suez Canal in August 1882. The Egyptian army was defeated and the Ottoman Khedive Tawfiq was restored to power. This marked the beginning of British military occupation of Egypt that lasted until 1936. Between 1892 and 1914, however, Turkey still held power. Following Khedive Tawfiq's death in 1892 his son Abbas Helmy II assumed the title of Khedive. Abbas Helmy ruled until his dethronement in 1914 when Egypt was proclaimed a British protectorate.

Tawfiq al-Hakim was born at his aunt's house in his mother's home town of Alexandria. His father was away from home on a legal assignment at the time of the birth. Al-Hakim's uncle wrote, “I saw him this morning, and found him to be like his father – except that he had no mustache!” (al-Hakim, Prison 4). As al-Hakim's father was not present at the birth, his mother chose his name, Husayn Tawfiq al-Hakim.

Tawfiq al-Hakim's father, Isma'il al-Hakim, was not from a wealthy family and lived solely on his earnings as a prosecutor. Isma'il had been one of the best students in his class at Law School and, with some fellow students, had founded the school Law Journal. He was widely-read not only in his legal texts and the Qu'ran but also literature, particularly classical poetry and narrative prose. However, following his marriage to a haughty and strong-willed woman, Isma'il apparently abandoned his literary pursuits (Starkey, 16, 17). Isma'il's marriage to al-Hakim's mother had been arranged by his step-mother who sent his aunt and sister to her home town of Alexandria to look for a wife. Despite the small dowry being offered, and, against the objections of her mother, the prospective bride was impressed with Isma'il's photograph and legal position and the match was struck. Isma'il
earned various promotions in his legal position with the government, from Associate Prosecutor to Prosecutor. The resulting assignments around the countryside, however, meant that the family was constantly on the move.

Al-Hakim never named his mother in his autobiography, though Richard Long has identified her as Asma al-Bustami (Long 1). Her family descended from Turkish, Persian or Albanian seafarers. She had a strong personality and spent much of her childhood quarrelling with her only sibling, a sister. Their mother was a widow, who married her widowed brother-in-law and united the two families. Al-Hakim’s mother learned to read and write due, in part, to one of her step-brothers who would tell her tales from *alif la ila walaila* (*Arabian Nights*). This step-brother also persuaded his father to hire a Qu’ranic tutor for her. Once she learned the alphabet she was able to read the tales for herself. This set her apart from most other women of this era, as it was not the norm for women to be able to read and write. After her marriage to Isma’il al-Hakim in the 1890s she joined her new husband in al-Mahalla al-Kubra. It was only when she saw her bare home that she found out about his meager salary. However, Isma’il was soon promoted to Prosecuting Agent, 4th Level at a higher salary. Despite their improved financial situation, al-Hakim’s mother wanted her own financial independence. She had a small private income from her own side of the family which she used to invest in some land. She was furious, however, to discover that Isma’il had registered only part of the land in her name, placing the remainder in his own name. Conditions in the household were difficult until Isma’il relented and re-registered the entire property in her name. A few months after Tawfiq al-Hakim was born, the family went to visit Isma’il’s father hoping he might offer some financial help. An argument ensued between Isma’il’s wife and his step-mother. Isma’il’s wife refused to
apologize, so Ismail “pulled her away by the hand, either muttering the formula of repudiation or threatening her with it” (al-Hakim, Prison 35). Under some schools of Islamic law, a husband has only to utter his intention to repudiate his wife three times for a divorce to become legally binding. The situation was finally resolved by Isma'il's father, who was secretly impressed with her courage in going up against the lady of the house.

As a young adult, al-Hakim was skeptical about marriage, probably because of the state of his parents' marriage and the dominant role which his mother played in the marriage. Al-Hakim considered his father dull, with no trace of his youthful exuberance. Al-Hakim believed his father's subservient behaviour was due to his mother's rebellious, aggressive, personality "that directed her husband's development the way she wanted it, that confined his energy within the material family frame-work" (al-Hakim, Prison 26, 27.) His mother tried to persuade al-Hakim otherwise, but he persisted in his belief. Apparently this experience with his mother kept him from marrying until later in life. It is probable that the state of his parents' marriage would affect his writing in later life and would add misogyny as one of the recurring themes in his plays. Richard Long agrees that at "an early age the seeds of misogyny were sewn" (Long 3), seeds that would show up in later in his works.

Isma'il and his wife had a second son. This time Isma'il was present for the birth and chose his son's name, Zuhayr in honour of the pre-islamic poet Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma. His wife was ill after giving birth but soon improved. When the boys grew older they shared a bed. The two boys were as different in their personalities as were their parents. While Zuhayr's personality was like his mother's, al-Hakim's was more like that of his father. Ismail had an extremely careful and precise personality. He kept a notebook in which he
wrote important facts, diary entries and items of concern; he carried a pocket watch which he set back ten minutes so that "he would always have ten minutes to spare for emergencies" (al-Hakim, Prison 132). Al-Hakim describes his father as being able to separate his emotion from his intellect, whilst his mother was the opposite, "all unrestraint and excess, either overflowing love or unremitting hatred, with no middle way or moderation" (al-Hakim, Prison 193). His father did not like to draw attention to himself but his mother was the exact opposite. She was "self-confident, loved the limelight, and hated obscurity and indifference" (al-Hakim, Prison 197). One of Isma'il's characteristics was his diligence in all things including his speech. "He was truly punctilious - in matters of money, of words, of everything, alike with himself and with others. He would bring a piaster out of his pocket or a word out of his mouth only carefully and probingly" (al-Hakim, Prison 194). As an adult, al-Hakim considered that he inherited this trait from his father and was glad because it suited theatre which he called an economical, miserly art. "In it words are carefully reckoned, time is restricted, space is limited, there is no room for the excessive or uncontrolled" (al-Hakim, Prison 194). Unlike his father, al-Hakim discovered that he did not like public speaking. When he was a prosecutor he believed that his responses did not come readily, and that was he was not quick-witted. He often had to search for the right word or idea. Consequently, as an adult he avoided public receptions, turned down invitations to meetings and refused to give speeches. He even preferred not to give radio and television interviews. He enjoyed the simple life and rejected many prestigious contract offers.

Zuhayr grew up to like sporting pastimes such as shooting, hunting, swimming, and dancing - not poetry or literature as did al-Hakim. In fact, al-Hakim hated swimming
because when his father taught him how to swim, he took him into deep water. Al-Hakim got scared when he was unable to touch bottom and swore if he got out he would never go in the sea again. He kept his oath. During his childhood, al-Hakim was scared by jins, (supernatural beings in Arabian mythology and Islam), but they turned out to be nothing other than his servants and nurses dressing up in sheets and abayas to keep him under control. Often when disturbed he would throw household utensils out of the window, and once he threw his nurse's gold locket out of the window.

The other family member living in the al-Hakim household, and another strong female influence in al-Hakim's life, was his maternal grandmother. As a young woman she had married her widowed brother-in-law. The combined family was raised together until she was divorced for neglecting her husband's children. However, to al-Hakim she was a saviour on more than one occasion. Once, when one of al-Hakim's class-mates told his father he was a dunce, Isma'il tried to beat his son. His grandmother saved him from the beating. Isma'il did not approve of al-Hakim reading novels (Syrian translations of European books). He wanted him to read pre-Islamic poetry. On one occasion when Isma'il and his son were reading from a poetry book, al-Hakim couldn't explain a long word in the book. Isma'il beat al-Hakim till his nose bled and, once again, al-Hakim was saved by his grandmother. It would be quite some time before al-Hakim would take an interest in poetry again. On another occasion, when al-Hakim was about 15 years old, he was out late at the cinema in Cairo, against his parents' wishes. His mother was waiting when he got home at 9pm. She locked him out until his father got home. Isma'il decided to teach his son a lesson and left him out in the street all night as punishment. Yet again, he was saved by his grandmother who let him into the house when everyone else was asleep.
Al-Hakim's enjoyed good health until the age of about five, when he was sick for several years, with recurrent fevers of multiple aetiology. For example, al-Hakim would get a fever that lasted for about three days whenever he saw a funeral. Paul Starkey conjectures that the origin "lay in the death of a play mate: and that al-Hakim "regarded his fevered body as a battleground for the forces of life and death" (Starkey 19). These fevers are more likely to have been a young child's psychosomatic reaction to his fear of death. Although al-Hakim's parents tried to discover the cause of the fevers, they were not successful, but al-Hakim grew out of these "funeral fevers" by the time he was seven. As a teenager he had a problem with an infection with his right eye. He was taken to an ophthalmologist but to no avail. A local barber used leeches to draw blood and applied Boric Acid. The eye healed but he would have a weak right eye for the remainder of his life.

Because Isma'il's work required the family to move around the country, al-Hakim was never enrolled in the same school for a complete academic year. Many of the towns lacked a State school so much of his education was obtained from Qu'ranic schools or private schools such as the Islamic Benevolent Society. It was not until al-Hakim was eleven years old, when Isma'il was assigned to a permanent posting in Cairo, that he attended a State school. He had to enter the school at a lower level than planned because, although his Arabic was excellent, his knowledge of geography was almost non-existent. Initially he found a fascination with sketching, but his attention was soon drawn to music. The family met a group of "delighters", women who performed at weddings. They played the lute, sang and entertained. Al-Hakim learned their songs, sang with them and accompanied them to weddings. When his mother found out he was learning to play the lute from them, she became angry and said his father would also be angry because this would affect his school
work and make him "a songmonger in life only" (al-Hakim, Prison 63, 64). She made al-Hakim swear never to touch a lute again. He obeyed, and this was another oath he kept throughout his life.

Al-Hakim's interest in the theatre began when he was a schoolchild. Salama Higazi's theatre troupe came to Disuq when his father was posted there. Isma'il took al-Hakim to their production of Romeo and Juliet. Al-Hakim didn't understand the play but was dazzled by the spectacle, the lights, the costumes, the singing, dancing, and acting. This is one of the only times in al-Hakim's autobiography when he dates an event, which occurred at the time of Halley's Comet (1910). He remembered watching it from the rooftop; so he was probably eleven at the time. However, a few years later when a good friend invited al-Hakim to go with him to another theatre on Friday nights, inspiring him with images of the fires of hell on stage during Telemaque (al-Hakim, Prison 70) he was afraid to ask his father if he could go.

Al-Hakim's interest in literature was also something that was stimulated during his childhood. When al-Hakim's mother was confined to bed during her various illnesses, she would read tales from Arabian Nights to the two brothers. She embellished the characters by comparing them to local acquaintances. By the time she was well again, al-Hakim was reading independently. Isma'il had hired a sheik as a tutor for him in Qu'ranic studies. It was from this sheik that al-Hakim learned to appreciate Islamic literature. However, he also loved reading the novels that got him in trouble with his father, the Syrian translations of European publications. Al-Hakim used to hide under the bed with a candle to read his novels, but one night he was late for dinner and forgot to snuff out his candle. His bedroom caught fire. Fortunately, his father never discovered that he was the cause of the fire.
Isma'il believed that "literature was no path to livelihood for someone who had not a fortune of his own" (al-Hakim, Prison 202). It was only acceptable as a hobby.

Although he excelled at English and Arabic while at school, al-Hakim had problems with mathematics throughout his school years. Some of the problems were created because of the constant changing of schools and the different curriculum levels at which he entered each successive school. At the end of the fourth year in the primary school system, in 1912, he took his National School Examination in Alexandria. When he arrived at the train station, one of the first things he saw was the cinema outside the station and its billboard for an episode of Zigomar, a famous thief. He went in to see the show which didn't end until 6pm. When he turned up at his relatives' house he was in a lot of trouble because he had been expected on the 3pm train. This would not be the last time, however, that the cinema would get him into trouble.

Al-Hakim had to live in Alexandria for his secondary education. Isma'il rented a house for him and hired a maid to take care of him when the family was not there. He found a book store where he could rent books by paying a monthly subscription of 5 piasters. Now books as well as the cinema got the better of his studies and he failed his end-of-year examination. When Isma'il found out what was happening with his son's studies, al-Hakim was banned from the cinema and his novels were ripped up. He had to repeat that school year. He decided he would need to study harder the following year, but the cinema continued to entice him and led to the event where his grandmother had to rescue him from being locked out after returning home late from the cinema. His parents forgave him on condition that he took an oath not to go to the cinema again until he obtained his baccalaureate at the end of his secondary school. He agreed and this was yet another oath
that he kept, staying away from the cinema until he later attended Law School (al-Hakim Prison 89). Later during that school year he got a new Arabic teacher who used love poetry as texts. Consequently, al-Hakim developed an interest in Arabic literature. Although he passed his school examinations at the end of this year, he was still having problems with mathematics. An uncle who was a mathematics teacher suggested to Isma'il that al-Hakim transfer to a school in Cairo. Al-Hakim could live with his uncle so he could help him with his mathematics. The parents agreed. They sent the uncle three pounds a month for his board and lodging, and miscellaneous expenses. So, in 1915 al-Hakim moved to Cairo to attend the Muhammad Ali Secondary School to prepare for his Intermediate Certificate.

However, Cairo had theatres which would continue to lure al-Hakim away from his studies. A ticket for a seat in “the Gods” (the highest platform, or upper circle) for the show, which ended at midnight, cost only 5 piasters; best of all, no-one in his uncle’s house reprimanded him for going to the theatre. George Abyad, a French-trained actor, had started a new troupe performing non-sung tragedies, a new concept in Egyptian theatre. He and his troupe performed in the Opera House. A young lawyer, Abdul Rahman Rushdi, joined the troupe as a performer, and al-Hakim thought him wonderful - he cried real tears. Al-Hakim learned Abayed’s tragedies by heart and recited them in Abayed’s classical style. He discovered Hamlet not at the theatre, but as one of his school plays. He read it in the original English and was expected to memorize selections as part of his school work. One activity which evolved from al-Hakim’s school classes was that he made up plays and performed them with two school friends who were also good at acting. These three budding theatrical artists improvised their plots and scripts as they went along. For their “theatre” they used a guest room in one of the boy’s homes. Al-Hakim wrote their first play, casting
himself as the protagonist. Once the local neighbourhood children heard of their play activities, the playwright had a captive audience. Of course the three friends argued over the best roles. The home-owner claimed the hero's role and al-Hakim had to concede. But theatre was not the only distraction from al-Hakim's schoolwork. An awareness of the opposite sex had been awakened in al-Hakim when he was about ten years of age; he dreamt about a younger blonde girl from the next village, and also had feelings for a young girl who came to work for the family as a maid. Now, as a teenager, like the rest of the boys in his class, his thoughts turned to women and masturbation as sex books were passed among the boys at school. A legal prostitute cost 10 piasters at a licensed whore house. Despite all the theatrical and other distractions, al-Hakim managed to obtain his Certificate of General Competence in 1918 and chose literature over science as his academic "stream". His next goal was the baccalaureate.

As a backdrop to al-Hakim's education, World War I (WWI) had broken out in Europe in 1914. As a result of the declaration of war with the Ottoman Empire (of which Egypt was still nominally a part), Britain declared Egypt a protectorate, deposed Khedive Abbas Helmy II and enthroned his family member Hussein Kamel as Sultan. Many of Britain's actions during WWI caused hardship and resentment throughout Egypt. For example, the British purchased cotton and animal foodstuffs below market prices, forcibly recruited peasants into the Labour and Camel Transport Corps of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, and used Egypt as a base for defence of the Suez Canal against Turkish attack.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 would divide up the Middle East into areas of influence for France, Britain and other powers. Britain was allocated control of areas
roughly comprising Jordan, Iraq and a small area around Haifa. France was allocated control of South-eastern Turkey, Northern Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Palestine was designated for international administration. However, during 1915-16 Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner of Egypt and Sudan, in Cairo, had been in secret correspondence with Sharif Husayn, in Mecca. McMahon pledged that if Husayn proclaimed a revolt against Ottoman rule, Britain would provide military and financial aid during the war and help to create independent Arab governments in the Arab Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent. The Sykes-Picot agreement made it impossible for Britain to honor the promises made by McMahon to Husayn. On June 5, 1916 Husayn declared Arab independence against Turkish rule. At the end of the war the Middle East was broken up into four mandates (a euphemism for colonies) and one emirate: Syria and Lebanon went to France; Iraq and Palestine (including current day Jordan) went to Britain; Trans-Jordan eventually became an emirate; The Hijaz was independent and continued to be ruled by Husayn.

On November 2, 1917, Britain issued a declaration by Lord Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, regarding the establishment of a Jewish National Homeland in Palestine. Zionism had been pressing for a homeland since the turn of the century, with Theodor Herzl as it driving force. The Balfour Declaration was the first major show of support by a world power for such a homeland. Much of the Arab world objected because Arabs comprised 9/10 of the population of Palestine; Arabs were never asked if they wanted the Jews there; and there was no mention in the declaration of the political rights of non-Jewish Palestinians.

In September 1918, at the end of the war, prominent members of the Egyptian Umma Party, such as Saad Zaghlul and Lutfi as-Sayyid, helped to form a wafad (delegation)
to voice their demands for independence at the Paris Peace Conference. *Al-Wafd al-Misri* was formed on November 13, 1918 and was headed by Zaghlul. The British refused to allow the *Wafd* to go to London. On March 8, 1919 Zaghlul and three other members were arrested, imprisoned and deported to Malta. The *Wafdist* deportation triggered student demonstrations, general strikes and rioting which began the 1919 revolution. On March 16 1919 150-300 upper-class Egyptian women in veils, led by Zaghlul's wife Safia, staged a demonstration against British occupation, an event that marked the entrance of Egyptian women into public life. Throughout the countryside, women protested alongside the men. The riots continued until Lord Allenby, the newly appointed High Commissioner to Egypt, arrived in Cairo on March 25, released the members of the *Wafd*, and allowed them to travel to Paris on April 7.

In December 1919 the Milner Commission was sent to Cairo to investigate limited powers of self-government for Egypt. The commission was boycotted by the nationalists and more strikes ensued. Early the following year Lord Milner reported to Lord Curzon that the protectorate should be replaced by a Treaty of Alliance. Curzon (the British Foreign Secretary) agreed to receive an Egyptian mission headed by Zaghlul and Adli Pasha to discuss proposals. The mission arrived in London in June 1920. By February 1921 the agreement had been approved by the British parliament. The Egyptians were asked to send another mission to London to conclude the Treaty. Adli Pasha led this mission, which arrived in June 1921. No agreement was reached because of unresolved disagreements over the Suez Canal. Curzon could not persuade his cabinet to agree to any terms which Adli Pasha was prepared to accept. In December 1921 the British imposed Martial Law in Cairo and deported Zaghlul again. Once again this was followed by violent demonstrations. Because of
concerns over the ever-growing nationalism, Lord Allenby unilaterally declared independence for Egypt on February 28 1922. Sultan Ahmed Fuad became King Fuad I and Faruk was named his heir. A new constitution was approved on April 19 1922, and a law was passed allowing parliamentary elections. Sarwat Pasha became Prime Minister. Britain retained control of the Canal Zone. Two years later, in 1924, Zaghlul was elected Prime Minister.

During WWI, and the British occupation of Egypt, al-Hakim and his friends supported the Germans and Turks against the British, whom they hated. Their local hero was Mustafa Kamel, an Egyptian journalist who founded the Nationalist Party. He had been at Law School with Isma'il. During the 1919 uprising some of al-Hakim's fellow students drafted political pamphlets. Al-Hakim composed the words of patriotic songs and, sometimes, also the music, which he based on funeral marches by Chopin and Wagner. Many of his songs became popular with the youth in Cairo and Alexandria. He also wrote poems about the national movement. Al-Hakim was arrested and jailed for a short period during this time of political turmoil.

Al-Hakim was opposed to the political parties formed after the 1919 revolution; he considered them to be "pro' men of wealth and prestige and landowners" and that the party leaders allowed the literati and academics to hold only minor positions with no political power (al-Hakim, Prison 114). What alienated him from these parties and kept him out of them was that the cultured, thinking writer was "in their eyes a mere hack hired to defend their point of view and to attack their opponents" (al-Hakim, Prison 115). Throughout his life he refused to align himself with any of the political parties. He believed that "a writer must maintain his independence in order to preserve his moral authority" (al-Hakim, Prison 114). His articles accused all parties equally of having "abandoned the spirit of the 1919
revolution” (Starkey 30). Despite his determination to avoid alignment with any political parties as a young man, this would not stop him from writing political dramas and exposés later in life.

Al-Hakim's first play, written towards the end of 1919, was al-Dayf al-Thaqil (The Unwelcome Guest). The unwelcome guest of the title referred to the British occupier. The play was not published and would probably not have passed the censor because of its anti-British sentiment. In The Prison of Life al-Hakim introduces an essential question: "Why did I start my writing career with a play?" He answers, "Perhaps it is the essence of drama, i.e. the creation of a character through dialogue, not description, through his own words not those of another - that suits my temperament" (al-Hakim, Prison 116, 117). Al-Hakim also believed that "the very character of our literary heritage," and "the inborn disposition of the Arab is a theatrical one" (al-Hakim, Prison 117).

Al-Hakim completed his schooling, and obtained his baccalaureate in 1921; he then went on to Law School. He was not an outstanding student, failing his first-year examinations, including his French examination. French was necessary because many of the legal texts and reference works were written in French. His parents made him spend the following Summer vacation studying French. They obtained a private tutor for him at the Berlitz School. This woman suggested that he read French literature, introducing him to Anatole France, Ernest Daudet, Alfred De Musset and Pierre Marivaux. Through this tutor he became au fait with the works of the French theatre. Al-Hakim's law studies would take four years, from 1921 to 1925. The Licence Examination was the goal at the end of the fourth year. Although he passed his law degree, his new-found interest in the French
theatre distracted him and prevented him from getting a distinction. He received only a meager pass.

While studying for the Licence Examination al-Hakim lived in Cairo with his brother, Zuhayr, who attended the Jesuit school there. Once again, theatre distracted him. The Azbakiyya Garden Theatre specialized in productions of Egyptian plays written in Arabic. The theatre was the home of the 'Ukasha theatre company, owned by 'Abdullah, Abdul-Hamid, and Zaki 'Ukasha. Al-Hakim and his friend from Law School, Mustafa Mumtaz, wrote *Khatam Sulayman (The Seal of Solomon)* for the 'Ukasha brothers, but Zaki 'Ukasha, was devious and tried to avoid paying them for it. Al-Hakim also wrote *al-'Aris (The Groom)* for the 'Ukasha brothers. The playwrights finally received 30 pounds for *The Seal of Solomon*. Zaki 'Ukasha paid 20 pounds for *The Groom*, less than for *The Seal of Solomon* because it contained no songs and had no co-author. Both plays were written some time in the early 1920s and performed in November 1924. The playwright's name appeared as Husayn Tawfiq so his parents would not discover he was writing plays.

In 1923 he wrote a new play for the 'Ukasha brothers, *al-Marah al-Jadida (Modern Woman)*. At that time Huda Sha'rawi had founded a women's rights' union to demand emancipation and the right not to wear the veil. *Modern Woman* was inspired by Sha'rawi's movement. Al-Hakim utilized the conflict between the tradition role of females, as dictated by Islam, and Sha'rawi's demands for emancipation. This was probably his first play which would demonstrate the misogyny for which he would later become famous. In fact, in later life he would give himself the title *Aduw al-Marah (enemy of women)*. Richard Long dismisses the play as "an unremarkable approach to the subject of women's emancipation which concentrates not so much on the rights and wrongs of the campaign to
abolish the veil as on attempting to discredit female claims that friendship between the sexes is possible and not necessarily an excuse for immorality" (Long 8). Starkey disagrees: “In this play he utilized his skills as a writer of comedy and melodrama to launch an assault on the movement for the unveiling of women” (Starkey 22). Given the myriad instances of mysogeny which were to appear in al-Hakim's later plays, I favour Starkey's view. *Modern Woman* was staged by the 'Ukasha brothers in 1926. The last piece al-Hakim wrote for the 'Ukasha brothers was *Ali Baba*, in 1926, while he was studying in Paris; it was never performed and the text, though originally thought lost, was in fact found and published in 1983. *Modern Women* was the only play submitted to the 'Ukasha brothers that was published.

After obtaining his law licence, al-Hakim was listed on the Register of Practicing Lawyers. His father took him to Ahmed Lutfi al-Sayyid, Director of the National Library to discuss his future education. When he informed al-Sayyid of al-Hakim's interest in literature, al-Sayyid advised Isma'il to send al-Hakim to Europe to get a doctorate in law. Isma'il agreed, but al-Hakim's mother was looking for a bride for him. Nonetheless, despite his mother's agenda, al-Hakim was sent to France in 1925.

While studying in Paris, al-Hakim lived in a suburb for a time with the family of a friend, André, a factory worker. He attended the Sorbonne University to study law in an attempt to obtain his doctorate. But, as usual, there were many distractions and he spent much of his time at the Louvre familiarizing himself with sculpture, painting and architecture. He absorbed European culture at the cafes. André's mother introduced him to Beethoven and the opera. When al-Hakim heard Beethoven's Fifth Symphony he understood and appreciated the truth of Neitzsche's statement, "every lofty human feeling
is found in the Fifth Symphony." Speaking through his character Muhsin, he described a sensation as though "his inner being had been deeply moved and his soul staggered by that lofty atmosphere (al-Hakim, Bird 52). Al-Hakim criticized the rich American audiences at the Opera, complaining that they had come to show off their money rather than to "seek the joy of purification in the presence of art or to seek the help of music in finding their souls" (al-Hakim, Bird 21). He believed the only people who had really come to listen to the music were the customers in the top balcony. Al-Hakim traded his interest in popular theatre for Henrik Ibsen, Luigi Pirandello, George Bernard Shaw and Maurice Maeterlinck. He saw George Pitoëff's production of Shaw's St. Joan at the Théâtre des Arts in 1925.

Al-Hakim's brother, Zuhayr, followed him to France to study agriculture in Toulouse and visited al-Hakim in Paris during their university vacations. Zuhayr arranged casual dates for both of them. In addition to these casual dates, Tawfiq had two love affairs while he was a student in Paris, with Emma Duran, a ticket seller at the Odeon, and with Sacha Schwartz, a dancer (Starkey 32). Zuhayr's life-style was very different from al-Hakim's. An extrovert, he was also a heavy smoker, liked good clothes, played poker, and loved to dance. Unhappily, he died the following summer, following a long, chronic illness.

By 1928, al-Hakim had failed to get a doctorate, so he was ordered home by his father. When al-Hakim returned from France, the Egyptian theatre had undergone a transformation for the worse. The 'Ukasha company had gone bankrupt and had closed its theatre. The Ramsis Theatre was struggling. His friend and co-author, Mustafa Mumtoz, had given up writing, saying the theatre was dead. Al-Hakim wanted to write for the theatre again, but more substantial works now, ones that showed his knowledge of European culture. He also wanted to discover what had caused the demise of Egyptian theatre. The
reason appeared to be two-fold: "on the one hand, the squabbles and struggle for power between the various political parties, which made politics and political journalism occupy the forefront of people's attention to the exclusion of the arts," and, on the other, "the growing world economic crisis, with its impact on the Egyptian economy" (Badawi, 14). During this time, other writers started their climb to fame as "the star of journalism rose" (al-Hakim, Prison 188). Novelists, prose writers and short story writers such as Taha Husayn, Ibrahim al-Mazini, Abbas al-'Aqqad and Mohammed Husayn Haikal came to the forefront. Al-Hakim admired these artists who were no longer obscured by the literati who dominated the scene when he left for Paris. "It was they who were now luminous, outstanding, prominent on the horizon of politics first, of literature second" (al-Hakim, Prison 188).

There were no professional theatre companies left to perform the plays which al-Hakim had written in France, so he wrote a comedy, Rasasa fi'il-Qalb (A Bullet in the Heart), for an amateur company, the Association of Patrons of the Theatre, but the play was never produced. For some time after this his newly-published plays appeared in newspapers but were not produced on stage. This may have been the beginning of al-Hakim's use of the concept 'théâtre des idées', or 'theatre of the mind' (works for reading rather than performance) to refer to his works. In the preface to his play Pygmalion (1942), al-Hakim's gives his own definition of 'theatre of the mind': "I set up my stage inside the mind, making my actors ideas moving in the region of abstract thought, but dressed as symbols. It is true that I retain the spirit of coup de théâtre but the theatrical surprises are not so much in the incidents as in the thoughts" (Badawi 61).
His studies having come to an end in 1928, it was time for al-Hakim to earn a living. He entered the government legal service and spent two years in the mixed courts in Alexandria. His various legal postings all over Egypt provided valuable research for his books. However, his constant writing annoyed his superior officers and he was reprimanded because this activity was not suitable for a government employee.

Throughout his lifetime, al-Hakim was a prolific writer of plays, novels, short stories, and newspaper articles. His novel, 'Awdat al-Ruh (Return of the Spirit), written in Paris in 1927 and published in 1933, established al-Hakim as an important new novelist. His work, together with the writing of others such as Mohammed Husayn Haikal (Zainab, 1913), Mohammad Farid Abu Hadid (Ibnat al-Makluk, The Mamluk's Daughter, 1926), and Ibrahim al-Mazini (Ibrahim al-Katib, Ibrahim the Writer, 1931) "undoubtedly helped to raise the prestige of the Egyptian novel, which was then still in its early experimental stages" (Sakkut 89). Return of the Spirit "describes the life of an Egyptian family in Cairo and culminates in the 1919 uprising." Al-Hakim says it was "intended to express the feelings of a youth caught up in an important phase of his country's history" (Starkey 26). He was also writing a "Work of Art in Three Volumes" at the time and made the decision to discontinue that work and to concentrate on Return of the Spirit, which he wanted to be "not so much a record of a historical period as a document about feeling, the feeling of a young man in the middle of a fateful stage for his country" (al-Hakim, Prison 113). Later, when he was Director of Investments at the Ministry of Education, he shared a flat in Giza with a friend from Law School, Hilmi Bahgat Badawi, until Badawi got married. Badawi asked for the manuscript of Return of the Spirit as a wedding gift.
In 1933 al-Hakim’s play *Ahl al-Kahf* (*The People of the Cave*) was published. He had begun writing this play while he was in Paris. It received the approval of Taha Hussayn and, later, in December 1935, was chosen as the inaugural production of the newly founded National Company. *The People of the Cave* was not a great success as the audiences were used to less cerebral entertainment. Following the failure of *The People of the Cave*, the only full-length play produced on stage for the next 20 years was *Sirr al-Muntahira* (*Suicide’s Secret*) (1937).

Al-Hakim became a deputy public prosecutor in 1934, practicing in Tanta, Disuq and Damanhur. From 1934 to 1939 he was Director of Inquiries, Ministry of Education, Cairo. In 1937 he published his novel *Yawmiyat Na’ib fi al-Aryaf* (*Maze of Justice*). It is a semi-autobiographical novel, written in diary format and is based on the life of a young prosecutor in the Egyptian countryside. In the same year al-Hakim published *Bird of the East*, another semi-autobiographical novel with the same protagonist as *Return of the Spirit*. In his introduction to the English language edition of novel, published in 1966, R. Bayly Winder notes that the protagonist, Muhsin, relives al-Hakim’s own student days in Paris. He describes the major theme of the work as the “similarities and differences between Western and Near Eastern culture” (Bayly, *Bird* ix). The storm that followed the publication of these novels, however, caused further problems for al-Hakim at work. His superiors told him he would do better publishing books on law. Following a requested transfer, he became Director of the Department of Social Guidance, in the new Ministry of Social Affairs from 1939 to 1943. Other works that he wrote during this period included *Shahrazad* (1934), *Mohammed* (1936), *Raqisat al-Ma’bad* (*The Temple Dancer*) (1939), *Praksa aw Mushkilat al-Hukm* (*Praksa or Problems of Governance*) (1939), *Himar al-Hakim* (*al-
Hakim's Donkey) (1940), Pygmalion (1942), and Sulayman al-Hakim (Solomon the Wise) (1943). In 1943, he resigned from government service to devote himself to writing. He did return, however, when in 1951 Taha Husayn (then Minister of Education) recalled him to be the Director of the National Library (Dar al-Kutub), a position he held until 1956. Amongst his other successes during this time were al-Malik Udib (King Oedipus) (1944), described by al-Hakim as a Greek tragedy through Muslim eyes; and Iziz (Isis) (1955), the last play he based upon myths from the ancient Egyptian world.

While al-Hakim was writing in the 1930s and 1940s, Europe saw the rise of Hitler, Nazism and World War II (WWII). In 1937 the Peel Commission recommended partition of Palestine, allocating a small area of northern and central Palestine for the Jews for their own state. The Arabs objected, so no agreement was reached. In 1939, when the war broke out, Britain wanted Arab support. A White Paper was issued by the British government stating that the mandate would end in ten years and Palestine would become independent. A trickle of Jewish immigrants into Palestine turned into a flood in the 1940s when Hitler and his regime began the systematic slaughter of over six million Jews, and five million others, including Gypsies, homosexuals, Poles, Soviet prisoners-of-war, and people with disabilities, mental and physical. Extermination was based on religious and political belief, physical defect and failure to conform to the Aryan ideal. Jewish immigration into Palestine from 1939 to 1944 would be held at a maximum of 15,000 per year, and after 1944 would be only with Arab consent. The Jews turned to the US for help and in 1942 the United States put pressure on the British to rescind the White Paper and make Palestine a Jewish State. Over the next several years terrorist acts were carried out by both sides, including the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel by Irgun (Irgun Tsvai Leumi; the
clandestine militant Zionist group that operated in Palestine from 1931 to 1948), the Jewish raid on Dayr Yasin (an Arab village) in 1947, and an Arab retaliatory massacre of a Jewish medical personnel bus the same year. In 1947 Britain told the UN General Assembly they were unable to continue to uphold the mandate. On November 29, 1947 the UN General Assembly adopted a partition plan as UN Resolution GA 181. The Jews accepted the decision but the Arabs rejected it. In 1948 the UN suggested a ten year "cooling off" period, postponing partition. However, on May 14, 1948 the Jewish Agency Executive Committee in Tel Aviv declared part of Palestine under Jewish control, the Independent State of Israel. They declared the 1939 White Paper limiting immigration and land purchase null and void. The following day, on May 15, 1948, the Israeli War of Independence began. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Syria attacked the newly declared State of Israel, but the Arab force could not match the 100,000-strong Israeli army and the Arab army was defeated. By January 1949, Ralph Bunch, the UN Mediator on Palestine held indirect talks on Rhodes between Egypt and Israel. He was able to negotiate an armistice. He negotiated further armistices with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria later that year, but Iraq never signed.

It was during this time of great conflict in the Middle East that al-Hakim finally married. He was in his mid-40s in 1946 when he married the sister of Dr. Muhammad Lutfi Bayyumi. His wife is unnamed in his autobiography. A son, Ismail, was born the following year. According to Denys Johnson-Davies, al-Hakim also had one daughter (Introduction vii) although he does not refer to her in his autobiography. However, on the copyright page of The Prison of Life a reference is made to Zaynab Tawfiq al-Hakim, which, as per Arabic naming custom, indicates that she is the daughter of Tawfiq al-Hakim. Al-Hakim's marriage
was reported to be "happy and successful" (Starkey 32). His wife died in 1977 and his only son, Ismael, was killed in a car accident on September 17, 1978.

King Farouk was on the throne of Egypt at the time of al-Hakim's marriage. His reign was characterized by major corruption. On July 23, 1952 the Free Officers Revolt took place and King Farouk was forced to abdicate. The throne passed to his young son, Ahmed Fouad II under the rule of the newly formed Regency. The abdication document was signed on July 26, 1952. The leader of the military coup was Major General Mohammed Naguib. In June 1953 Naguib was named the first President of Egypt and Prime Minister; Gamal Abdul Nasir was named Deputy Prime Minister. A republic was declared on June 18, 1953 and the Revolutionary Command Council took over government from the Wafd. Later that year Nasir assumed the position of Prime Minister. In November 1954 the Revolutionary Command Council dismissed Naguib as President and placed him under house detention. In 1956 a referendum was held to ratify the new Egyptian constitution and to declare Nasir as President.

Two events of major political importance would follow from the 1952 revolution, the building of the Aswan High Dam and the Suez Canal crisis. The banks of the River Nile have historically been used for agriculture and rely on the annual summer flood for fertility. As the population along the Nile grew, it became necessary to protect the land and the cotton and sugar crops along the banks. The British completed the first Aswan Dam in 1902. This was insufficient and it was later raised on two occasions, in 1912, and again in 1933. In 1946 the dam almost overflowed so it was decided to build a new dam 6km upriver. Planning for *El-Saad al-Aali* (The Aswan High Dam) began in 1952. It was not until February 1956 that an offer of finance support for the project was made by the World Bank; however, by July
that year the finances fell through. Nasir intended to go ahead with the plan, using revenue from the Suez Canal to fund the construction. The Soviets, however, took advantage of the Cold War and offered to pay approximately one third of the cost. The Soviet financial gift was not unconditional as the USSR also sent military advisers and other workers to enhance Egyptian/Soviet ties and relations. Construction began in 1960, the first stage was completed in 1964; the reservoir began filling in 1964, and the project was completed on July 21, 1970. The reservoir reached its capacity in 1976. An archeological rescue was mounted to move major historical monuments, under the aegis of UNESCO. In addition to the many benefits provided by the dam, it also brought with it problems such as erosion, water-logging, and salinity of farm-land, loss of fisheries, flooding of rice-growing areas in the Delta with seawater, and a rise in cases of schistosomiasis and bilharzias.

Aggrieved at US support for Israel, Egypt turned to the USSR for military aide. When this was granted the US withdrew funding for the High Aswan Dam and requested Britain do the same. When the British complied, Nasir announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal to finance the dam. Negotiations for British troop withdrawal from Egypt had been underway since July 1954, and the Anglo-Egyptian agreement on total British withdrawal and joint operation of Suez was signed in October 1954. The treaty also included the proviso that the British could return if any Arab League country or Turkey was attacked, presumably by the USSR. Nasir’s action led to tripartite aggression against Egypt. On October 29, 1956 Israel invaded the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. On October 30 Britain and France issued ultimatums to Egypt and Israel to withdraw ten miles either side of the Suez Canal, to allow Anglo-French occupation. Following Egypt’s refusal to do so, Anglo-French air attacks began on Egyptian air fields the next day, October 31,
and the UN Security Council called an emergency meeting of the UN General Assembly. On November 1st Anglo-French airplanes destroyed 260 Egyptian aircraft and the Israelis routed the Egyptians in the Sinai. By November 2nd the UN General Assembly had called for a ceasefire. The Israelis agreed to accept the ceasefire on November 3, provided Egypt did the same. On November 4th Egypt blockaded the Canal. The next day British and French paratroops landed in Port Said and Port Fuad which caused the Soviets to threaten military reprisals against them. A cease-fire was declared on November 6th and the UN arranged a peacekeeping force for Egypt on November 7th. The force began arriving on November 21st. By the end of December all British and French troops had been evacuated and Israel returned all seized lands except the Gaza Strip. Nasir expelled thousands of French and British citizens living in Egypt and confiscated their property and commercial enterprises. This ended much of what remained of British economic power in Egypt. Israeli withdrawal was complete by March 1957 and the canal was reopened in April.

The Officers Revolt of 1952 inspired al-Hakim to write the play, *al-Aydi a/-Na’ima* (Soft Hands) (1954) a type of writing which al-Hakim referred to as *al-masrah al-hadif*, drama with a message. The message was political and involved social criticism. The dual message of *Soft Hands* was that the social classes should put aside their differences in order to find a way to live together harmoniously. It also proposed that the new Egypt should be based on a solid work ethic and not the wealth that comes from an accident of birth. In 1956 al-Hakim published *al-Safqa* (The Deal) which addressed the exploitation of peasant landowners and was inspired by Nasir’s of land reform laws. Al-Hakim’s post-revolution plays emphasized “work rather than wealth as the basis for social order” and the
positive attitude of work become more evident as a major theme in his works after the 1952 revolt (Badawi 61).

Al-Hakim's early plays, written for the popular theatre of the 'Ukasha brothers, were written in colloquial Arabic. Following this, only five of the pre-1952 plays were written in colloquial Arabic. The use of the classical language in plays such as People of the Cave (1933) and Shahrazad (1934) was a "conscious attempt to raise Egyptian drama to a new level of literary respectability." In the mid-1950s al-Hakim embarked on a language experiment with The Deal (1956). He devised a "third language" mid-way between classical and colloquial Arabic. The aim of his experiment was partly to overcome the unsuitability of the classical language for acting purposes; to create a language which is correct and does not offend the principles of classical Arabic, but which, at the same time, can be articulated by the characters and is not incompatible with their natures or their environments. This "hybrid idiom" met with mixed reactions from critics; from Mohamed Mandur's opinion that the experiment deserved success to another that considered that this new language was "doomed to die like Esperanto" (Starkey 195-199).

In 1956 discussions took place between Nasir and the Syrian Baath Party concerning a union of the two countries. The discussions were interrupted by the Suez crisis. By December 1957 the Syrian Baath Party had drafted a bill for union with Egypt, though they knew that Nasir was opposed to political parties and that this union would probably spell the end of Baath Party. The United Arab Republic was announced on February 1, 1958. Nasir demanded complete integration of both countries, not just federation as the Syrians wanted. Nasir was President of the republic with the 600-member assembly comprised of 400 Egyptians and 200 Syrians. There were two Syrian vice-presidents and two Egyptians.
All political parties were dissolved. The Syrians were dissatisfied with Egypt's domination of the alliance in which the Egyptians took most important administrative posts. By the 1960s there was political unrest in Syria, together with economic unrest brought about by prolonged drought. Nasir made no attempt to placate the Syrians. The UAR was dissolved in September 1961 after a military coup in Syria. In September 1962 an army coup took place in Yemen. By October Nasir had sent troops to support the coup forces against Saudi-backed Imam's forces. He saw the conflict in Yemen as a way of settling the score with the Saudi royal family, who Nasir felt had undermined his union with Syria. Within three months of sending troops to Yemen, Nasir realized that this would require a larger commitment than anticipated. By early 1963 he would begin a four year withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen.

In 1959 al-Hakim was appointed Egyptian Delegate to UNESCO in Paris for one year. During this second stay in Paris, he fell under the influence of the 'Theatre of the Absurd' of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. He became fascinated by absurdist motifs that revealed life as chaotic and perhaps meaningless. He especially appreciated that characters and situations are unrealistic. The normal theatrical conventions of time, place and identity are dispensed with. Meaningless plots and repetitive or irrational dialogue are often used to create dream-like or even nightmarish atmospheres. Al-Hakim called his version of "Theatre of the Absurd" Irrationalism which he defined as "putting the intelligible world in the framework of the unintelligible" and removing the wall that separated them so they could live in harmony (al-Hakim, Plays Vol. Two 329). When discussing Absurdism in the postscript to al-Ta'am li-kull Fam (Food for Every Mouth) al-Hakim summarized his artistic innovation in one word: freedom. All that was of concern to him was "the freedom to treat a
subject without being imprisoned within a framework of any variety . . . the freedom to go in and out through the walls like the afreet (spirits), without any recourse at times to windows or doors" (al-Hakim, Plays Vol. Two 328). He compared writing an Irrationalist play to blending two melodies into a single piece of music. It was for this reason that his friend, Dr. Husayn Fawzi, called his 1960's absurdist drama, The Tree Climber, a 'counterpoint' play.

Some of his most notable successes from this era included al-Sultan al-Ha'ir (The Perplexed Sultan or The Sultan's Dilemma) (1960). This play addresses legitimacy of rule, possibly questioning Nasir's right to the presidency. It also deals with the dilemma of world leaders to solve world problems by the sword or by law, i.e. by military action or negotiation. Ya Tali al-Shajarah (The Tree Climber) an absurdist, experimental play written in 1962, was reminiscent of Ionesco. The play focuses on the failure of a married couple to communicate and the police investigation of the wife's suspected murder. Al-Hakim described The Tree Climber as Irrationalist rather than absurdist and declared that its purpose was "to shake Egyptian society out of its torpor by exposing its loss of direction" (Cachia, Idealism 233).

Other aspects of modernist theatre which influenced al-Hakim at around the same time were the drama and ideas of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht believed that actions on stage should stimulate an audience to identify the world's social problems and to take action to effect change. Al-Hakim believed that Brecht's plays had as their goal the provision of guidance for the conduct of the individual or of society. "They, unlike the other art which conceals its true face and leaves you to discover what it hides, remove their veils and say: 'Yes, I want to preach to you. Will you listen to me?" (al-Hakim, Plays Vol. One 297).

Although Brecht's didactic influence would show up in al-Hakim's later works, al-Hakim rejected Brecht's brand of Marxism which was contrary to the religion and structure of the
Islamic society. In the same way that al-Hakim stripped Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* of “superstitious beliefs that the Arab or Islamic mentality would scorn” he used only those aspects of Brecht’s work that were compatible with his religious and philosophical beliefs. Al-Hakim used his plays, novels and memoirs to speak out against political oppression, hunger and poverty. One of his recurring themes would be how the money spent on military conflict could be put to better use raising the standard of living of the average Egyptian citizen and eliminating hunger. His Brechtian-style drama *al-Ta'am li-kull Fam* (*Food for Every Mouth*) (1963) dealt with the abolition of world hunger. Al-Hakim believed that Egypt should add European ideas such as those of Ionesco and Brecht to its dramatic repertoire “lest its art stagnate while the rest of the world struck out in new directions” (Long 86).

During this period al-Hakim received several state awards. In 1961 he was awarded the First State Prize in Literature; and in 1963 the *Masrah al-Hakim* (al-Hakim Theatre) was founded in Cairo, in recognition of his services to the cause of Arabic Drama. Other state honours awarded to him included election as a member of the Academy of the Arabic Language in 1954, membership of the Supreme Council for Literature and the Arts in 1956, and the Order of the Republic for services to literature in 1958. Clearly, by the 1960s al-Hakim had obtained the status of an important and respected writer in Egypt. This status and fame allowed him to use his plays as a vehicle for influencing social and political change. It also afforded him some protection from the normal punishments associated with breaking the rules of censorship and opposition.

The 1960s saw the publication of some of al-Hakim’s most important works. Al-Hakim’s most well-known autobiographical novel, *Siijn al-‘Umra* (*Prison of Life*), which covers his life up to his departure to Paris to study law, was published in 1964. In 1966 he
published *Bank al-Qalaq (Anxiety Bank)*, a *masriwayah*, part play/part novel, which alternates chapters of prose with scenes of dialogue. This play was a pessimistic statement of the “damage wrought on Egypt by the fifteen years of 1952 Revolution” (Long 160). Al-Hakim wrote the play in an attempt to bring Nasir’s attention to “feelings of fear and fragmentation that had struck Egyptian society before the war of 1967” (al-Hakim, *Consciousness* 38). Although Nasir understood the warning that was implicit in the play, he ignored it. Consequently al-Hakim published *Masir Sirsar (Fate of a Cockroach)* the same year. Act One expresses al-Hakim’s disillusionment with the Nasir regime in the form of an allegory, using cockroaches and ants as characters. “It is indeed astounding that, despite the strict censorship imposed at the time, al-Hakim was permitted to say so much” (Badawi 83). In the human world of Acts Two and Three a wife exerts supremacy over her husband, who identifies with a struggling cockroach. Acts Two and Three exhibit another demonstration of al-Hakim’s misogyny. In 1969 al-Hakim made an attempt at *Commedia dell’arte* with *Harun al-Rashid and Harun al-Rashid*. His last full-length play was *al-Dunya Riwaya Hazliya (Life is a Farce)* 1974, a dream by a bored civil servant. He continued writing after this, but mostly articles which were published in newspapers.

In May 1967 Egypt and Jordan signed a defence pact, which Israel saw as a sign of increased danger of war with the Arab states. UN forces were told to leave and Egypt blockaded the Gulf of Akaba. On June 5th 1967 Israel launched pre-emptive surprise air attacks, virtually destroying the air forces of the Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq. In the ensuing Six-Day War, Israel captured the Gaza Strip, and the Sinai Peninsula. By June 8th Israel had reached the Suez Canal. The Sinai was under Israeli control and the Suez was closed to shipping. On that day, both sides accepted a UN Security Council call for a cease-
By June 11th the Arab defeat was total. The final draft of the Security Council resolution was presented by the British Ambassador, Lord Caradon, on November 22, 1967. It was adopted on the same day. This resolution, numbered 242, established provisions and principles which, it was hoped, would lead to a solution of the conflict. Resolution 242 was to become the basis of Middle East diplomatic efforts in the coming decades.

Al-Hakim’s most controversial publication, listed by the Egyptian newspaper al-Ahram as a memoir, was ‘Awdat al-Wa’i (The Return of Consciousness) (1974). It was a scathing criticism of the Nasir regime that caused great controversy when it was published. It makes an unfavourable comparison between the 1919 and 1952 revolutions and voices al-Hakim’s disappointment with Nasir. Prior to Egypt’s defeat in the 1967 war, Nasir appeared to the Egyptian people on television and, as in previous conflicts, overstated Egypt’s military capabilities. Nasir convinced the people that Egypt was winning the war. Stunned at Egypt’s defeat in the Six Day War, al-Hakim criticized Nasir’s actions that led to the retreat of the Egyptian Army. When the cease-fire was officially announced by the Security Council of the General Assembly, al-Hakim asked himself, "How could Egypt accept that when she is winning?" (al-Hakim, Consciousness, 42). In retrospect, al-Hakim regretted that it did not occur to him that Nasir might be bluffing or that his talk might be bravado. After the defeat Nasir resigned but was reinstated after massive national clamour.

In the late 1960’s Egypt adopted a socialist program to improve the economy which had been depleted as a result of the Suez Crisis and the war in Yemen. Since private investment had been discouraged after the nationalization of privately-owned industry in the early 60s, Egypt borrowed heavily from the USSR, the EEC and the USA to rebuild the infrastructure and the economy. But instead of using the funds for rebuilding, Nasir
diverted the loans to fund the 1967 War and the The War of Attrition, a war fought between Israel and Egypt from 1968 to 1970. It was initiated by Egypt to recapture the Sinai, which had been controlled by Israel since the Six Day War. The war ended with a ceasefire signed between both countries in 1970 with no change in frontiers. On September 28, 1970 President Nasir died of a heart attack, and Vice President Anwar Sadat was elected President of Egypt. He agreed to end the War of Attrition, but almost immediately began planning for a new military engagement with Israel, which resulted in the 1973 Yom Kippur War that would take place three years later.

Al-Hakim continued to be politically active during the next regime. During the student riots in 1973 al-Hakim drafted a petition to President Sadat. This "Declaration by Writers and Men of Letters" protested Sadat's policies and supported the students who were protesting for greater freedom of speech. As a reprimand, al-Hakim was banned from publishing. However, after the outbreak of the October 1973 war he made his peace with the regime by "warmly commending the initiative taken and offering his services in any capacity commensurate with his age" (Cachia, Idealism 227).

Sadat's major achievement was probably the October 1973 war in which the Egyptian army managed to cross the Suez Canal and accomplish a significant victory. After this conflict Sadat became known as "hero of the crossing." The war intensified attempts to establish peace with Israel and restored Egypt's authority over the Sinai. Sadat was re-elected for a second term in 1976. It was the same year that al-Hakim was made Honorary President of the Association of Egyptian Writers.

In November 1977 Sadat became the first Arab leader to make a state visit to Israel. He made a speech before the Knesset on the subject of solving the Arab-Israeli
conflict. In 1978 he took part in the Camp David Peace Agreement, for which he earned the Nobel Peace Prize jointly with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The Camp David accord was unpopular with other Arab countries that relied on Egypt, as the most powerful Arab country, to represent their case more strongly. They felt that Sadat had betrayed all hopes of pan-Arabism and regaining Palestine. In 1979 Egypt was suspended from the Arab League until 1989. In September 1981 Sadat "cracked-down" on intellectuals and activists, imprisoning almost 1,600 people. The following month Sadat was assassinated by army officers during celebrations on October 6, 1981. The assassins were members of Egypt’s Islamic Jihad who were opposed to the peace agreement with Israel and the September crackdown.

The last political regime of al-Hakim’s lifetime was that of Hosney Mubarak, who was declared Head of State on October 14, 1981 upon the assassination of Sadat. Taking over as president, he moved quickly to suppress an Islamic uprising and jailed over 2,500 members of militant Islamic groups. Mubarak retained many of Sadat’s foreign and domestic policies, including the Camp David accord and the peace treaty with Israel. He tried to mend relations with Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and PLO leader Yasir Arafat who had all criticized Egypt for the treaty with Israel. Throughout the 1980s Mubarak increased affordable housing, clothing, furniture, and medicine for Egyptian citizens. He won re-election to a second six-year term, although the validity of the election result was suspect. No other candidates are allowed to oppose the President due to a clause in the Egyptian constitution. Probably Mubarak’s major achievement during that era was the liberation of all Egyptian lands, as per the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement. Mubarak has continued the emergency law which has been in effect since Sadat’s assassination in 1981.
He uses this law, which he justifies as prevention of terrorism, to continue his crack-down on the Muslim Brotherhood. He has also continued to limit free discussion of his policies and to apply strict censorship to all forms of media.

Tawfiq al-Hakim died on July 26, 1987, aged 88. In effect, little has changed over the three regimes in which al-Hakim wrote his plays, novels, memoirs, and newspaper articles. The topics, themes and messages of his writings are still as valid today as when they were first published. The conflicts between the Arabs and the Israelis persist. Corruption still exists in the bureaucracy as does vote-rigging in the elections. The population is still growing, thus contributing to the problems of and poverty and hunger. The Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic movements still challenge the legality of the government. The regimes were, and continue to be, repressive. For journalists, novelists, playwrights, poets and all artists who express their political opinions through their art, censorship has been a defining condition of all three regimes. In the past these writers found ways to circumvent this oppression by using allegory and satire to voice their opinions without reprisal. Current writers continue in al-Hakim's footsteps.
CHAPTER 3

THE MAJOR LITERARY WORKS OF TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM

Tawfiq Hussein has secured a permanent place in the history of Arabic literature. His writing reveals an eclectic imagination and a variety of styles. In his works, both plays and novels, al-Hakim draws upon many sources, including Islam, the Bible, Egyptian lore, and both modern and classic European culture. The significant publications of his writing career, which utilize these sources, cover all genres from short stories to plays, novels to memoirs and autobiographies. Some of these works have been translated into English. Accordingly, I wish to provide an overview on the key works which characterize the definitive topics and themes of al-Hakim’s imagination. These works also provide a needed perspective on his political ideas, which often are presented in implicit and symbolic ways. These works, therefore, provide a necessary foundation for understanding a major later work, Fate of a Cockroach. This play will provide the focus of my study, a touchstone for his political ideas and ethical values.

The works identified in this chapter are representative of al-Hakim’s writings, published from 1927 to 1998, and include a series of short stories In the Tavern of Life and other Stories, his first published play Ahl al-Kahf (People of the Cave), his first adaptation of a Greek tragedy for an Islamic audience al-Malik Udib (King Oedipus), his first novel
'Awdat al-Ruh (Return of the Spirit), his first experimental play, Ya Tali’ al-Shajarah (The Tree Climber), and his political memoir, a harsh denunciation of the policies of Gamal Abdul Nasir, 'Awdat al-Wawi (The Return of Consciousness).

IN THE TAVERN OF LIFE AND OTHER STORIES, 1998

The first collection of al-Hakim's short stories to be published in English was In the Tavern of Life and Other Stories (1998). It comprises a series of short stories which were previously published in other collections, between 1927 and 1984, such as Qisas Tawfiq al-Hakim (Stories of Tawfiq al-Hakim), a two-volume set published in 1949, and Arini Allah (Show Me God), published in 1953. Little attention has been paid to al-Hakim's short stories by scholars. I believe they deserve to be considered here. They provide brief glimpses of al-Hakim's knowledge and literary skills that are evident in his other works. They reveal a number of his artistic traits, including his ability to describe Egyptian society; methods of characterization; his sense of wit and humour which is apparent in their dialogue; his use of animal symbolism; his approach to moral issues such as suicide, greed, and adultery; his approach to philosophical and religious issues such as love, luck, the birth of ideas, looking for God, and reincarnation; and his sense of justice and knowledge of the legal system.

The characters in al-Hakim's short stories are realistic, mythical, fantastic and science-fictional. Al-Hakim's stories are inspired by both his own and European drama, culture and folklore, and by Egyptian society. He is also inspired by philosophy and psychology. The stories range from memoirs to science fiction, and from folklore to fantasy. The realistic characters, such as the entertainers on the train in The Artistes, are people one might meet in Cairo, as I know from my own travels there. In the Middle East I have most surely met such a woman as Nagiya who scolds Hajj Muhammad for merely
pretending to keep the Ramadan fast. The literary and folklore characters, such as Princess Priska, from *Visiting the Angry Princess*, and Shahrazad, from *By the Marble Basin*, are drawn from al-Hakim’s own plays. Al-Hakim visits Princess Priska and Shahrazad and debates issues from their lives as portrayed in his works. Al-Hakim declares it is futile to debate with Priska as she is a woman in love; in his conversation with Shahrazad he discovers that there is only one reality - "that none of us is real." In a reminiscence of an alpine trip, *The Radium of Happiness*, al-Hakim introduces a beautiful waitress with whom he discusses the work of Ibn Abd Rabbih.¹ In *The Unknown Lover*, the narrator tells of a second beautiful woman who is having an affair with an unknown man, and how he narrowly escapes the clutches of her angry husband. In *The Year One Million*, a science-fiction fantasy, describes a future society which has eradicated death. Its citizens have evolved, body and soul. Amongst the characters of al-Hakim’s fantasy worlds are a talking donkey in *My Donkey and Hypocrisy* and ethical birds in *Confederation of Sparrows*. The donkey debates with man whether his species should gouge out their physical eyes and look with eyes of self-interest if they want to learn from man about hypocrisy. The donkey questions whether his species will accept being turned into a mass of blind asses and is told by man, "why not, we human beings have."

Al-Hakim considered his short stories a good introduction to his thought. He praised the modern short story for its ‘condensation and concentration.’ He believed that modern, international taste may eventually be reconciled through the short story to the

¹ Ibn Abd Rabbih (860-940) was an Arab poet with a great reputation for learning and eloquence. More widely known than his poetry is his great anthology, *Iqd al-Farid* (*The Precious Necklace*).
medieval Arab taste for elegant abbreviation in verbal expression” (Hutchins, Readers’ Guide 129).

In this collection of short stories death is a recurrent motif which al-Hakim treats in diverse ways. Muhammad al-Sayyid ‘Id, one of the only Egyptian critics of al-Hakim’s short stories, considered al-Hakim to be a pioneer in the field of short-story writing. He pointed out that, “death - most frequently accidental death - occurs in several stories. Since death may be a chance occurrence, salvation from death can be based on chance too” (qtd. in Hutchins, Readers’ Guide 125). In three of the stories, the protagonists are not looking for salvation from death; in fact they welcome death. The reader is left to decide if it is chance that decides their destiny or divine intervention.

The title story of the collection, In the Tavern of Life, refers to the “Tavern of the World,” in which there are three waiters, Love, a boy of five, Satan, a man of forty, and Death, an ageless man. Death is the only waiter the narrator is not willing to approach. Love is the only waiter he allows to serve him. Love tells the narrator not to order anything from him, especially ice. Love cannot bring him ice. He agrees. A year later the narrator returns to the bar, calling for ice. Love tricks him and brings fire instead of wine. Ice is not the responsibility of Love, the narrator should ask the tavern keeper, or another waiter. The tavern keeper sends Satan to the narrator, but ice is not his responsibility either. Death approaches; ice is his responsibility. But the narrator calls to the tavern keeper to keep this hideous creature away from him. Everything is tolerable except Death.

This story suggests that what we desire is not always what it seems, and may come at a price we are not prepared to pay. The terms of a deal are not always worth it, even though they may have been set out from the beginning. Love may tempt us with a hot
romance but sometimes the flame burns. Love can hurt so much that we want to put out the fire. Rejected love can create a desire for Vengeance, which only makes life worse. Once we have decided not to interact with Love again, Death seems to be the way to cure the problem, but is it worth it? No, Death is so ugly we reject it.

In *The World's a Stage* al-Hakim addresses the topic of reincarnation. He likens our entrances to and exits from life to the stage, with the Angel operating as a master stage manager. The number of souls entering and exiting the Earth is finite, as is the numbers of actors in a repertory company, so as souls exit from Earth, souls must be sent back. When a soul dies and arrives before the Angel, it is sent to the Sea of Forgetfulness to remove all traces of its present "role." When it emerges from the sea as a "blank slate," it appears before the Angel to be assigned a new acting role so that it can be returned to Earth. However, as the story opens the Angel has a problem. A successful, rich surgeon arrives. He argues with the Angel about reassignment because he wants to go back to be with his wife. While the Angel is explaining the rules, another soul arrives - it is the doctor's wife; distraught at her husband's death, she cannot stay on Earth without him and commits suicide. The Angel tells them they must go to the Sea of Forgetfulness. They ask one favour, that when they are reassigned, they be kept together. Although such an assignment is complicated the Angel agrees. In their new lives the couple lives in different societies, but they eventually meet on a plane, he as the pilot, she as a passenger. After some time they become romantically involved and marry. But in time their paths diverge. Although they have two children, they never revive the closeness of the first years of their marriage. She likes parties, and meets a "friend"; her husband catches them together one evening,
her, and kills himself. Two violently arguing souls arrive before the Angel. The story ends with the husband pleading with the Angel to be separated from his wife.

The couple wanted to return to Earth together because of their strong love for each other during their first roles. They believed they could continue this relationship, even in new bodies. However, the two souls who returned to Earth were merely shells, with no memories of this great love and their prior life together. Why did the Angel appear to agree to break his own rules? Why did he send them back to reunite? Because this pairing ended in such a disastrous way, the reader may wonder what the Angel’s intentions really were in the reassignment. Who should have been the pilot’s companion; who should been the wife’s companion, and what should their lives have been like?

Islam does not accept the theory of reincarnation; however, the ancient Egyptian religions did believe in life after death, as a continuation of the individual’s existence and not reincarnation of a soul with a new identity. If we are to believe that reincarnation is the reuse of souls in new bodies, without any knowledge of prior life, then that is what the Angel did. Although the two people did meet again they had no recollection of a prior love. It is ironic that they ended up in a relationship the exact opposite of that which they had requested. Perhaps the angel was playing a joke on them. One moral of this story is to be careful what one wishes for.

The scene of I’m Death opens on the attempted suicide of a young man at the beach at Sidi Bish. He is saved by a young woman, and an investigation of his crime is undertaken by the District Attorney’s office. When asked for his motive, the young man will not provide one, but questions what right the young woman had to prevent him. She compares saving him to picking up a dropped handkerchief, but he tells her if the handkerchief had
been discarded she should have left it where it was. The young man describes suicide as a desire to relocate from one world to another and likens it to vacationers relocating from Cairo to Alexandria. The District Attorney, ever the bureaucrat, reminds the young man that he doesn't have the appropriate documentation and asks him, “do you imagine the divine plan to be such anarchy that you can voyage from one world to another on a whim, as a stowaway?” The young man accepts being branded a stowaway but remains firm about discussing his motives. The attorney reminds him that “the reason for travel is always demanded in requests for emigration or resident alien status. So there is all the more need for this in a case of migration from one world to another.” The young man tells the attorney to write temporary insanity as the cause. The case is closed and the young man leaves the court. The young woman follows him to try to make peace with him. Just in time, she pulls him from in front of the wheels of an enormous truck. “As long as you’re beside me, I’ll never meet death face-to-face,” he tells her. All he wants to do is escape from her and die. She agrees to correct her mistake. She will go back to the beach with him and this time when he plunges into the water, she won’t prevent him. In fact, she will deliver him to death. When they arrive at the beach, she wants to know his motive before he kills himself. He doesn’t reply so she makes the assumption that his motive is tied to a woman. He tells her he simply wants to exit life, nothing more, nothing less. He is concerned she will try to save him again, but she promises she won’t. He questions the time for his suicide, which appears to have become important. She sits, applying her make-up, and laughs at him. He seems to be reconsidering his decision, but, no, he will never see life as anything but ridiculous and ugly, like the distorting mirror of an amusement park. Her solution is for him to partake of some inane pursuits, such as eating roasted corn, or marrying a woman who he
can bother and who will pester him. She would be prepared to make such a sacrifice for the sake of his health. Suddenly he leaps into the water to drown himself. Once again, she rescues him. As he regains consciousness she asks, “Don’t you long for death’s embrace?” When he answers, “yes,” she tells him, “I’m Death.”

This story poses many questions. In what way is the young woman Death? Is she really Death personified? Must the young man embrace her until she chooses when and where he should leave this world? Or is she giving him the option to live by taking Death’s place, so he can embrace her in Death’s stead? Or is he really dead after all; having justified to her why he wants to die, is he now eligible for the visa to transcend through death to the next world and, as Death, she is there to receive him?

Although it is common human trait to want to “live forever,” the lifestyle in In the Year One Million does not make it appear as appealing as it initially would seem. In an anonymous futuristic society set in One Million AD, disease is extinct and death has been exterminated. There are no live births, since marriage for the procreation of children has been abandoned. Children are now produced by laboratory culture. When the natural attraction between the sexes was eradicated, so was love. With the eradication of love, society also lost poetry and art.

The story opens during the summer when a geologist makes an amazing discovery in a cave, a 600,000-year-old skull. He shows it to a chemist and questions what has separated it from its flesh. He wonders about the whereabouts of the rest of the body. Because the geologist begins to ponder the concepts of “being” and “non-being” he is reported to “The Secretariat” by the chemist. When summoned by “The Secretariat,” he offers to them his theory of “non-being” (which he now terms “death”). They explain the skull by suggesting
that prehistoric people prefabricated skeletons and then breathed life into them. The skull is obviously a draft version that was not completed. "The Secretariat" warns him not to perpetrate a hoax for fear of confusing simple people.

The geologist then visits a friend who eons ago would have been referred to as female. All humans are now single gender. Their conversation takes place telepathically because they have no mouths. Since Man was the only species to survive the atomic wars, humans have moved to Earth's interior and over thousands of years have devolved. Life-giving nutrients are inhaled from gases released into the home; digestive juices are no longer required as the stomach has contracted, there is no requirement for a mouth or teeth. The geologist and his friend have a bond of trust so he tells her his theory. She believes his theory although she does not understand it. He believes something must come after existence, it must have an end. He calls it "death."

His ideas spread throughout the community and believers consider him to be a Prophet. However, there is one major hurdle to acceptance; doubters want to see something living die. For the first time in more than a million years, "consciousness of the existence of a supreme god returns to manifest itself once more in the human soul." The Prophet receives omnipotent help. A giant meteor falls, crushing a man. The government wants to "restore" the man's head but the Prophet's followers refuse to give up the body and a civil riot ensues. The government triumphs and the Prophet is arrested. A trial takes place and the judgement against the Prophet is that he must receive a head transplant. His brain is zapped but his message survives; the people have seen "death." During the next 1,000 years the Prophet's message continues. Concepts of a supreme God and heavenly repose are "classified." The religious community breaks into the laboratories and smashes
the equipment which provides the nutritive gases to the citizenry. Disease begins to return. Worshippers take control of an independent region and reject the god of science, leaving their destinies to God and nature. Over the next hundreds of thousands of years death reappears and with it fear, and a desire to preserve humanity. The human libido returns and the reproductive laboratories disappear. The species splits into male and female genders once more. Finally love reappears, and it is accompanied by art and poetry.

In the future of this short story, Mankind had evolved to a state where death was no longer an option. The purpose of existence was to provide brain power to support government objectives. There was no birth, no death, no love, no art, no poetry, nothing to cause the mind to deviate. Mankind needs something to look forward to. Living forever deprives him of that. Man needs a purpose to exist other than mere existence. Without love, art, poetry, the citizens became just objects being kept alive by their government, for eons on end. Ultimately, when the citizens revolted and set off a chain of events that would cause mankind to devolve to its prior state, death, fear and disease returned. But along with devolution came the concepts that made life valuable, enjoyable, and interesting. Was it worth it? Or should man accept progress regardless of the outcome?

The protagonist in *A Killer Confessed* is a young man being tried for murder who refuses to mount a defence. As the prosecutor demands the death penalty, he tells the court, "The defendant has admitted his guilt. He planned this crime meticulously and executed it expertly." Apparently the defendant has, with premeditation, "murdered a renowned political figure by firing a revolver at the victim, while aboard an aircraft en route from Alexandria to Cairo, striking him in the chest." The only statement from the defendant is, "I killed deliberately. I deserve to die on the gallows. So hurry up with it."
Don't waste my time or yours with futile exercises." Since the defendant has not retained a lawyer the court has appointed one for him. The defendant sleeps through most of the trial but at one point he does ask the judge if the trial can be sped up. When the prosecution is completed, the defending attorney rises and tells the court how difficult his task is because he client treats him as an enemy. He has no plan to present a defence; he will, instead, tell the story of the events as they happened.

The attorney then tells the court the sad story of the circumstance that lead to the young man's current predicament. A few years ago, while a student at the Faculty of Arts, the defendant fell in love with a fellow-student. He planned to ask her family for her hand in marriage when he found a good position. They passed their exams and then she contracted tuberculosis. With her family's approval, they became engaged. She was admitted to a sanatorium in Cairo and he took extra work to pay for her treatment. The attorney reads some of his letters to her, including one in which he wrote that he would follow her in death when she died. When she was near death, her family sent him a telegram to come. He took his revolver from his desk and took the plane from Alexandria so he would reach Cairo in time. There was only one other passenger on the plane. The plane took off and suddenly the defendant heard the young woman's voice calling his name and felt a tremor through his body as he saw an aura pass through the cabin. It was at this moment that he knew she had died. The defendant took out his revolver, aimed it at his own head, and pulled the trigger. Just at that moment, however, the plane swerved, altering the course of the bullet; the other passenger was hit instead of the defendant. The defendant rushed to help the wounded man but it was too late. The radio officer entered the cabin
when he heard the shot, saw the defendant with the revolver and assumed he had murdered the passenger.

Confessing to premeditated murder provides the defendant with the same end result. He can die and join his beloved. The attorney asks the judge to re-open the case of a “wounded heart whose only wish now is to join his beloved in heaven.” The stunned silence is broken by screams from the defendant, "This attorney is a liar, a prevaricator. Everything he's said has been lies and prevarications. I'm the killer. I committed premeditated murder. Premeditated! Kill me. Kill me." And he breaks down in sobs.

Love transcending the grave is a recurrent theme for al-Hakim. When faced with the loss of the one truly great love of his life, the young man opted to die rather than live without her. The connection between the couple was so strong that the young man felt her spirit passing and he felt the overwhelming desire to follow her. Robbed of the opportunity to commit suicide, to die by his own hand, he saw a simple solution to his dilemma by confessing to a capital crime he did not intend to commit. His love was so strong that he was prepared to do anything to be with his beloved and his corporal body was of no importance, as long as their spirits could spend eternity together.

In these stories which address the various aspects of death, al-Hakim provides us with some conditions in which all the character must choose between life and death and rationalize their desire to take that step in either direction. Do they take this step voluntarily or does chance or divine intervention control the outcome?

**AHL AL-KAHF (PEOPLE OF THE CAVE), 1933**

*Ahlu al-Kahf (The People of the Cave),* a play which al-Hakim began writing while he was in Paris, was published in 1933. “He had four versions in draft and the final one was
begun and completed in Egypt in 1928" (Long 21). The English translation was published in 1994 by Elias Modern Publish House in Cairo. *Surat al-Kahf* (The Cave) is the 18th surah of the Qur’an. It tells the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, Christians who are persecuted during the reign of Emperor Decius (249-51) who flee to a cave and fall into a deep, lengthy sleep of 309 years. When they awake, they find themselves in a new age in which Christians are no longer persecuted. Tawfiq al-Hakim turns this legend into the four-act play, *The People of the Cave*. In the *Introduction to King Oedipus* al-Hakim claims that his aim in composing the Sleepers of Ephesus was:

> [T]o introduce the element of tragedy in an Arab and Islamic subject. This was tragedy in its ancient Greek meaning which I have retained: the conflict between man and the unseen forces beyond man. I desired my source to be not the legends of Greece but the Qur’an. My aim was not simply to take a story from the Holy Book and put it in the dramatic mold. The goal was rather to look at our Islamic legends with the eye of Greek tragedy. It was to effect this intermarriage between the two mentalities and literatures. (al-Hakim, *Plays Vol. One* 283)

When asked by a journalist shortly after the publication why he had used the Qur’anic legend he cited the desire to write an Egyptian tragedy on an Egyptian basis. He claimed that the basis of Greek tragedy was the struggle between ‘man’ and ‘fate.’ He contrasted this to Egyptian tragedy, which was based on the struggle between ‘man’ and ‘time’. “With the Greeks it is ‘fate’ and ‘destiny’; with the Egyptians it is ‘time’ and ‘space’” (Starkey 38). When *The People Of The Cave* was published in 1933, al-Hakim was hailed as an important figure in Arab and Egyptian literature. It was al-Hakim’s first published work and his use of a Qur’anic topic was unprecedented. His friend and colleague, Taha Husayn, was effusive about his publication, writing in the newspaper, *Ar-Risala*: “No Arab literary intellectual must be ignorant of this unprecedented literary work. Tawfiq al-Hakim has
made a new departure in Arabic literature; there can be no doubt about this" (Long 25). Taha Husayn's criticized al-Hakim for "shocking errors in language" and "ugly mistakes" in grammar and morphology which he asked al-Hakim to correct before the next reprint. Husayn volunteered to correct the text for al-Hakim but his offer was ignored. Al-Hakim corrected the text as best he could himself (Long 25). The play enjoyed success initially, going through two editions in 1933. Although al-Hakim did not originally intend the play to be produced, it was chosen in December 1935 as the inaugural production of the newly founded al-Firqah al-Qawmiyah (the National Company). Unfortunately the production was not a success, perhaps because Egyptian audiences were not used to such cerebral entertainment. They preferred farces and melodramas. They "found the Arabic equivalent of a Greek tragedy too demanding for them with its lofty language, somewhat remote incidents and characterization and, above all, lack of physical action" (Long 33).

Act One of the play introduces Mishlinya and Marnush, two Christian ministers who are being persecuted by King Dikyanos for their religious beliefs. Mishlinya is secretly engaged to the King's daughter, Priska; Marnush has a wife and young son. Thanks to Priska's warning, the two young men are able to flee from the city. En route they meet a shepherd, Yamlikha, and his dog Qitmir, who takes them to safety in a nearby cave. Safe in their surroundings, the three men sleep for the night. On waking the following morning they decide to send Yamlikha to the town to purchase food, and to reassure Marnush's family that he is safe. Yamlikha returns, having met a hunter who is amazed by his coins from the reign of Dikyanos. A din from outside the cave announces the arrival of townspeople.

In Act Two, the scene opens on the royal palace. Three hundred years have elapsed since Act One. Princess Priska is with her tutor, Gallias. Priska is the great, great grand-
niece of Mishlinya's Priska, and resembles her aunt closely. She reports having had a strange dream the previous night in which she was buried alive. The King arrives to announce the discovery of the three men in the cave. Noise is heard outside; the people have brought the men to the palace. The three men are identified as the long-awaited Christians who fled the persecution of Dikyanos over three hundred years ago and have now been designated as saints. Gallias reminds the king of a similar story in Japanese history, and suggests that the story of resurrection is common to all cultures. The three men react in different ways. Yamlikha asks if he may check on his sheep. Permission granted, he leaves but returns later in the act, having realized that he has awoken in a different era. He has no family left and his sheep are gone. He is afraid and the townspeople are afraid of him. Even the dogs are afraid of Qitmir. Act Two ends with Yamlikha's decision to return to the cave with his dog.

In Act Three Marnush fails to believe Yamlikha. He shaves, changes his clothes and goes out to find his family. He soon returns because he discovers that his family home has gone and he sees the tomb of his son who died at the age of sixty. There is no place for Marnush here in this world anymore. He believes in the 300-year gap now, so he returns to the cave to join Yamlikha and Qitmir. Mishlinya's case is different. He also shaves and enjoys getting dressed in modern clothes. He sees Princess Priska and is so convinced that she is his Priska that he scares her, although she is a little flattered. He sees the gold cross she is wearing and recognizes it as the one he gave to his Priska. He asks who the old man is with her and she tells him it is her father, the King. She realizes that Mishlinya has mistaken her for his Priska and tries to explain. She tells him the legend that his Priska remained faithful to him, waiting for his return till she died aged fifty. He becomes upset.
and leaves. When Mishlinya returns Priska reminds him that they are not a suitable match because of their age difference so he, like his two friends, returns to the cave.

The final act takes place in the cave one month later. The three men are weak now from lack of food. Yamlikha, the first to die, admits he doesn't know whether what has happened to them is dream or reality. Marnush dies in despair because his heart had died; he dies a pagan, no longer believing in the resurrection. Mishlinya calls on God to witness his faith. Priska enters with Gallias. She has suggested that the King should build a temple over the cave, sealing the entrance. She sees Mishlinya and tells him she loves him, that the heart is stronger than time. Her declaration makes him want to live, but, alas, it is too late and he, too, dies. Priska cries for the happiness she has missed. Gallias doesn't understand; she tells him it is something that must be felt, not explained. So she relates the Japanese story of Orashima, the sea-turtle and the Sea-King's daughter. A noise is heard outside as the King's entourage approaches. Priska hides. Gallias persuades the King to leave spades inside the cave so the Saints might dig themselves out if they ever wake again. He agrees and leaves. Priska bids farewell to Gallias and tells him to leave. She accepts this is her destiny, her dream come true. She insists that he tell the people her story. He will tell the people that she is a Saint. No, her story must be that she is a woman in love.

One of the main conflicts in the play is the struggle between man and time. The saints cannot reconcile themselves to the interval of three hundred years. Time had changed the world as they know it, and the current-day world offers so many overwhelming challenges that each of the three men give up the desire to live and return to the safety of the cave. They are faced with the predicament that they are not allowed to go back in time, only forward. Time is controlling their environment and their destiny. Al-Hakim points out
that there is another conflict in the play too, one between fact and truth. It is a fact that Priska and Mishliniya love each other, but the truth is that he has come from a time where he is her great-great-great aunt’s fiancé. This conflict is their tragedy (Hutchins, Reader’s Guide 102). Time has placed the saint and the princess into a quandary that cannot be reconciled. It has created a situation where they can never have a lasting romance.

Mishliniya’s final words, ”Our time is past; now we are the property of history. We wanted to return to time, but history is taking its vengeance” may refer to the current Egyptian political situation in the 1930s “as the country awoke from centuries of stagnation to face the challenge of the 20th century and Western civilization” (Starkey 38).

Badawi is not necessarily in agreement with Starkey. He points out that these are not, in fact, Mishliniya’s last words in the play and he dies convinced that love will continue beyond the grave and over time, and that his experience has been real, not a dream. (Badawi 35). Other political commentators saw al-Hakim’s message as an attempt to “lift the people of Egypt out of their disastrous habit of dwelling in the past” (Badawi 34).

Love is a strong theme throughout the play, particularly the endurance of love beyond the grave. It provides a testimony to true love and the endurance of a woman who waited in vain for fifty years for her true love to return. But time has created a new reality for Mishliniya and true love for one person cannot easily be transferred to another. Love will not conform to his requirements. He cannot expect the current-day Priska to love him just because she looks like his fiancé. This is a superficial relationship based upon what he desires and not reality. But love can conquer all things as eventually the princess realizes that she can love the saint, however futile that love turns out to be. Emphasis is placed on the universal quality of love as the princess tells the Japanese love story. Hutchins
discusses the romance between Mishlinya and Priska which is at the centre of this play and refers to *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. "Consciously or not, he followed Edward Gibbon's suggestion in that the legend of the Seven Sleepers ‘would furnish the pleasing subject of a philosophical romance.’" (Hutchins, Reader’s Guide 94).

Long felt it was important to have a worthwhile comment on the play’s basis in Christianity and asked al-Hakim’s opinion on the subject. “Given that Egypt has progressed from paganism to Islam via Christianity it was no coincidence that I should have written The Cavemen (sic) in a Christian context.” Al-Hakim’s use of many Christian references in his short stories, and the numerous uses of Biblical and Christian material in his writing, led Long to suggest that “al-Hakim’s character and his Paris sojourn disposed him to regard Islam and Christianity as almost equally valid versions of the religious truth” (Long 36).

Al-Hakim’s exposure to Western culture and its myriad of religions allowed him to expand the resources from which he drew upon when writing his works. This prevented him from being constrained by one influence and gave him the ability to take advantage of multiple religious viewpoints.

The political undertones of *People of the Cave* foreshadow *Fate of a Cockroach*. The three saints have escaped from the oppressive regime of Emperor Decius and have awakened from a sleep of three hundred years. The political message is that the Egyptians must wake from their “suspended sleep” under the rule of the Ottomans and must take control of their lives again. If the cockroaches are to defeat their enemies, they can no longer be bound by the past, they must not fear change. They must embrace it and assume their new identities. The people of Egypt need to wake up, look around, see what is going on and not be tied to their past.
One of al-Hakim's recurring themes is of the struggle of man versus time. This is seen in *People of the Cave* as the saints realize that time is controlling their environment and their destiny. They are faced with the predicament that they are not allowed to go back in time to where they came from, only forward.

**AL-MALIK UDIB (KING OEDIPUS), 1949**

Al-Hakim wrote *al-Malik Udib (King Oedipus)* in 1944 and described it as a Greek tragedy through Muslim eyes. In the introduction to the play al-Hakim asks, "What is the Greek spirit of tragedy?" He answers, "it is that tragedy springs from a religious feeling" and explains what that means for him. "The entire substance of tragedy is that it is a struggle, manifest or hidden between man and the divine forces dominating existence. It is the struggle of man with something greater than man and above man. The foundation of true tragedy in my opinion is man's sense that he is not alone in existence" (al-Hakim, *Plays Vol. One* 281). What concerned al-Hakim as a Muslim was that his religious belief refused "the idea of God planning injuries for man in advance for no purpose or offense" (al-Hakim, *Plays Vol. One* 291). Predestination has not found acceptance with most important Muslim philosophers. For al-Hakim the conflict in Oedipus was not "with arrogant gods who deal brutally with an innocent person they have selected to pursue" but rather a conflict between the wills of God and man. In *King Oedipus* al-Hakim introduced many changes into Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. He had to strip away what he considered the "superstitious beliefs that the Arab or Islamic mentality would scorn" (al-Hakim, *Plays Vol. One* 288).

Al-Hakim's opening scene introduces a devoted family. Oedipus is sitting with his wife, Jocasta, his daughter, Antigone, and his other children. This scene is used to provide exposition of Oedipus' life to date. Al-Hakim regretted having to violate the principle of
unity of time and place to include this scene but he felt that "the family atmosphere of the life of Oedipus was something which ought not to be neglected" (al-Hakim, Plays Vol. One 288). Oedipus tells his family the story of the Sphinx. However, it soon becomes apparent that the Sphinx was merely a lion dreamed up by Teiresias for his own political ends. Having defeated the imaginary Sphinx, Teiresias manipulated Oedipus onto the throne of Thebes. Oedipus's character flaw is his insatiable search for the truth. He left Corinth when he discovered that he was adopted, determined to discover the true facts of his birth.

Oedipus character is contradictory, however, since his seventeen-year reign has been based on a lie, the defeat of the imaginary Sphinx. It was Teiresias who suggested to Laius that he get rid of Oedipus when he was a baby. While Creon has been sent to Delphi to consult the Oracle, Teiresias arrives and Oedipus threatens to expose his political maneuverings of the past seventeen years, declaring that he is prepared to forfeit his throne for the truth. Teiresias warns him against playing with the truth. The act closes with Creon returning from Delphi and accusing Oedipus of Laius' murder. Creon and his companions are accused of conspiracy and offered death or exile.

In Act Two the conspirators stand trial. Creon reveals the word of the Oracle, accusing Oedipus of Laius' murder and now the play follows Sophacles' version closely as Laius' killer and Oedipus' marriage to his mother are revealed. The final act returns to al-Hakim's analysis of the story. Jocasta, overwhelmed by the evil of their marriage and procreation cannot accept that she should continue living. Oedipus tries to persuade her that love can conquer all, but despite this she kills herself and Oedipus casts out his eyes in despair. In an attempt to mitigate the blame Oedipus confronts Teiresis, who merely laughs. Teiresias is labelled the "villain of the piece" but Oedipus must bear the brunt of
the punishment. The play ends as it began; Antigone shows her devotion to Oedipus as she accompanies him into exile.

In a paper delivered to the Annual Meeting of the American Philological Association entitled "Oedipus, King of Thebes (Egypt): Adaptations by Egyptian Playwrights Tawfiq al-Hakim and Ali Salem," John H. Starks, Jr.'s abstract summed up the revisionist features to al-Hakim's play.

No Greek fatalism presenting gods as unjust plotters against man; less humanistic centering on Oedipus the mystery-solver; no fabulous Sphinx, just a propagandized lion. Al-Hakim's Tiresias is the political conspirator that Sophocles' Oedipus suspects. His Oedipus ignores facts and consequences for others, unconcerned by his sin, but rather, fixated on his personal quest for identity and intellectual pursuit of 'truth'. Oedipus here is a devoted family man driven to self-destruction, not by awareness of culpability, but by the suicide of his love. Oedipus fails by scoffing, along with Tiresias and Jocasta, at the gods' clear signs of doom.

In al-Hakim's adaptation, no mention is made of prophesies, predestination or divine interference. By re-working Sophocles' Greek tragedy to fit in with Islamic sensibilities, al-Hakim has discarded the element of fate almost completely. But, as previously mentioned, he defines the difference between Greek and Egyptian tragedy as the struggle between man and fate versus the struggle between man and time. Unfortunately Oedipus failed in his struggle with time. By giving in to his insatiable desire for the truth, he has destroyed everything he holds dear, his wife, his family, his home, his throne, his people, and his good name.

Scholars were ambivalent in their response to al-Hakim's adaptation. Comments and criticism ranged from support of the concept of an Islamic version to disapproval of the interpretation. Egyptian critic Ahmed Etman observed "the legend of Oedipus entranced both classic and modern authors, and al-Hakim endeavoured deliberately and successfully to
marry Greek and Arab literature by building his play on the foundation of Sophocles’s play” (qtd. in Hutchins, Reader’s Guide 173). Nevertheless, Etman criticized al-Hakim’s attempt to reconstruct Oedipus as a Muslim.

Starkey believes that problems remain with al-Hakim’s reinterpretation and that the play closes with “many questions of guilt and responsibility unanswered. In its suggestion that Oedipus deliberately ignores the past, al-Hakim’s interpretation seems positively grotesque; but the play remains an important statement of the author’s views on the relationship between feeling and reason” (Starkey 32). Oedipus has problems accepting his guilt and deciding which aspects of truth he is prepared to accept. On the one hand he left Corinth to find out the truth about his origins; on the other hand his life as King of Thebes for the past seventeen years has been based on a lie. When Oedipus discovers the truth about his murder of Laius and his marriage to his mother, he attempts to put most of the blame on Teiresias. Teiresias feels no guilt nor takes responsibility. He merely laughs at Oedipus. At the end of the play Oedipus is prepared, yet again, to pick and choose which truths he acts upon. He decides he can put aside murder and incest and continue with his marriage. He tells Jocasta, “We are capable of recovering. Rise with me. Let’s put our fingers in our ears and live in actuality.” It is left to Jocasta to feel the guilt and take the responsibility when she commits suicide.

Badawi felt that much of the subtlety of Sophocles’ original had been lost in all al-Hakim’s changes. He stresses where al-Hakim lays the blame for the tragedy, not with “the envy of the gods’ but ‘the nature of Oedipus’s character with his passion for investigation into the origin of things’ and his obsessive search for the truth.” But it may also be “the action of Teiresias who set himself up as a god, pitting his will against that of
the heavens, and interfering with the normal course of events" (Badawi, 48/49). If al-Hakim does lay the blame for the tragedy with Oedipus’s obsessive search for the truth, then perhaps al-Hakim did not remove all traces of fate from his adaptation after all. If Oedipus had not been so obsessed with discovering the true identity of his parentage, he would never had left Corinth and met Laius along the way. He would never have murdered his father, married his mother and unleashed the subsequent chain of events that led to his downfall.

Al-Hakim uses the theme of the struggle of man versus time again in *King Oedipus* to show that Oedipus runs out of time and he loses all he holds dear in this life. Nasir didn’t listen to the message of *Anxiety Bank* which warned him that time was running out for him too. The political message of *Fate of a Cockroach* was that if he didn’t take action to change his programs and policies time would run out for the Egyptian people. It did; they were embroiled in yet another war with the Israelis in 1967. Time also ran out for Nasir personally. He did not accomplish all the aims of his revolution before his death and the living conditions of the average Egyptian citizens were still sub-standard.

**YA TAL‘ AL-SHAJARAH (THE TREE CLIMBER), 1962**

In 1959 al-Hakim was appointed Egyptian Delegate to UNESCO in Paris for one year. During this second stay in Paris, he fell under the influence of the 'Theatre of the Absurd' of Beckett and Ionesco. One of his most notable successes from this era was *Ya Tali al-Shajarah (The Tree Climber)* an absurdist play written in 1962, reminiscent of Ionescu.

Al-Hakim called his version of “Theatre of the Absurd” Irrationalism which he defined as “the presentation of the rational world in an irrational framework” rather than, as in the true Theatre of the Absurd, the presentation of an absurd world in an absurdist
framework" (Long 85). Al-Hakim described *The Tree Climber* as irrationalist rather than absurdist and declared that its purpose was "to shake Egyptian society out of its torpor by exposing its loss of direction" (Cachia, *Idealism* 233).

Act One opens in a house in suburban Zeitoun, with the police interrogation of the housemaid following the disappearance of Madame Behana three days previously. Behana has gone to buy some wool to knit a dress for her daughter, a child who was never born. The baby was aborted at the request of her first husband forty years ago on the grounds of poverty. Her previous husband died and nine years ago Behana married Bahadir, a retired train inspector. The maid tells the detective about the couple's relationship; Behana is obsessed with the non-existent child; Bahadir is obsessed with the orange tree in his garden and his lizard the Venerable Lady Green. They never receive visitors, they visit no-one; they live in absolute harmony. The couple's unusual relationship is then revealed to the detective via a 'flashback' which opens up on stage.

The detective calls the husband from the garden to interrogate him. Bahadir has just realized that his lizard, which has been in the garden since he married Behana, is also missing. Originally he considered killing her, but over time he has grown to love her - of course he is referring to the lizard. The conversation shifts from killing a lizard to killing a wife; Bahadir and the detective talk at cross purposes. The detective calls for a spade to dig in the garden beneath Bahadir's orange tree to search for a body. Bahadir is distraught - his beloved tree will be damaged. They discuss Bahadir's marriage. The detective attempts to persuade Bahadir to admit he is unhappy but he will admit to no complaints. When asked to explain his wife's disappearance he suggests it is linked to the disappearance of his lizard, Lady Green. Bahadir and the detective discuss his apparent lack of concern
for his missing wife. Bahadir explains that he lost the habit of worrying a long time ago.

The only thing that ever made him upset was the train whistle when he was asleep.

The sound of a train whistle is heard and another 'flashback' appears on stage. A uniformed assistant inspector appears, sits at a train window and sleeps. A younger Bahadir, dressed as a Railway Inspector, enters and wakes his assistant. There are now two Bahadirs on stage: the younger Bahadir in centre stage as a character in the train 'flashback'; the older Bahadir is sitting at the side of the stage with the detective watching the 'flashback.'

A group of school children is heard singing an Egyptian nursery rhyme, The Tree Climber.

The assistant inspector has checked the passengers' tickets and the only passenger without one is a Dervish. He is brought to Bahadir who asks for his ticket. The Dervish hands him a birth certificate - all he requires for his journey. When Bahadir threatens him with the police, the Dervish plucks ten tickets out of thin air and gives them to him. Bahadir keeps one and the Dervish throws the other nine away. Bahadir sees the Dervish as a man blessed with power from God and asks to be permitted to stay with him. He is allowed to make requests of the Dervish but not to ask questions. The Dervish foretells of a tree in a suburb called Zeitoun which will produce a different fruit each season, and of Lady Green. Bahadir asks protection from a person who upsets and frightens him, but he doesn't know who this person is.

At the side of the stage the detective and Bahadir discuss this person who frightens him. Bahadir thinks he can summon the Dervish to ask who it is. The Dervish leaves the 'flashback,' appearing at the side of the stage where the Detective and Bahadir wait. He greets them with, "You did it then." All sign of the 'flashback' and the second Bahadir disappear. The Dervish 'sees' that if Bahadir hasn't killed Behana yet, he will kill...
her. The Dervish discusses the tree and how the only way for it to produce all the different fruit is for it to be ‘fertilized’ with a human body. The detective accepts this as a motive for murder, calls for Bahadir’s arrest, and for a spade to dig up the orange tree. The Dervish leaves.

In Act Two the detective supervises the digging up of the orange tree. The maid answers a knock at the door to find that Behana has returned. An embarrassed detective telephones the jail to arrange for Bahadir’s release, and tries to justify to Behana why he sent Bahadir to jail. He explains that he received a telephone call reporting her as missing, but cannot identify who the call was from. He tells Behana about seeing her in the ‘flashback’, and the conversation she had with her husband. Behana questions how she could have been both missing and in the house at the same time. The detective tells her about the train ‘flashback’, about the Dervish leaving it and suggesting that Bahadir had killed her. At this she asks, “Do you understand what you’re saying?” Suddenly the disregard for time which the detective coped with so well in Act One seems to have got the better of him. He replies, “The fact is I don’t understand what I was saying. It would appear to be quite meaningless. Actually, everything at that time seemed to have a meaning. I don’t know why it’s all collapsed now.” Another knock at the door heralds the return of Bahadir. He has been released from prison, which he likens to being reborn from a womb. He and his wife embrace. He goes to his garden and is happy to find that Lady Green has also returned, but is distressed to see what the police have done to his tree. He then starts to question where his wife has been for the past three days. Despite being bombarded with questions, she will neither give a reason for her absence nor tell him where she has been. All she will
answer is, “No.” Bahadir becomes so angry he grabs her by the throat and before he realizes what he has done, he strangles her. He covers her body with a white blanket.

Filled with remorse, Bahadir telephones the police detective. Before he can confess, the detective assumes he has called to say his wife has gone missing again. At this point Bahadir can no longer tell the truth. The detective tells him “She’ll return, just as she returned before.” He instructs Bahadir to calm himself and go about his gardening. The Dervish appears. He has heard of Bahadir’s release from prison and his wife’s return. The Dervish knows he has found the fertilizer he needs for the tree’s “extraordinary growth.” He refuses to help Bahadir when he buries his wife beneath the tree because ‘knowledge of murder is not approval.’ For Bahadir, realizing his dream of owning the miraculous tree will mean his ultimate discovery as a murderer but he is prepared to pay the price. Bahadir goes out to the garden where he placed the body and a scream is heard. The body has gone and the dead body of Lady Green is lying in its place. The Dervish leaves - to go to the post office to send a cable of condolence. The plays ends with the sounds of a party, the train and the school children’s song blended together.

One of the main themes in *The Tree Climber* concerns the difficulties of communication. Bihana and Bahadir live in a life of apparent non-communication but for them this absurd way of life is their normal way of communicating and it works well for them. Each accepts the other’s self-absorption and they live a content, quarrel-free existence. Is this al-Hakim’s comment on his parent’s marriage? From his point of view, his parents did not have the ideal marriage, yet, with the exception of one threat of divorce in the early days, they stayed married. In Act Two Bahadir exhibits signs of male aggression. Perhaps prison has changed his personality. Perhaps he blames Bihana for his incarceration.
Once their normal but indirect communication breaks down, they resort to direct communication, and this is disastrous for them. Either Bihana tells Bahadir what he wants to know or she will die.

Another topic in the play is the search for happiness and knowledge which al-Hakim seems to be saying is illusory. For Bahadir happiness and knowledge are represented by the tree which bears a different fruit in each of the four seasons. Does Bahadir's tree represent the Tree of Life? In his attempt to create the perfect tree he must first destroy a human being in order to provide life-giving fertilizer for the tree. When details of his wonderful tree are made public, scientists will want to conduct research on the tree and its root system. In the course of this research, the dead body will be found and his crime will be discovered. He will have to sacrifice what he has attained as he will once again be imprisoned. So, in order to attain his ideal of happiness and knowledge, he must ultimately destroy it. This brings to mind Mark 8:36, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" There is always a cost to satisfying our desires.

The Tree Climber also includes a spiritual element as represented by the character of the Dervish. When asked for his ticket for the train ride the Dervish offers the train inspector his birth certificate. Perhaps that is all that is necessary if the train ride represents the ride through life. But the train ride may also represent the path to God or to knowledge and enlightenment, since this is where Bahadir first learns of his wonderful tree. The Dervish has the power to foretell the future but does not always approve of the future he sees. He tells Bahadir if he hasn't already killed his wife he will, but when the
time comes to bury her he refuses to help Bahadir because 'knowledge of murder is not approval.

In *The Tree Climber* al-Hakim makes use of many techniques of the 'Theatre of the Absurd.' In the stage directions given at the beginning of Act One he disregards traditional theatrical conventions. "There are no sets in this play, neither are there division between time and place, the past, present and future sometimes all being present at the same time and one person occasionally present in two places on stage and talking in his own voice twice at the same time." "There are no fixed 'props': every character in the play makes his appearance carrying his 'props' and accessories and taking them out with him when he has finished." For example when the Inspector's assistant makes his entrance in Act One, he is "carrying part of a carriage window which he sets up. He then brings a chair, places it by the window and seats himself on it." At the end of the scene, "the whistle and clamour of the departing train is heard, followed by the disappearance of the Inspector, the window and the chair."

The most blatant disregard of the divisions between time and place occur in Act One in the flashback on the train. Here Bahadir is seen as a young ticket Inspector; at the same time he appears as the husband watching the flashback with the detective from the side of the stage. In an attempt to obtain information from the Dervish, Bahadir the husband summons the Dervish from the train. Stage directions indicate that "the Dervish is groping his way with fumbling steps to the side of the stage where the detective and the husband are. At the same time the whistle and clamour of the departing train is heard, followed by the disappearance of the Inspector, the window and the chair. Nothing remains
but the detective, seated before his table, and the husband. Then the Dervish appears and slowly approaches them."

Richard Long suggests other instances of standard 'Theatre of the Absurd' used by al-Hakim in this play, such as conversations which go on and get nowhere and duologues in which the interlocutors each wrongly imagine that the other is talking about the same thing (Long 87). The best example of a conversation going nowhere is in Act Two when Bahadir's interrogates his wife to try to find out where she has been during her three day absence. Initially she tells him she went to buy some wool and on further questioning, she responds with questions of her own. "Is it necessary for you to know?" she asks. "Very necessary," he replies. He promises that whatever she has done, wherever she has been, he will not be angry and their relationship will not change. Still she remains secretive. This provokes Bahadir to proffer a four page list of places where she might have been, to which her answer is always, "No." She wants to understand why he puts so much importance on finding out where she has been. Why has it become a matter of prodigious gravity for him? Without an answer he will not be able to calm down. When he can bear her attitude no longer, the specter of violence appears. "Do you want me to do you some injury" he asks. Still all she says is, "No." He loses his patience and grabs her by the throat, still the answer is, "No, No." As he strangles the life from Behana, her final words are, "No, No, No, No."

An example of such a duologue takes place in Act One when the detective calls Bahadir in from the garden to question him regarding his wife's disappearance:

Detective. You love her?
Husband. Yes, now I do. When you see something near to you every day over a period of nine years you inevitable get to know it, to love it, isn't that so? I don't deny that thing weren't like this when I first set eyes on her. At that time I found her ugly-looking, horrible, abhorrent. I was
about to kill her, then shelved the idea and let her live - temporarily. Then I began to see her every day leaving her sanctuary and returning to it at regular times. I quickly got used to this and so I became attached to her - I arranged my life in the garden in accordance with her life, her ways and her habits.

Detective. This is truly extraordinary
Husband. Yes, she has become a creature connected to me by the ties of kinship. Don't be surprised therefore that her disappearance is painful to me.
Detective. No, I'm not.
Husband. No, when I think nowadays that I was going to kill her one day.
    But it's natural that I should have wanted to kill her at that time, for I didn't know her properly.
Detective. The idea of killing did, then, occur to you?
Husband. Certainly it did.
Detective. And with what would you have carried out the murder?
Husband. Whose murder? My wife's?
Detective. Your wife? Did I so much as mention your wife? Oh, so be it!
    Your wife then. Yes, your wife?
Husband. But we were talking about the lizard.

Another example is the duologue between Bahadir and Behana in the flashback in Act One. Badawi talks about his orange tree and his precious lizard Lady Green, while Behana obsesses over her non-existent child. Somehow a form of harmony is reached at the end of the conversation:

Wife. What do you think of her green dress, the one I knitted for her with my own hands? Didn't it look lovely on her little body?
Husband. Her little body is always attired in this green dress, summer and winter. Even when the tree is denuded of its green leaves she remains radiant in her greenness as she goes down to her sanctuary at the foot of the tree.
Wife. Yes, yes, my dear, how beautiful Bahiyya is with the green dress over her little body!
Husband. I always find her beautiful with her little body attired in perpetual greenness and that extraordinary brightness in her brilliant eyes. She's truly wonderful is Lady Green!
Wife. Yes, she's truly wonderful is my daughter Bahiyya!
Husband. Oh, yes.
Wife. Oh, yes.
Badawi considers their dialogue to be "an extreme example of the type of talking at cross-purposes which Hakim has perfected; there is, however, a strange kind of communication between them; each relates what the other says to his or her own solipsistic world" (Badawi, 74).

To Badawi the *Tree Climber* can be enjoyed simply as an ironic statement. "The husband and wife enjoyed a happy, at least a working relationship, as long as there was no conventional communication between them." When he demands a direct answer to a direct question, that's when communication breaks down and his frustration drives him to murder. Al-Hakim seems to be saying that "intellectual communication in intimate human relations is impossible to achieve, for true communication occurs at a non-logical or even non-verbal level, the level of instinct and deep emotion; or the message of the play may simply be that each man is an island, and any attempt to break into this solipsistic world spells disaster" (Badawi 77).

Starkey reminds us that in the 'Theatre of the Absurd' "communication breaks down completely, consciousness disintegrates, and man, confronted with an inexplicable universe, can only raise a fist at an empty heaven" (Starkey, 61). But, according to Badawi, al-Hakim's final comment on life is "an amused chuckle rather than a fist raised in angry defiance against the heavens" (Badawi, 77). Al-Hakim's amused chuckle, which closes his play, is the Dervish going off to the post office to send a telegram of condolence to Bahadir on the death of his wife.

Al-Hakim admits in the introduction to his play that the "roots lie neither in ancient nor in Islamic Egypt, but in the European tradition of intellectual drama with which he had come into contact during his stay in Paris from 1925 to 1928, in particular, the works of
Pirandello.” The end-products of Pirandello’s plays often resembled “a game in which the spectator is left to tie together the various loose threads as best he can” (Starkey, 39). These loose threads give rise to questions to which the spectator seeks answers at the end of the play. What is the connection between Lady Green and Bihana? Why did they both disappear and return at the same time? What happens to Bihana’s dead body at the end of the play and why is it replaced with Lady Green’s dead body? What is the relevance of the Dervish? Is he purely symbolic? Does he represent Bahadir’s conscience? Is his train journey representative of the journey of life? What does the miraculous tree represent to Bihadir? Does it represent the tree of knowledge?

Several aspects of *The Tree Climber* recur in *Fate of a Cockroach*. The use of animal symbolism to connect Bihana to the Venerable Lady Green is echoed in *Fate of a Cockroach* with the representation of the Arabs and Israelis as cockroaches and ants respectively. Communication is an important topic that connects the two plays. In *The Tree Climber* the communication is at the social level; miscommunication is the norm for Bihana and Bahadir and it is only when they deviate from this norm that problems occur. In *Fate of a Cockroach*, the communication, or lack of it, is in the political sphere. Nasir’s failure to communicate with the Egyptians on all levels is highlighted. He would not allow opposing political views to be voiced, he would not accept oppositional advice, no oppositional political parties were allowed, and a severe system of censorship was imposed on the country. Even attempts at allegorical communication were ignored.

*‘AWDAT AL-RUH (RETURN OF THE SPIRIT), 1933*

Al-Hakim’s novel *‘Awdat al-Ruh (Return of the Spirit)* was written in Paris in 1927 and, following its publication in 1933, al-Hakim was recognized as an important new novelist.
The novel "describes the life of an Egyptian family in Cairo and culminates in the 1919 uprising." According to al-Hakim it was "intended to express the feelings of a youth caught up in an important phase of his country's history." The literary critic Paul Starkey claims that it represented "a major advance in the attempt to establish the novel as a form in modern Egyptian literature" (Starkey 26). Al-Hakim was also writing a "Work of Art in Three Volumes" at the time and made the decision to discontinue that work and to concentrate on Return of the Spirit. He "wanted it to be not so much a record of a historical period as a document about feeling, the feeling of a young man in the middle of a fateful stage for his country" (al-Hakim, Prison 113). The novel gives a vivid description of Egyptian city society and country life, with its many colourful characters, their colloquial dialogue and the humour and pathos of day to day life as seen through the eyes of a young man.

The protagonist of the story is fifteen-year-old Muhsin al-Atifi. His parents live in Damanhur but he has moved to Cairo to live with family so he may continue his schooling there. Muhsin lodges with two uncles, Hanafi, a school teacher who usually annoys the family by falling asleep each evening and keeping them waiting for dinner, and Abduh, an engineering student who is always angry about something. Their sister, Aunt Zanuba, an illiterate spinster, manages the household, but is obsessed with the occult and wastes the household finances on magic and spells for obtaining a husband. Also living in the household are cousin Salim, a suspended police officer who is too preoccupied with women, and Mabruk, a friend from the country who acts as the household servant. The apartment is simply decorated with cheap furniture, including a kitchen table which at night becomes Mabruk's bed. The other four men share a bedroom; Zanuba has her own room.
apartment is on the second floor of the building. The tenant on the first floor is Mustafa Bey, a young man of approximately twenty-five who passes much of his time sitting outside the ground floor Shahata Coffee Shop. The next-door neighbour is Dr. Hilmi who has a wife and a beautiful seventeen-year-old daughter, Saniya.

The novel is divided into two volumes. Volume One tells the story of Muhsin's infatuation with his next-door neighbour, Saniya. He has stolen her handkerchief as a keepsake. He develops a relationship with her when Zanuba arranges for him to give Saniya singing lessons and for Saniya to give him piano lessons. This relationship causes Abduh and Salim to become jealous of Muhsin but they later find their own ways to visit Saniya.

Zanuba is also looking for love and visits a local sheikh to purchase a magic potion to make Mustafa Bey fall in love with her. When Abduh discovers Zanuba has wasted the housekeeping money, he gives responsibility for the household finances to Mabruk. However, when Mabruk wastes some of the remaining money to purchase glasses, Abduh is outraged and has no alternative but to return the money to a vindicated Zanuba.

One afternoon Abduh and Muhsin steam open a letter that has arrived for Salim. It is his love letter to Saniya which has been returned with no comment. Zanuba receives a visit from Mrs. Hilmi regarding the letter which was intercepted by her husband. Fortunately Mrs. Hilmi is able to persuade her husband that Saniya is innocent but the impropriety of the affair has made him angry.

Volume One ends with Muhsin preparing for a ten-day trip to the country to visit his parents. Before he leaves he visits Saniya. Muhsin realizes she is watching someone in the coffee shop. He is jealous and realizes he has filled himself with false hopes. When Muhsin tells her about the handkerchief she offers to let him keep it, but he refuses and cries.
She kisses his cheek. On returning home he discovers that Saniya has agreed to write a letter to Muhsin on Zanuba's behalf while he is away. The following morning Hanafi wakes with difficulty to get Muhsin to the station by 6.30am. While in the ticket queue, however, Hanafi falls asleep and Muhsin misses his train. He has to take the next train and is angry with his uncle.

Volume Two opens with Muhsin's train trip to Damanhur. His fellow-passengers discuss the lack of friendliness in Europe. Egyptians are more social by instinct, talk to each other on trains, and share food with each other. One passenger claims that this is because Europe is “a land without Islam” but another, with a cross tattooed on his wrist, points out that Europe is a land without hearts, unlike Egypt where all citizens, Copts and Muslims alike, are brothers.

Muhsin is unhappy in Damanhur. He finds his parents' lifestyle extravagant and their references to the working classes demeaning. He is homesick for Cairo and Saniya. His mother suggests a trip to their country estate and he readily agrees. On arrival the family are greeted by the overseer, the headman, and trilling women. Muhsin’s mother drives the women away because they are peasants. She continues to treat the workers badly, merely because they are peasants. Muhsin is ashamed of his mother's behaviour and goes outside, where he overhears a farm worker, Shaykh Hasan, arguing with a Bedouin about who is better, the farmer or the Bedouin. The Bedouin believes he comes from a long noble line and that peasants are descended from slaves. Muhsin remembers from his history lesson that today's Egyptian is descended from the same farmer who tended the earth before the Bedouin. Bedouin lifestyle was based on raiding and tribe plundering tribe.
By contrast the agricultural lifestyle was harmonious and required peace and tranquility. The farming life came from a noble origin, not one steeped in a slave descent.

While Muhsin waits for a letter from Saniya he roams around the farm. He comes across an empty hut where he finds a suckling calf feeding from its mother. To his astonishment, he also finds a small child doing the same. He views the calf and the child in their purity and innocence and has a “feeling of being merged with existence, that is of being merged in God.” It is the feeling of “that ancient, deeply rooted Egyptian people.” On his way home Muhsin hears a commotion as the farm workers return with a dead water buffalo. As is the usual custom, a friend of the owner skins the animal, divides and sells the meat to the other workers in order to provide the owner with financial compensation for the loss of his animal. Muhsin is impressed with this solidarity. Next morning he listens to the farm workers singing and working as the sun rises. It seems to him they are saying, “Toil and suffering are of no concern so long as they are for you whom we worship.” That night he can’t sleep and goes outside. He finds the workers drinking their strong, sweet, black tea and they invite him to join them for their ceremony, like a prayer at the end of the day. Muhsin is not sure he is made of the same blood as these farmers.

Once again Muhsin sees his mother’s disdain for the workers when she hosts a luncheon for his father’s colleagues, a British civil servant, Mr. Black, and a French archeologist, Mr. Fouquet. Muhsin is embarrassed as she is verbally abusive to the overseer regarding the arrangements. She is put on the spot herself, however, when Muhsin’s father requests cheese after the luncheon and the only cheese in the house is a piece that has been stored away for a mouse trap. Al-Hakim includes a delightful description of the
washing, scraping, and ultimate retrieval of the cheese from the drain before it is served to the guests.

An important discussion takes place between the two guests as they watch the farm workers return to work in the fields. Mr. Black refers to the workers as ignorant because they share sleeping quarters with their animals. In Mr. Fouquet’s opinion these people know more than Europeans because they know by the heart, not the intellect. They have “a supreme wisdom of an ancient people,” an experience from the past which is instinctive when it is needed today. He tells Black that if he were to open an Egyptian heart he would find 10,000 years of experiential knowledge, but that a European heart would be empty and desolate. Europe’s power, he remarks, is its intellect. These Egyptians also conceal a great spiritual power that exists in the heart, “the deep well from which the pyramids emerged.” Europeans cannot imagine what would make a man carry such heavy stones for twenty years, and smile while he did it, “all for his beloved.” Mr. Fouquet is confident that these people take pleasure in communal toil – another difference between Europeans and Egyptians. He believes that present-day Egyptians preserve this “spirit of the temple” and that what they lack is a “beloved” - “that man from among them who will manifest all their feelings and hopes and be for them a symbol of the ultimate. At that time don’t be surprised if these people who stand together as one, and who relish sacrifice, bring forth another miracle besides the pyramids” (al-Hakim, Spirit 183).

At last a letter arrives for Muhsin and he reads and re-reads it. He reads between the lines that Saniya wants him to hurry up and return to Cairo. He tells his mother he wants to return and arrangements are made. When he arrives he senses a difference in the men-folk’s demeanour when he asks for news of the neighbours. The men are upset and
Muhsin is stunned to hear Zanuba call Saniya a whore. It is only later that evening that Muhsin discovers what has happened. While in the Helmi house Zanuba has seen Saniya making eye contact with Mustafa Bey in the coffee shop and using the maid to send messages and exchange letters. Zanuba embellishes these events for her own purposes and sends an anonymous letter to Dr. Helmi reporting Saniya’s purported dishonourable activity. Saniya’s father intercepts and opens the letter and is outraged. His wife persuades him that Saniya is innocent and that Zanuba is entirely to blame.

The relationship between Mustafa Bey and Saniya blossoms but runs into some problems initiated by Zanuba along the way. The young couple eventually overcomes these problems and, when Mustafa returns to the country to take care of his business ventures, he promises to send his aunt back to Cairo to ask for Saniya’s hand in marriage. Before this happens, however, the 1919 Revolution breaks out and he is unable to return to Cairo to complete the contract.

Muhsin, Abduh, and Salim plunge into the revolution and their despair over Saniya is replaced with fervent nationalistic feelings for the revolution. The three young men become involved in the storage and distribution of political pamphlets. They are caught and arrested by the British authorities. The apartment is searched and all five men are taken to the Citadel Prison, and lodged in a single cell. Zanuba contacts Muhsin’s father who attempts to arrange Muhsin’s release but, Muhsin feels a sense of solidarity and refuses to be released on his own. His father’s British contacts arrange for the men to be transferred to the prison hospital where they will receive better treatment and will be the first to be released when the conflict is over. When calm is restored Mustafa Bey is able to return to
Cairo to finalize his marriage arrangements. It is on the day of his marriage to Saniya that the five men are released from prison.

*Return of the Spirit* is classified as semi-autobiographical fiction. The events follow a similar pattern to al-Hakim’s life, as narrated in *Sijn al-‘Umṛ* (*Prison of Life*). Muhsin, the protagonist, is, in all probability, based on Tawfiq al-Hakim himself. Some similarities between the two books are that at the age of fifteen, al-Hakim moved to Cairo from Damanhur to live with his uncle, a mathematics teacher, to improve his schooling. Both boys spent time singing with a troupe of “delighters,” both preferred the Arts at school and had a friend who had to select the Sciences, both delighted in reading foreign novels in translation, and both threw themselves wholeheartedly into the cause of the revolution and spent a brief time in prison. Al-Hakim makes no mention, however, in *Prison of Life* of a major love affair during this period of his life. He makes only brief references at all to women in the memoir when he mentions that, as a teenager, like the rest of the boys in his class, his thoughts turned to women as sex books were passing among the boys at school. He also mentions the price of a local prostitute at a licensed whore house. Although Roger Long appears to believe that this relationship was autobiographical, I would speculate that Saniya was part of the fiction of al-Hakim’s novel.

Two main themes appear to flow through al-Hakim’s novel. One is the social nature of the Egyptians and their great sense of solidarity. Muhsin’s return to his parents’ farm for his vacation serves only to reinforce what he already knows, that he is not interested in the exclusivity that they have to offer. As he found out, the food and life in general are better at his uncle’s house. “What a happy life ...the life of the group ...even during their hardships and difficult times” (al-Hakim, *Spirit* 160). The only time that Muhsin casts off
the solidarity that comes from a tight-knit family is when he is infatuated and in love. It is then he wants to be alone to ponder the new and wonderful feelings he is experiencing; for once this is not a time to share.

The other important theme is the link between ancient and modern Egyptians. This motif is highlighted not only by the discussion between the family lunch guests, but also by the argument Muhsin overhears between the Bedouin and the farm worker. This link is important to Muhsin’s social conscience as he views an agricultural society both through his parent’s eyes and his own, and as he is distancing himself from his parents’ opinions and beginning to form his own. In writing about al-Hakim’s plays, Badawi alleged that “al-Hakim’s plays of social criticism written after the Revolution are clearly distinguished from his earlier work because they preach a more positive attitude to work” (Badawi 61). In this novel, written in 1933, al-Hakim appears quite clearly to be advocating the value of work much earlier than the 1950s.

Perhaps one most important role this book would play is in the future political career of Nasir. The after-lunch discussion between Fouquet and Black, and the possibility that Fouquet’s “miracle” would be the High Aswan Dam, had a great impact on Nasir. In his conversation between Black and Fouquet, al-Hakim seems to be saying that Egyptian people are stronger and more capable than Europeans believe. It is an error in judgement to observe only the individual, not to recognize the potential for strength in the group when it is being guided by a dynamic leader. As a population they are capable of achieving great things, given a dynamic leader to move them in the right direction. Nasir read into al-Hakim’s book that he would be that dynamic leader. Long is confident about the book’s political influence. "Gamal Abd an Nasir read it in 1934-5 while still at secondary school and
it made the most powerful impression on him of all the many books, from many countries, which had come his way” (Long 28). Luwis Awad insists that "it had a potent morale-boosting impact on his generation: Among we youth of the '30s there was not one who doubted that it pointed our way to the revival of our national holy war against the English" (qtd. in Long 28).

Hutchins writes that the Iranian sociologist Ali Shirati had a different opinion on the building of the pyramids to Mr. Fouquet's romantic view. He considered it exploitation of the masses (Hutchins, Introduction 11). He also pointed out the further issue of “the totalitarian implication of the notion of the Egyptian agricultural masses as a single person with a single heart yearning to be led and to suffer together may have misled President Nasser to some extent” (Hutchins, Introduction 11).

Although Return of the Spirit deals with several of al-Hakim's abiding social, moral and philosophical issues, such as hunger, poverty, classism, and the solidarity of the Egyptian people, the basic message of this work is political. This novel introduces the concepts of change in the form of the 1919 revolution. Nasir considered that, in writing this novel, al-Hakim was the prophet and advocate of the 1952 revolution. The novel shows how the Egyptian people had embraced Zaghlul's revolution. Their spirit had returned and they were ready to be guided by another dynamic leader to do great things. This would come in the form of Nasir's revolution. Fate of a Cockroach highlights al-Hakim's disappointment in Nasir's revolution and his appeal to Nasir to change his policies before the 1967 war became inevitable. Fate of a Cockroach also addresses some of the failures of the revolution, such as the abiding poverty and hunger in Egypt during his regime because of the mismanagement of resources.
Al-Hakim’s most controversial publication was his memoir ‘Awdat Al-Wa’i (The Return of Consciousness), a scathing criticism of the Nasir regime that caused great controversy when it was published in 1974. The book was published after Nasir’s September 1970 death; consequently many critics were angry that al-Hakim waited till Nasir was dead to criticize him. The book makes an unfavourable comparison between the 1919 and 1952 revolutions and voices al-Hakim’s ultimate disappointment with Nasir. Al-Hakim describes his memoir as “retracing such pictures of the revolution and of my relationship to it as I still remembered, and while making an account of it, I also made an account of myself” (al-Hakim, Consciousness, xvii).

In the foreword to Return of Consciousness Tawfiq al-Hakim relates that he had not planned to allow publication of his document at the time he wrote it. His manuscript remained secret until he showed it to a trusted friend who asked to type a copy for himself. Before long unauthorized copies surfaced and got out of al-Hakim’s control. He was not concerned since he retained control of the original, hand-written copy, and neither his name, nor signature was on the circulating copies. Unfortunately, a French journal published an incomplete translation from one of the unauthorized copies. The unauthorized publication was followed by al-Hakim’s denial of permission to a European journal to publish the document. A Lebanese newspaper then published an Arabic translation of the French version, which bore little resemblance to al-Hakim’s original document. Al-Hakim’s decision to sue was soon rescinded and he decided that since publication had already occurred he would admit authorship. His friends persuaded him that the Egyptian people had a right to
read his work because "the pen and thought were the property of all the people and not the private, captive property of their creator" (al-Hakim, Consciousness xviii).

As to his motive for writing, twenty years had passed since the Officers Revolt of 1952, and al-Hakim wanted to document "reflections on this period in the history of my country, especially since the atmosphere around me was then gloomy with painful events and since spirits were depressed by the nightmare of the defeat" (al-Hakim, Consciousness xvii). The defeat to which he referred here, of course, was the war and defeat of 1967.

In the Translator's Introduction to Return of Consciousness Bayly describes al-Hakim's work as:

[T]he first public, published repudiation of 'Nasirism' to emerge from the upper-class, liberal, intelligentsian, Westernized sectors of Egyptian society. As a published document it broke Egypt's group solidarity, and created a sensation. Its message is simple: We Egyptians were taken in by the promise of the revolution of 1952, and Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, for all his personal charisma, imposed on us a police state which pursued failing policies in all directions. We, the intellectuals of Egypt, are to be rebuked for having accepted it all so passively at the time, but Egypt has now regained consciousness and can begin to move forward again. (Winder, Consciousness vii)

Winder explains that the reasons for the outcry which followed the publication of Return of Consciousness were twofold. Firstly, al-Hakim seemed "almost guilty of treason in publicly condemning the practices and principles that had come close to constituting Egypt's inner identity from 1952 to 1970" (Winder, Consciousness viii). Secondly, people felt al-Hakim should not have waited until after Nasir's death to attack a man from whom he had received so many positions and awards. The publication "naturally angered Nasirites in Egypt and outside, 'as though Nasirism were a holy religion'" (Long 114).
Although Starkey found "little original or profound in al-Hakim's analysis of the period of Egyptian history from 1952 to 1972" (Starkey, 181), it caused a considerable shock among the intellectuals when it was published. Al-Hakim read the manuscript of *Return of Consciousness* to Naguib Mahfouz (fellow Egyptian novelist and winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature) some time between 1972 and 1974. Mahfouz was convinced it would never see the light of day.

*Return of Consciousness* covers the period Wednesday July 23, 1952 to Sunday July 23, 1972. It comprises a series of short headed chapters, many less than one page in length, that document the political situation of Gamal Abdul Nasir's regime from the Free Officer's Revolt to Nasir's death. It opens with al-Hakim's documentation of the 1952 Revolution. There was a feeling of happiness in the country because of the Officers Revolt and the abdication of King Farouk, although there was some uneasy anticipation regarding who the new masters were. Al-Hakim wonders whether the officers always planned to rule the country themselves or whether circumstances pushed them into it. He discusses whether what occurred was a movement, a revolution or a military overthrow. Once the Council of Revolution was formed and "issued laws in closed rooms without any opposition and without any public debate" the distinction became clear (al-Hakim, *Consciousness* 7).

Al-Hakim welcomed the revolution but regretted, however, that he and his fellow Egyptians did not "pay sufficient attention to the grievousness of the loss of their constitutional life." This loss was eased by reforms. Titles were abolished, as was the fez, the symbol of Ottoman dominance. Land reforms took place, with limits placed on agricultural holdings. No citizen would be allowed to own more than two hundred feddan of land [1 feddan = 1.038 acres]. Owners of large estates would, in addition, be allowed to transfer an additional one
hundred feddan to their children. Political parties were dissolved and a revolutionary tribunal created which tried the previous party leaders.

As Nasir imposed stricter controls, the feeling of euphoria began to be undermined. The Movement of Purification was introduced in which employees were encouraged to submit complaints about their superiors and peers, turning virtually every workplace in Egypt into a "battleground." From al-Hakim's perspective the most dangerous aspect of Purification was that a chief's fear of his subordinates would diminish his authority. "When the revolution became stabilized and introduced absolute rule in the country, it found itself faced by chiefs and directors in all agencies, departments and sections who had lost the courage to take responsibility" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 15). But Egypt had longed for change from Faruk's reign with its corruption and social oppression, so the revolution continued.

Nasir became the supreme ruler and "little by little the voices of those who were accustomed to debate died down, and the beloved ruler himself began to become accustomed to rule without debate" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 19). Al-Hakim writes of Nasir's charismatic speeches and of the enthusiastic response which they engendered from the people. Initially, al-Hakim wanted to believe in Nasir's leadership: "it did not occur to me to think about the truth of the picture which was being manufactured for us; perhaps I justified the lapse to myself on the grounds that the revolution was trying to raise the morale of the people. Confidence apparently had paralyzed thought" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 20).

Al-Hakim explains that Nasir ended up being idolized by the people and it was the Egyptian mind-set not to publicly oppose such a leader. But he questions what happened to the Egyptian press, parliament and socialist union. Why was there no one single voice raised
in opposition in the media? And even if there was, how would this lone voice have been
heard by the people? In time, al-Hakim saw Nasir as the first instance in modern history
of a leader who "wanted his will to have, throughout the Arab countries, a degree of
holiness, greatness and power which not even God's prophets and messengers possessed"
(al-Hakim, Consciousness 25). He contrasts Nasir to Sa'd Zaghlul, the leader of the 1919
revolution who was also worshipped by the people. However, Zaghlul never prevented
opposition opinions or political parties.

Nasir persuaded the Egyptians they were a major industrial state, leaders in
agricultural reform, and the strongest military force in the Middle East. His speeches on
television and at public gatherings caused people to applaud and believe in him. People were
transported in from the country and paid to applaud. No one argued.

On October 19, 1954, the treaty for British evacuation of Egypt was signed and the
Aswan High Dam project was begun. When funding was withdrawn, Nasir nationalized the
Suez Canal in 1956. Al-Hakim claims himself to have been "a prime zealot in favour of
nationalization. The Suez Canal had always been the centre of our hopes, and now it was in
our hands. The rest didn't matter. Nevertheless, there were flashes of thought which
made me wonder about certain things" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 33). Following the invasion
by Britain, France and Israel, Nasir withdrew his forces from the Sinai and al-Hakim
describes how the people were reassured.

We also listened during the famous Friday sermon to the reassuring news
which the president announced about our success in the withdrawal of our
armies from Sinai in the year 1956. They had been rushed there blindly at
the beginning of the tripartite aggression. When the president saw disaster
on the horizon, he immediately issued orders to withdraw. The retreat was
completed in excellent order; he gave praise to God; and we praised Him too
along with the president" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 34).
But al-Hakim writes that Nasir's aim was to deceive the people, to prevent them from realizing their inability to defend Egypt. Unfortunately the Egyptians believed Nasir's propaganda and "began to get in the mood for military adventures" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 36). Al-Hakim is referring here to the failed war in Yemen which began in September 1962. By early 1963 Nasir would begin a four year withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen.

A shift in tone becomes apparent in the memoir as al-Hakim voices disillusionment over Egypt's 1967 defeat by Israel. "Had we had enough with two wars and two defeats? No. We had to have a third - the war and the defeat of 1967" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 37). Al-Hakim claims that the wars cost unknown thousands of lives and thousand of millions of Egyptian pounds. To him this was money which would have been better spent raising the standard of living in most Egyptian villages. "But our Egyptian villages have remained in their sad condition, and our poor peasants in their ignorance, disease and poverty. The billions, which came from the veins of Egypt to disappear into the morass, have disappeared. On top of that there was a reprehensible defeat." He blamed lack of opposition, not least his own, for "the feelings of fear and fragmentation that struck Egyptian society before the war of 1967" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 37).

No one from the political, judicial, scientific, academic and cultural institutions was brave enough to speak out. They lacked courage. "Nor am I free of guilt myself in this because I consider that my true guilt lies in my complete loss of consciousness of the situation even though I was of venerable age and had a mind which lived on thinking" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 39).
It is al-Hakim's belief that the revolution ended on the day of defeat of the 1967 war. Nasir died three years after the war. Supportive to the end, al-Hakim suggested erecting a statue of Nasir in his honour. Amongst the dissenters was one correspondent who suggested the statue be erected in Tel Aviv because "Israel should not dream that it could attain this degree of military power with such speed or that it could show the world such a superior level of civilization except by the grace of the policies of 'Abd al-Nasir" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 46).

Al-Hakim believed this period in Egypt’s history should be the subject of an intensive study. He implored investigators to be objective and not to let "bitterness, conformism or emotionalism" impair their judgement. He asked that both the good and the bad of the revolution be preserved for the future.

He turns finally to Egypt's "loss of consciousness." He refers to the constant propaganda issued by the government regarding Egypt's so-called victories. He bemoans the fact that "Egypt hardly reasoned and was unconscious of the fact that she had become a laughing-stock through these words and descriptions" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 53). He compared Egypt to the son of a father who does everything for his son without any "consultation, opposition or free choice," and asked what the fate of that son will be. Surely over time he "has been deprived of natural growth in his mental and volitional being and has become an individual of weak personality who has lost consciousness of himself, and is ignorant of the meaning of responsibility because he had never borne any by himself for a day." He wrote, "that was precisely my situation on the day that I sat in front of the television open mouth like a moron listening to the collapse of revolutionary Egypt" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 52). Once again he blamed the lack of action of the mature men of
the revolution on censorship, imprisonment of those who were suspected of dissention, and
rumours of torture.

Al-Hakim referred to "the burdensomeness of the disasters of our revolution after
the defeat of 1967, and "a kind of semi-consciousness" that began "because of the
necessity of a reckoning." But the slogan, "No sound above the sound of battle" prevented
the return of consciousness and "Egypt was not permitted to open the file on the case and
judge for itself what had happened" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 56). His last words were,
"Will Egypt one day recover a free consciousness? To that end the book 'Awdat al-Wa'i
must some day be written. But it will never be written until the file of truth is opened"
(al-Hakim, Consciousness 47).

As a postscript to Return of Consciousness al-Hakim wrote A Word in Memory of
'Abd al-Nasir, in which he included an extract from his 1945 book Shajarat al-Hukm (The
Tree of Governance) which predicts revolution. He told how Nasir valued him and
considered him "almost a spiritual father of the revolution which I had prophesied and
advocated" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 59). This recognition for him will always be a great
personal treasure. He listed the social improvements that he had expected from the
revolution for the Egyptian peasants, such as eradication of illiteracy, provision of clean
hospitals. However, no more than 10% of his expectations were met. In order to find out
where the revolution went wrong in failing the people, he considered it essential to open the
file and investigate, but this seemed to strike fear into the hearts of many. He wanted
them to understand that there was a difference between debate and attack and that there
was nothing wrong with loving Nasir as his friend but at the same time examining his account
as a public servant. He closed with a word of charity for a man who kept his friendship his
whole life. "As long as a day of remembrance is held for his passing, I shall appeal for mercy and forgiveness for him from the depths of my heart" (al-Hakim, *Consciousness* 61).
CHAPTER 4

FATE OF A COCKROACH, ACT ONE

In this chapter I will establish that Act One of *Fate of a Cockroach* (originally published as *The Cockroach as a King*) can stand alone from the rest of the play as a separate entity. I will provide a political interpretation of this self-contained play which was written as an allegory, probably to circumvent the political censorship of Gamal Abdul Nasir’s regime. Taking passages from Act One of *Fate of a Cockroach* that I feel are important to the playwright’s message, I will analyze the text in the context of historical events leading up to and during the Nasir regime, which I believe drew al-Hakim to this theme. I will also discuss the relevance of *Fate of a Cockroach*, both in 1966 and today.

In 1966 al-Hakim published *Masir Sirsar (Fate of a Cockroach)*, two plays in one. Acts Two and Three had previously been published in *al-Ahram* on January 10 and 17, 1964 as *Fate of a Cockroach*. The following year Act One was published in *al-Ahram* on November 12 as *The Cockroach as a King*. These two plays were then combined and published as one play, *Fate of a Cockroach* in 1966 (Sakhsúkh 143).1

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1 Information regarding the publication of these two plays in *Al-Ahram* was provided by Dr. Joseph Zeidan, Department of Near East Languages and Cultures, The Ohio State University. The original source is Ahmad Sakhsúkh’s text, *Tawfiq al-Hakim: Mufakkiran wa-Munazziran* (*Tawfiq al-Hakim: Thinker and Theorist*).
There is general agreement that al-Hakim's play *Fate of a Cockroach* was, indeed, written as two separate plays. Richard Long is of the opinion that "though Act One and Acts Two/Three are complete in themselves, the drama as a whole . . . is in no way unsatisfactory" (Long 99). Likewise, Paul Starkey finds the play, "remarkable for little other than for being one of the most blatant examples of the tendency to lack unity in al-Hakim's plays; indeed, the work can almost be regarded as two plays stitched together" (Starkey 215). Concurring with Long and Starkey, Muhammad Badawi points out that the three-act play is, "in effect not one but two plays, since Act One can easily stand by itself, and the other two acts constitute a detachable whole which can be understood without reference to what goes before" (Badawi 81).

I have chosen to focus on *Fate of a Cockroach* because I believe al-Hakim had an important message when he wrote the play in 1966 and the message of the play is equally as valid, perhaps even more so now. I do not believe that the English-language scholars who have written about al-Hakim's works in translation have given enough importance to *Fate of a Cockroach*. None of the scholars provide any in-depth political analysis of this allegorical play and its political message.

I believe it is important to focus on Act One because al-Hakim showed his bravery in speaking out against an oppressive regime that had put such a strict system of censorship in place that direct opposition was not only impossible, but dangerous to consider. Al-Hakim had already tried to bring Nasir's attention to what he believed was a dire political situation by writing *Anxiety Bank* but this failed because, although Nasir understood the allegory, he ignored its message. According to al-Hakim, "I learned that, in fact, Abd-al Nasir read [it] and understood what I intended. Obviously, however, he did not accept my views, but
rather plunged forward on his own course” (al-Hakim, Consciousness 38). His bravery in writing *Fate of a Cockroach* was quite considerable. Act One contains al-Hakim’s political message; in contrast Acts Two and Three are a direct protest against feminine domination.

*Fate of a Cockroach*, as a total work, has three acts. Act One expresses disillusionment with the socialist revolutionary regime under Nasir. It is “a indirect, bitter satire on Egyptian society and its leadership, this time in the form of an allegory, or rather a fable, with cockroaches and ants as characters” (Badawi 82). “It is indeed astounding that, despite the strict censorship imposed at the time, al-Hakim was permitted to say so much” (Badawi 83).

Act One of *Fate of a Cockroach* is a veiled attack on the policies and programs of the regime of Gamal Abdul Nasir. It deals with the conflict between the Arabs and Israelis and the prospect of yet another war that the Arabs would probably lose. Al-Hakim dramatizes his concerns over the inability of the Arabs to form a cohesive partnership against a common enemy, and the people’s desire for a leader who will provide a better society. He also portrays Nasir’s desire to be leader of the Arab world and the resultant rise and fall of the United Arab Republic. Al-Hakim contrasts the Arab lack of unity with the Israeli ability to work together as a group, to become self-sustaining, to succeed against all odds, and to overcome a larger force.

The characters in Act One are represented symbolically by cockroaches and ants. Al-Hakim wrote a book of essays in 1941 called *Min al-Burj al-’Aji* (From the Ivory Tower). In Chapter 3 he reminisces that as a youth he would watch columns of ants bearing away cockroach corpses (Hutchins 140). It seems obvious why al-Hakim chose the ants to represent the Israelis. They are small insects; they work as a coordinated army where each
Ant understands and performs its assigned task, no matter how difficult. Ants are capable of seeking out and gathering items that far exceed their own weight, indicating that they are not deterred by overwhelming odds.

Cockroaches, while larger than ants, act more as independent, individual creatures that do not perform any work or social functions in a group. Their whole focus is on self-preservation. Their individuality prevents them from forming alliances. Despite the fact that they are often defeated, cockroaches are never annihilated. Cockroaches are said to have lived through the atomic bomb blasts of Hiroshima. They have an ability to survive in terrible conditions. Even so, if a cockroach is turned on its back, it cannot right itself without help, and it will die.

In Acts Two and Three the focus shifts from the insect kingdom to the realm of the humans and the war of the sexes. It brings the conflict to the daily life of an urban Egyptian couple. Al-Hakim is re-living the atmosphere of his parents' marriage through these characters. The misogyny for which he earned a reputation in later life is evident in the character of the wife.

Acts Two and Three represent how much a man will take from his overbearing wife before he rebels, and the outcome of his rebellion. They show the effect that an overbearing woman has on her husband's psyche and how he can escape into a safe haven where he can control events. In addition, these two acts represent not only a man's loss of identity and the association of his loss with the struggle of another creature, but also a woman's realization of the adverse psychological effect that her dominance has on her husband. All the conflicts of Acts Two and Three need outside intervention to bring about resolution before the end of the play.
Acts Two and Three appear to be al-Hakim's protest against feminine domination and this is, perhaps, one of the places where the seeds of misogyny sewn by his mother's domination of his father show up in his work. "The human hero Adil identifies with the cockroach king's struggle and rebels against his wife's commands, since he now realizes that although she has emasculated him and reduced him to the status of a cockroach, even a cockroach can rebel. Though the struggle is futile, it allows him to feel like a human being again" (Tarabishi, qtd. in Hutchins 179).

Following is a synopsis of Fate of a Cockroach. Act One takes place in the courtyard of the King and Queen cockroach. This is, in fact "nothing more than the bathroom floor of an ordinary flat." Acts Two and Three take place in the flat of Adil and Samia.

Act One: The King Cockroach rouses his Queen who is annoyed at being disturbed. She questions his authority over her, a female who provides for herself. The King has attained his position because he is the male with the longest whiskers and the other males are too apathetic to challenge him. The Queen has attained her position by default because she is the King's mate. The only difference she sees between the two of them is that his whiskers are longer than hers. She feels he is no more important than she, so she is constantly trying to diminish his authority. He urges her to set a good example to the subject cockroaches. The cockroach members of the King's court, whom the Queen mocks because they are a trio of self-appointed sycophants, are the Minister, the Savant, and the Priest. The Queen chides the King for not having found a solution to the age-old problem of the threat of the ants: cockroaches that fall on their backs will always fall prey to the ants because they cannot right themselves.
The Minister arrives. He has a reputation for proposing disconcerting problems and producing unpleasant news. He is distressed because his son has fallen on his back and has been carried off by the ants. The King is sympathetic to his situation but tells him he must find a solution to the problem of the ants. The Minister suggests mobilizing a huge ant-like army, but the Savant must provide the details. The Savant (whose ideas have existence only in his own head) is unable to help. The ants are a political problem, not a scientific one.

When the Minister approaches a passing subject cockroach for help with the problem of the ants, the subject tells the Minister he just wants to be left out of it. The Priest arrives, having just seen the procession of ants carrying off the Minister's son. The Priest's suggestion for ridding the kingdom of ants is to offer sacrifices. At this point the army of ants carries the dead cockroach in a procession before the King and his court.

The Queen becomes depressed listening to the four hulking males who have done nothing but talk about the problem. They all have reasons why they cannot take any action. But the King tells her that cockroaches cannot fight like ants. Ants know methods of warfare. They have a Minister of War, an organized army, and a Minister of Supply who is responsible for storing food. The ants increase their numbers so they have to go to war to solve their need for food and storage. The ants are obviously inferior creatures so why do the cockroaches constantly suffer from them? The solution proposed by the male cockroaches is not to fall on their backs. The Queen gets angry. All this talk and the cockroaches have ended up exactly where they began.

The Savant excitedly begins to talk about his discovery of a lake (the bath). The King goes with him to see this lake and shortly the Savant returns with news that the King has fallen down the slippery walls of the bath and is trapped. It is too dangerous for the
others to help; he must save himself now. The Priest encourages them all to pray to the Gods for help.

**Act Two:** As the human couple Samia and Adil rise, they too argue, about who is first to use the bathroom. Samia wins, and locks the door on her husband Adil. While Adil attempts to persuade Samia to open the bathroom door, he philosophizes on his place and importance in life, and his identity. Samia demeans him in the same way the Queen belittles the King, and sends him to make breakfast. Obviously used to being dominated in this way, he does as he is told. He makes a telephone call to his employer, Raafat, and holds a disjointed conversation about the bath. Following this conversation, he passes all the toiletry items Samia requests through the door. A scream is heard as Samia discovers a cockroach in the bath. Adil becomes engrossed with the cockroach's struggle to escape from the bath, and its constant slipping back to the bottom. Perhaps Adil sympathizes with the cockroach because he sees the cockroach in himself, a trapped entity, repeating the same tasks day in, day out. While Samia goes to get insecticide, Adil rushes into the bathroom and locks the door; he talks to the cockroach, encouraging it in its struggle. On Samia’s return, she demands that he open the door. The cook, Um Attiya, arrives and Samia explains what is happening. Um Attiya tries to talk Adil out of the bathroom, but to no avail. The company doctor arrives and is shown in by the cook. He has been sent by Adil’s supervisor, Rafaat. Samia continues to try to dominate Adil and to suppress him. She tries to give her version of the situation to the Doctor, but Adil wants to explain in his own way. He takes the Doctor to the bathroom and shows him the cockroach. The Doctor examines Adil and comes to the conclusion he has been overworking. He gives Adil a prescription for tranquilizers and three days off work for rest and relaxation. The Doctor has to leave to
see other patients but he will return later. Adil is distressed - the cockroach will be
destroyed by then. The Doctor leaves without hearing Adil’s explanation of the situation.

Act Three: Both Adil and Samia wonder why the Doctor has left so abruptly.

Suddenly the Doctor reappears. He had decided to reconsider the case because he has a
private interest in psychiatry. He sees this as a unique opportunity to study a case first-
hand. Samia tells the Doctor she considers that Adil has identified himself with the
cockroach. The Doctor’s prescribed treatment is for Samia to persuade Adil that this is
not so. She can do this by showing affection for the cockroach, and, thus, for Adil. She
must go along with whatever Adil does, and participate in all his actions. She must be
complimentary about Adil, not make fun of him, and persuade him of her sincerity. Samia
and the Doctor persuade Adil that they have come to understand his point of view. Samia
agrees not to have a bath, and not to attempt to harm the cockroach. She apologizes to
Adil for not always having been nice to him. She will turn over a new leaf. He can go to the
bathroom first from now on.

When Samia and the Doctor ask Adil why he doesn’t help the cockroach with his
struggle, Adil tells them it is no concern of his; he doesn’t want it to die, yet he doesn’t
want to save it either. He has no connection with it. He denies any similarity between
himself and the cockroach. The Doctor asks to speak to Adil in private and Adil is able to
explain his preoccupation in detail to the Doctor. They discuss Samia and her dominance
over Adil. The Doctor is sympathetic to Adil and they form a bond. The Doctor also begins
to understand Adil’s obsession with the cockroach’s struggle. He tells Samia that Adil is
perfectly healthy, and she wonders if it is she who is mad. Um Attiya, the cook, runs a
bath, removes the drowned cockroach and throws it in the corner of the bathroom. The
play ends with the Doctor and Adil both watching the cockroach's corpse being carried off by the ants.

Richard Long considers *Fate of a Cockroach* to be "an inspired, thoughtful and vigorous denunciation of Egyptian (and Arab) politics and policies as he [al-Hakim] saw them in the years immediately prior to the June War and his last direct dramatic word on Abd an-Nasir" (Long 160). Long was of the opinion that, "Act One expresses the contempt of the Egyptian people (represented by the Cockroach Queen) for the lack of initiative of their leaders (the King and his male advisers) vis-à-vis Israel (the ants)" (Long 167).

Badawi found the mood of *Fate of a Cockroach* to be "one of cynicism and disenchantment both on the personal and the social and political levels, particularly in Act One, which expresses disillusionment with the socialist revolutionary regime under Nasser" (Badawi 82). He also points out (qtd. in Long 160) that, "the relevance to the contemporary situation in Egypt is all too clear. As one commentator puts it, 'It is an anti-Egyptian (perhaps anti-Arab) parable: the Kingdom is Egypt, the King and his sensible Queen are respectively the Egyptian President (Nasser) and people, whom Hakim is not complimenting by dressing up as cockroaches, and the non-existent cockroach army is Egypt's'" (Badawi 83).

Prior to the publication of *Fate of a Cockroach* in 1966, al-Hakim published *Bank al-Qalaq* (*Anxiety Bank*) which Badawi describes as a gloomy picture of the Egyptian society of the time, painted in a curious mixture of satire, farce, nightmarish vision, and Gothic elements (Badawi 86). Al-Hakim claims that he wrote *Anxiety Bank* because Nasir was "insufficiently aware of the feelings of fear and fragmentation that had struck Egyptian society before the war of 1967." Al-Hakim was afraid that Nasir would rely on Egyptian
society "to go on another adventure" (al-Hakim, *Consciousness* 38). Al-Hakim had problems publishing *Anxiety Bank*. Publication was held up by the censors for more than six months until they heard that it might be published overseas. This caused them reluctantly to agree to publication. Al-Hakim says, "I did not shrink from writing about things as I saw them, even though they were considered dangerous. In the in-tray of one official are writings of mine which have not been permitted to appear up until now. Some of them were read secretly as *samizdat*" (al-Hakim, *Consciousness* 38). *Samizdat* are clandestine publications named after the publishing system within the Soviet Union, by which forbidden or unpublishable literature was reproduced and circulated privately.

Strict censorship had been in effect in Egypt since Nasir's rise to power in 1952. By 1960 Egypt was still a police state in most respects:

> All incoming and outgoing mail was opened and censored. Unfavorable comments were eliminated from broadcasts or newspaper dispatches going abroad. Egypt's chief newspapers had been nationalized and placed under management of the single political party, controlled in turn by the government. Now there was nothing even resembling a free press in the Western sense. Telephone lines were tapped. Visitors' rooms were searched. Ambassadors' automobiles were followed. The people dared not discuss, even in whispers, certain subjects, among them the concentration camps hundreds of miles off on the desert where Communists, Moslem Brothers, and other political prisoners were kept, with few guards and no fences because escape meant certain death before water could be reached. Political democracy did not yet exist, despite the frequent promises. No party except the National Union was permitted. (St. John 314)

Nasir justified his strict censorship by saying that "the individual in Egypt enjoyed less democracy before the revolution than after the Revolutionary Command Council abolished Parliament, imposed almost perpetual censorship, restricted freedom of movement and assembly, limited the right of free speech, abolished opposition political parties, and put the
country under military rule" (St. John 238-9). His rationale was that since colonialism had been abolished Egyptians were now free men.

Al-Hakim followed Anxiety Bank with Fate of a Cockroach. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that, pursuant to the problems he encountered with censorship, he would disguise this bitter satire on Egyptian society and its leadership as an allegory in order to bypass the censor and have his work published.

Allegory, as The American Heritage® New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy defines it, is:

A story that has a deeper or more general meaning in addition to its surface meaning. Allegories are composed of several symbols or metaphors. For example, in The Pilgrim's Progress, by John Bunyan, the character named Christian struggles to escape from a bog or swamp. The story of his difficulty is a symbol of the difficulty of leading a good life in the "bog" of this world. The "bog" is a metaphor or symbol of life's hardships and distractions. Similarly, when Christian loses a heavy pack that he has been carrying on his back, this symbolizes his freedom from the weight of sin that he has been carrying.

In the following analysis, I will examine key passages in Fate of a Cockroach in order to demonstrate al-Hakim's use of allegory and the political significance of his message.

The first time the problem of the ants is raised in discussion between the King and the Queen, the King warns the Queen to be careful not to fall on her back. If that happens she will be carried away by the enemy.

Queen. Is that the only solution you have?
King. Do you want, from one day to the next, a solution to a problem that is as old as time? (al-Hakim, Fate 4)

The King tells the Queen that the ants are not a new problem for him to solve. Similarly, the Israelis were not a new problem for Nasir to deal with. In modern times, the Jewish problem has been an issue with the Arabs since the 1800s. But, of course, the
conflicts are "as old as time." For centuries there have been conflicts between the Arabs and the Jewish people. Throughout history the Jews have been in diaspora. However, starting in the 1800s a new movement called Zionism was formed to return the Jews to their ancient homeland.

Arthur Goldschmidt Jr. defines Zionism as "the belief that the Jews constitute a nation and that they deserve the liberties of other such groups, including the right to return to what they consider their ancestral homeland, the land of Israel (or Palestine)" (Goldschmidt 231). He defines political Zionism as "the belief that the Jews should establish and maintain a state for themselves there" (Goldschmidt 231). The Zionism movement received its impetus from Theodor Herzl, a Jewish journalist living in Vienna in 1896. He convened the first International Zionist congress in Switzerland in 1897. The congress adopted as its goal the establishment for the Jewish people of a home in Palestine guaranteed by public law. Although the Jews have been living in diaspora for two millennia, in more modern times, the King's "problem that is as old as time" has been on-going for over sixty years.

The Minister and the Savant hold a discussion regarding the cockroaches predilection for scattering in times of crises. The ants, by contrast, do the opposite.

Savant. The ants, because of their tiny size, can do what they like, but we larger creatures are in a special position.
Minister. But by their coming together they overcome us.
Savant. Yes, regretfully. (al-Hakim, Fate 13)

I believe that al-Hakim is using this dialogue to illustrate that the Jewish strength comes from their willingness to "come together" to create a united Israel, while the Arab states failed to bond together effectively. At the end of World War Two (WWII)
immigration of Jews to Palestine increased. Immigrants came from post-Holocaust Europe, and from Islamic countries in Africa and the Middle East where being Jewish equated to living in danger. By 1948 the State of Israel had been created. The immigrants came together, set aside their ethnic origins and various languages, embraced the Israeli nationality and worked towards building the new country (Goldschmidt 243). National military service was compulsory for men and women over the age of 18, which helped to boost the Israeli Defense Force, whose purpose was to protect all the inhabitants of Israel and to combat terrorism. Following regular military service Israeli men were eligible to be called-up for annual reserve service until the age of 45, and for active duty immediately in times of crisis. Because of Israel’s small population and limited financial resources, it used the Swiss model of a small standing army backed by a large reserve force. During the Suez crisis in October 1956, this allowed Israel to “double the number of its citizens under arms” and to have the Israeli air-force fully operational within 43 hours. With this military force Israel made a pre-emptive strike against Egypt, where it cut off Gaza and drove into the Sinai (Goldschmidt 269).

The Queen becomes annoyed at the King’s tone of superiority in his treatment of her. He warns her to speak to him with respect since he is the King. She demands to know how he became the King.

Queen. King! I would just like to ask who made you a king.
King. I made myself a king.
Queen. And what devious means and measures brought you to the throne and placed you on the seat of kingship? (al-Hakim, Fate 4)

The Queen questions the devious way in which the King became leader of the cockroaches. Similarly, al-Hakim questions the validity of the election which made Nasir
President of Egypt. In July 1952, the Free Officers carried out a bloodless coup against King Farouk. General Mohammad Naguib was installed as head of state. By June 1953 Naguib had been named first President of the republic. In early 1954 Nasir was made Prime Minister. Following a failed assassination attempt against Nasir by the Muslim Brotherhood, members of the Revolutionary Command Council established a connection between the Brotherhood and Naguib. Nasir dismissed Naguib as President and placed him under house arrest. Nasir assumed the position of acting Head of State (St. John 180). Presidential elections were held on June 23, 1956. For the first time more than five million Egyptians voted for a President and for a constitution. However, there was only one candidate on the slate, Gamal Abdel Nasir. Approval of the President was by default. So, as the King Cockroach says, Nasir effectively made himself President.

The discussion between the King and the Queen continues when the Queen asks if there were any challenges to the King’s authority when he named himself King.

King. I was really delighted at the length of my whiskers. I immediately rose up and challenged all the cockroaches to compare their whiskers with mine, and that if it was apparent that mine were the longest then I should become king over them all.

Queen. And they accepted the challenge?

King. No, they conceded it to me there and then, saying that they had no time for whisker-measuring. (al-Hakim, Fate 5)

The parallel to be drawn here is the challenge from members of the Revolutionary Command Council, which Nasir dealt with swiftly. The Free Officers organization was started by Nasir in February 1942 and it was then that he started making his plans for the revolution. The members of his secret group would owe allegiance to no one except him.

When the revolt took place in 1952, Nasir worked hard to keep his name out of the public eye. Nasir, General Amer, and a small number of officers in Nasir’s inner circle, had already
decided that there would be a public figurehead other than Nasir. He would be a senior military officer, someone who would command the respect of both the army and the Egyptian people. After several candidates were dismissed, Naguib was chosen (St. John 107/8). However, Nasir was the driving force behind the revolution and eventually the news leaked to the press. In the initial stages of the revolution, decisions regarding the ruling of the country were made by the Free Officers Executive Committee. They would eventually rename themselves the Revolutionary Command Council. At an early meeting of the Executive Committee discussion turned to how to deal with enemies of the government. Most members demanded quick trials and public executions. However, Nasir reminded them that one of the aims of the revolution was to relieve the people of tyranny. When the vote went against him, he told the committee that he resigned as head of the committee, and as a member of the Free Officers. He also told them that he planned to resign his army commission and he left the meeting. The other committee members, lost without his guidance, passed a unanimous vote of confidence in him and informed him he had free reign if he would only return to chair the committee. There was no challenge to Nasir's leadership; the rest of the committee members conceded it to him (St. John 136/7).

Because the Queen is the King's mate, she is Queen by right. But she reminds him that, titles aside, there is no difference between them, they are both from the cockroach species.

Queen. I'm a queen! Don't forget I'm the Queen!
King. And I'm the King!
Queen. I'm exactly the same as you - there's no difference between us at all. (al-Hakim, Fate 2)
In al-Hakim's play *Fate of a Cockroach* the Cockroach Queen represents the Egyptian people. In this text she is reminding the King Cockroach, who represents Nasir, that they have the same origins. En route to the Presidency of Egypt, Nasir succeeded King Farouk, a member of the Muhammad Ali dynasty, a family of Albanian origin which came to prominence under the Ottoman Empire, and General Mohammad Naguib, who was born in the Sudan. Nasir, by contrast, was born in Alexandria and was the first modern Egyptian ruler of the Egyptians. The Queen Cockroach is correct, she and the king are the same. Egypt is no longer governed by a foreign power. Nasir is of the people.

The members of the King's court begin to arrive. The King delegates to them the problem of finding a solution to the problem of the ants. The first to be asked to find a solution is the Minister:

King. Come along, Minister - suggest something.
Minister. As you think best, Your Majesty.
King. Yes, but it's up to you first to put forward an opinion, even if it's a stupid one. I'll then look into it.
Minister. Put forward an opinion?
King. Yes, any opinion. Speak - quickly. It's one of the duties of your position to put forward an opinion - and for me to make fun of it.
Queen. Perhaps his opinion will be sound.
King. I don't think so. I know his opinions. (al-Hakim, *Fate* 8/9)

In this text we see an example of the Minister declining to provide a suggestion for a solution to the problem of the ants. He is prepared to accept whatever the King suggests. Likewise, at the beginning of Nasir's regime a cleansing process took place called the Movement of Purification. Employees were encouraged to complain about their superiors, colleagues to turn on their peers. "Agencies, departments, ministries, universities, hospitals were converted into battlegrounds of truth and falsehood but mostly falsehood because the defamer in most cases coveted the post of the defamed." As al-Hakim states in *Return of*
"Consciousness, "No chief of a department nor director of an agency was free from the complaints of those under him, nor was any professor in a university spared from the defamation of a colleague" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 15). The result of this cleansing was that the administrative system was weakened. Chiefs were fearful of speaking out and taking responsibility. Although the revolution achieved its aim in preventing the cultural, social, and political elite holding authority or speaking against the Revolutionary Council, it created a situation later, in that once absolute rule was introduced, the country was left with chiefs and directors who declined to take responsibility. "The 'purification' operations included some senior officials who were chosen a little later as ministers in the very government which has previously destroyed them for purposes of 'purification'" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 16). Surely it is little wonder the Minister will not give the King his opinion.

The Savant arrives. Having failed to provide the King with any useful solutions, the Minister leaves and passes the problem over to the Savant. Surely, though, if politics is timid, science will provide the answer.

Minister: The matter is the problems of the ants.
Savant: What about the problem of the ants?
Minister: We want to find a decisive solution to it.
Savant: And what have I to do with this? This is a political problem. It is for you to solve - you in your capacity as Minister and His Majesty in his capacity as King. (al-Hakim, Fate 10)

For the same reason the Minister is reluctant to provide the King with an answer, the Savant declines to bring science into the realm of politics. This scene may suggest, then, the lack of decision-making created by the Movement of Purification which extended into universities, hospitals and other scientific areas. Nasir appointed a junior army officer of limited education to the prestigious position of presidency of the high council of
universities and the high council for literature, arts and social sciences. "Our senior scholars," as al-Hakim noted, "began to sit politely before their chairman, the young officer, on their best behaviour" (al-Hakim, Consciousness 43). This officer was responsible for the issuing of awards, and could withhold them from anyone who dissatisfied him. Many distinguished scholars who should have received national meritorious awards in fields such as engineering and law were disqualified for no other reason.

The Minister returns in a state of great distress. His son has fallen on his back and has been carried off by the ants.

Minister. My son, Your Majesty - my one and only son.
King. What's wrong with him?
Minister. He has been taken in the prime of youth - has died in the spring of life - he has been killed! Killed!
King. Killed? How? Who killed him?
Minister. The ants. (al-Hakim, Fate 6)

By announcing the death of his son, the Minister brings attention here to the death toll of the young men in the cockroach/ant conflict. This represents the many young Egyptian lives that were lost in wars with Israel, including the Israeli War of Independence in 1948, and the Suez conflict in 1956. The exact number of Arab losses during the 1948 war is unknown but is estimated at between 5,000 and 15,000. In the 1956 Suez conflict Arab casualties were given as 21,000 dead and 45,000 wounded. Israel captured almost 6,000 prisoners of war. Although civilians were included in these numbers, most of the casualties were young men in the military (http://www.zionism-israel.com).

Distraught over the death of his son, the Minister decries the aggressive nature of the ants:

Minister. I have not asked for an announcement of mourning, Your Majesty.
King. That's extremely intelligent of you.
Minister. I am merely announcing that it is a catastrophe for the whole of our species.

King. The whole of our species? The death of your son?

Minister. I mean rather the ants' aggression against us all in this manner. (al-Hakim, Fate 7)

In this excerpt the Minister is claiming that it has always been the ants who have been the aggressors. In other words, Egypt sees Israel as the constant aggressor in the Arab/Israeli conflicts and regards the creation of the state of Israel as a catastrophe for the Arab nations as a whole.

When, on May 14, 1948 the Jewish Agency Executive Committee declared the Independent State of Israel, the surrounding Arab states regarding this as an act of aggression. The following day, May 15, 1948, the Israeli War of Independence began. A united Arab force of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Syria attacked the newly declared State of Israel, but the force could not match the 100,000-strong Israeli army and it was defeated (Goldschmidt 248). For the Palestinians this war marked the beginning of what they termed 'the catastrophe' (al-Nakba).

The other Israeli aggressive act was the pre-emptive strike against Egypt following the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Nasir in October 1956. The Gaza Strip was cut off by the Israelis and they drove towards the Sinai. When Nasir rejected a cease fire ultimatum from Britain and France, the Israelis joined in the tri-partite aggression against Egypt. Britain landed paratroopers in Port Said. The situation was eventually resolved when a UN Emergency Force occupied Egyptian lands taken by the aggressors (Goldschmidt 229).

As soon as the Minister finishes railing against the ants, a chanting procession of ants passes before the cockroach court. They are carrying the corpse of the Minister's son.
The Ants. Here is your great feast.
We carry it together, together,
To our towns, our villages:
A great and splendid cockroach -
Provision for the winter long.
With it our storerooms we shall fill
None of us will hunger know,
Because we all lend a hand,
We’re members of a single body.
There is amongst us no one sad,
There is amongst us none who’s lonesome,
There is amongst us none who says
‘I am not concerned with others.’ (al-Hakim, Fate 17)

The song of the ants describes the kibbutz system which was the social and
agricultural basis for the expansion of the State of Israel. Immigration to Israel after
WWII created a War of Independence population of 650,000. By 1950 there were 214
kibbutzim (community settlements, usually agricultural in nature, organized under
collectivist principles) in Israel with 66,708 Israelis living on them as members. Many other
immigrants worked on the kibbutzim, but not as members.

The kibbutz belonged to all its members, and each member was personally
responsible to the collective. All members were entitled to housing,
furniture, food, clothing, medical services, cultural activities, and education
for their children. In return they were expected to work in the kibbutz at
the task assigned to them by the work organizer. (Gavron 2)

The kibbutz provided food all year round for the settlement, because everyone there
worked towards a communal aim of providing for the settlement. When the immigrants
became workers at the kibbutzim the food output was sufficient to support the needs of
the immigrants as well as the existing members. Everyone on the kibbutz was part of the
single body, the collective. Because all the social services were provided, everyone was
cared for, and cultural activities provided members and workers with companionship.

Now the Minister is ready to mobilize an army of cockroaches to destroy the ants:
King. Tell me how many there will be in the army of cockroaches you want to mobilize?

Minister. Let's say twenty. Twenty cockroaches assembled together could trample underfoot and destroy a long column of ants - nay, a whole village, a whole township.

King. Of that there is no doubt, but has it every happened in the whole of our long history that twenty cockroaches have gathered together in one column? (al-Hakim, Fate 9)

The King is asking his Minister here whether the cockroaches ever fight together on the same side, or ever fully support each other. This calls to mind the failure of the Arab states to support Egypt in its military action during the Israeli War of Independence. In the 1948 war, Saudi Arabia promised to support Egypt with 40,000 troops, but only 700 were sent. The force of 2,000 sent by Lebanon was "little more than a glorified police force" and even the well-trained contribution provided by the TransJordan Arab Legion was, unfortunately, not strong enough to defeat the Israeli army (Goldschmidt 250). In the Suez conflict, no troops were sent by neighbouring Arab countries to assist Egypt. Possibly both these wars could have been won if the "cockroaches had gathered together." The 1962 Yemeni Civil War was an example of Arab fighting Arab as Saudi Arabia supported the royalist forces against the Egyptian-backed republican forces of Yemen.

The King and his court now discuss the logistics of how such an army might be formed. Who has the authority to coordinate such a fighting force?

Queen. Define things for him Minister.

Minister. You know that the ants attack us with their armies. If we also were able to mobilize an army of twenty, or even ten, cockroaches with which to attack them, we would be able to destroy their towns and villages.

Savant. Then mobilize ten cockroaches!

Minister. And who will do so?

Savant. You and His Majesty the King - that's your job.

King. Our job!

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Savant. Naturally. If the King can’t order ten cockroaches to assemble together, then what authority has the King got? (al-Hakim, Fate 11)

This mobilization of the cockroaches surely represents the establishment of the United Arab Republic. It was important to Nasir because he wanted leadership of the Arab world. In early 1957 King Saud of Saudi Arabia signed the Eisenhower Doctrine, a US plan to give economic military aid to any Middle East country asking for it as a defence against communism. In exchange, the Saudis renewed the lease on the US air base in Saudi Arabia for a further five years (Goldschmidt 270/1). This manoeuvre annoyed Nasir as he felt he was being bypassed and that the Americans were attempting to make Saud the key figure in the Middle East. He decided that unless he wanted to turn the Middle East leadership over to Saud, he needed to take action. On February 1, 1958 Nasir and Syrian President Shukri el-Kuwatly proclaimed the United Arab Republic, uniting half the population and one quarter the land mass of the Arab Middle East. Nasir was nominated as President of the 600-member assembly comprised of 400 Egyptians and 200 Syrians. There were two Syrian vice-presidents and two Egyptians. El-Kuwatly expected Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Yemen to join but only Yemen showed any interest. In March 1958 the Yemeni crown prince was authorized to join a federation, but not a republic. The tripartite union into which Yemen was amalgamated became the United Arab States (Sicker 206).

The King wonders why he is to be assigned the task of solving the ant problem when those rulers who preceded him were unable to do so. The Queen tells him that along with the position of King comes certain responsibilities.

King. We grew up, our fathers, our grandfathers, and our grandfathers’ grandfathers grew up, with the problems of the ants there. Minister. Truly, Your Majesty.
King. Seeing that you know all that, why do you today assign me the task of solving it? Why should it be my bad luck that I, out of all those fathers and grandfathers who came before me, should alone be asked to find the solution?

Queen. Because, before you came along there had been no one who was so delighted with the length of his whiskers that he demanded to be made king. (al-Hakim, Fate 7/8)

The King confirms that no previous Kings have been able to solve the problem of the ants. The Queen tells him that, since he proclaimed himself king he obviously needs to find a solution now. Similarly, it is incumbent upon Nasir, the self-proclaimed President and leader of the Arab world, to find a solution to the Israeli conflict.

The leadership of Egypt had passed through Ottoman succession, from Mohammad Ali Pasha in 1805 to King Ahmed Fouad II in 1952 (following the forced abdication of his father, King Farouk I). Following the Free Officers’ Revolt, Nasir was the first leader who “demanded to be made king.” The “problem” of Zionism and the Israelis had, indeed, existed since the time of the Ottoman rulers at the end of the nineteenth century, but none of these rulers had attempted to find a solution. It was not until the time of the Israeli War of Independence in 1948 that major violence erupted and it was only with the assistance of Ralph Bunche, the UN Mediator on Palestine, that an armistice was negotiated (Goldschmidt 253). Since Nasir took over the Presidency of Egypt, he also had to accept the responsibility for providing solutions to issues that arose subsequent to the revolt, and this included any future conflicts with Israel, i.e. the pre-emptive strike following the Suez Crisis. To do otherwise would compromise his ability to remain in power and thus make him a target for overthrow himself.
Having been given authority to form a fighting force, the King tries to exert his authority over the Queen. She reminds him that he has no justification for this, since he does not provide for her as a spouse should do.

Queen. You don’t provide me with food or drink. Have you ever fed me? I feed myself, just as you feed yourself. Do you deny it? (al-Hakim, Fate 3)

Queen. And I myself - the Queen - no one has given me anything, not even my dear husband. I strive for my daily bread like him, without any difference at all. (al-Hakim, Fate 15)

The Queen is pointing out here that the King has not provided for her daily needs. She has done this herself. In other words, Nasir did not fulfill the revolutionary promises he made regarding a better life for the average Egyptian citizen. Writing in 1960 about social conditions, Robert St. John reports that:

Poverty was still widespread in Cairo and the villages of Upper Egypt in all its filthy, squalid, diseased, fly-covered, manure-smelling aspects. Clean water had been piped to a few hundred thousand people, but most Egyptians still used the same canals and banks of the Nile for mutually incompatible purposes. The death rate had gone down slightly, but the birth rate was almost as high as ever, with the certainty that by the time the Aswan Dam was completed the land it rescued from the desert would just about feed the increase in population. (St. John 314)

Although al-Hakim did not know exactly how much the three wars in which Nasir involved the Egyptian people had cost, either in thousand of lives or in thousands of millions of Egyptian pounds, he was appalled:

If this amount had been spent on the villages of Egypt, which number about four thousand, the share for each village would have been a million pounds. Such a sum would completely re-create the villages and raise them to the level of the villages of Europe. But our Egyptian villages have remained in their sad condition, and our poor peasants in their ignorance, disease and poverty. (al-Hakim, Consciousness, 37)
Even the Aswan Dam, which was described by al-Hakim in *Return of the Spirit* as the next miracle after the pyramids, brought problems in addition to its many benefits. It caused agricultural and fishing problems for the people living in the villages and the Nile Delta, problems such as erosion, water-logging, and salinity of farm-land, loss of fishery, and difficulties growing rice in the Delta because of inundation with seawater.

The Queen asks for information on methods by which the cockroaches might defeat the ants. She asks for details on the ants' war machine, and what steps the cockroaches must take to overcome it.

King. Speak and tell her why the ants know methods of warfare and we don't. Tell her, explain to her!

Savant. First, the ants have a Minister of War.

Queen. A Minister of War?

Savant. Naturally. A minister who devotes all his attention to the business of organizing armies. Is it reasonable that all these vast troops should march with such discipline and order in serried ranks without somebody responsible behind them, somebody specialized in organizing them?

Queen. The question's a simple one - why don't we too have a specialized Minister of War? (al-Hakim, *Fate* 19)

The Savant highlights the effectiveness of the ants' war machine, in particular the fact that they have a dedicated minister of war. The Queen questions why the Arabs do not have a minister who is allowed to focus specifically on the issue of war. This scene illustrates that the Israeli Defence Force is a highly trained and motivated fighting force.

From the inception of the State of Israel in 1948 until 1963 the control and organization of the Israeli Defence Force came under the authority of David Ben Gurion, as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. He had seen military service as a member of the Jewish Legion at the end of World War One (WWI). An important and contentious decision which Ben Gurion made in 1948 was the exclusion of all private militias and the unification of all armed
factions into a single Israeli army. Ben Gurion constantly reassessed Israel's defence policies and responses to terrorism. In 1955 he adopted a defence strategy based on a partnership with France which would last for over a decade. The Defence Force developed a logistics system based upon civil resources and national infrastructures as well as supporting industries which built munitions, instead of relying upon external sources. Large weapon systems, such as airplanes, were supplied by Western powers, as a Cold War deterrent to Soviet influence in Egypt and Syria.

Nasir appointed Abdel-Hakim Amer Commander in Chief of the Egyptian army shortly after the Free Officers' Revolt and, although he would subsequently be named Minister of Defence, Amer acted as friend, confidante, and right-hand man to Nasir and did not devote all his time to the development of the armed forces. On many occasions military advice given to Nasir by Amer was overruled. For example, in mid-1956 Nasir instructed bands of fedayeen to make incursions into Israel. Many Israelis were killed and the Israeli Defence Force responded. Amer called Nasir to inform him that the Israelis were close by the fedayeen headquarters. "'I am ready to move the Army in an all-out attack,' Amer said. Nasser hesitated only a second. 'Not now, Abdel. Hold it until day-light, and then call me again'" (St. John 209). By daybreak the fedayeen camp was destroyed and thirty-five Arabs had been killed. Although Amer was an experienced and decorated military officer, his actions were governed by the whims of Nasir and he could not be the "specialized Minister of War" that was required by the people.

The Queen looks for more information on the ants, specifically their supply mechanism. The Savant describes it:
Queen. Then, O venerable Savant, the whole difference is that the ants have a specialized Minister of War?

Savant. That is not all they have.

Queen. What do they have as well?

Savant. A brilliant Minister of Supply.

Queen. A Minister of Supply?

Savant. A brilliant one - the operation of storing goods in warehouses on that enormous scale must have some remarkable economic planning behind it.

King. We have no need for any supply or any Minister of Supply because we don't have a food crisis and have no need to plan or store. (al-Hakim, Fate 20)

The Savant and the Queen question the King regarding his kingdom's use of its resources. He denies there is a problem and says that they have no food crisis. Both Robert St. John and al-Hakim reported that poverty was rife in the villages of Egypt. The hoped-for benefits that the Aswan Dam brought were also accompanied by problems that effected crop growth and fishing. Tons of food that could not be spared was wasted during the 1962 war with Yemen:

Slabs of fine cheese or cans of meat or fruit were dropped from the air to our armies. But the burning sun and the absence of refrigerators spoiled these provisions, and they were abandoned in piles where they were dropped. Then the worms started to play in them, the smell of putrefaction hung over them, and no one would approach these piles. The hungry and deprived Egyptians did not know that this food of theirs, for which they had exhausted themselves, was the rendezvous of vermin in the dust of Arabia felix. (al-Hakim, Consciousness 36)

The Israeli kibbutz system had perfected the organization of growing and storing the food which was the primary source for Israelis. In addition to the kibbutzim, a number of moshav (a type of cooperative community based upon 50-100 individual family farms) had been developed over the years. The two communities accounted for more than 80% of the country's agricultural produce. The 1948 provisional government of Israel had a Minister of Trade, Industry and Supplies. This position was re-named the Minister of Agriculture,
Supply and Rationing in the official first government. In all subsequent governments the position became the Minister of Agriculture. This office was responsible for planning the growth and distribution of farm produce, and managing the nation's water supply and lands.

The cockroach Minister comes to the conclusion that in order to defeat the ants the cockroaches must work together. He approaches the citizen cockroach with a bid for his cooperation, but he is rejected.

Minister. I'm the Minister.
Cockroach. It's an honour I'm sure.
Minister. We are thinking about an important problem that threatens your life - the problems of the ants. You've come along at the right time. We'd like you and others to co-operate with us. What do you think?
Cockroach. I think you should let me be. (al-Hakim, Fate 24)

In Fate of a Cockroach the subject cockroach represents the other Arab nations. The Minister seeks cooperation from him but he is not willing to participate actively in the King's efforts. I believe this scene represents the collapse of the United Arab Republic because of a lack of cohesion and cooperation between the Arab states. Nasir had sent subversives into Jordan, Lebanon and other surrounding Arab countries in an attempt to destabilize these governments in his bid for Arab dominance. King Faisal of Iraq and King Saud of Saudi Arabia tried to settle the subsequent dispute between Nasir and Hussein of Jordan. Nasir's anti-Hussein propaganda backfired as Hussein ended up being even more popular with his people. After the announcement of the United Arab Republic (UAR) Jordan and Iraq announced another union along the same pattern, the Arab Federation. On his way to join the UAR, the Yemeni crown prince stopped for a visit in Riyadh and, on arrival in Cairo, reported to Nasir that King Saud has declared he would never join the UAR.

Following a coup d'etat in Iraq on July 14, 1958 in which all the royal family were
assassinated, Abdel Karim Kassem became Prime Minister. He was invited to join the UAR by Nasir but suggested that the decision should be delayed temporarily. His later decision not to join was based on the fact that he did not want to be the "tail to Nasir's kite" (St. John 296). Nasir's vision of Arab dominance and supremacy over the Israelis dwindled with the refused offer of UAR membership by Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq who preferred that Nasir "let them be."

The Savant rushes into the cockroach court in a state of distress. The King has fallen into "a lake" and cannot get out without the assistance of other cockroaches. The Queen begs for help for her husband, but none is forthcoming.

Queen. What's happened to the King?
Savant. His foot slipped - he fell into the lake! (al-Hakim, Fate 24)

Queen. My husband must be saved! Save my husband! I beseech you - save him.
Minister. Yes, the King must be saved!
Savant. No one can do so. He is in the very depths of the chasm. The walls are slippery. One's feet will slip on the smooth walls. Only he can save himself, only by his own efforts. (al-Hakim, Fate 25)

The falling of the King into the chasm can be equated to the collapse of the United Arab Republic. None of the other cockroaches is prepared to offer assistance to the King and he is left alone. The Syrians were dissatisfied with Egypt's domination of the alliance in which the Egyptians took most important administrative posts. By the 1960s there was political unrest in Syria, together with economic unrest brought about by prolonged drought. Living conditions did not improve and this caused malcontent. Industrialization and land reform was slow. Nasir made no attempts to placate the Syrians and the UAR was dissolved in September 1961 after a military coup in Syria. The federation with Yemen was dissolved
the same year. Once again Nasir was left alone and his vision of Arab dominance disappeared (Sicker 211-13).

Al-Hakim's use of allegory in *Fate of a Cockroach* to circumvent political censorship or pressure to avoid criticism of the current government is not a new technique nor is it limited to the Middle East. It has been used throughout history and in all regions of the world.

In the eighteenth century when Henry Fielding wrote plays in London, his political satires were directed mostly towards the court and the government, in particular towards Robert Walpole (British Prime Minister from 1721 to 1742). His works contributed to the passage of the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737. In April 1731 Fielding wrote *The Welsh Opera* for production at the Little Haymarket Theatre. This play was "was political in its intent . . . full of satirical allusions to Walpole, his friend William Pulteney and incidentally even to the royal family. With this play Fielding embraced the cause of the discontented Whigs against the government" (van der Voorde 33).

In 1734 *Don Quixote in London* was produced, a direct political satire on the recent general elections which had been marked by corruption, violence and libel. The election scenes in the play mock both sides (the foes of Walpole were the Duke of Bolton and Lord Chesterfield) but there were many allusions that mocked Walpole. *The Historical Register, for the Year 1736*, which opened in 1737, was openly hostile to Walpole and his system of taxation. McCrea considers them to be "deviations from his [Fielding's] steady loyalty to the urban and commercial way of life that flourished during the Walpole-Pelham era. This deviation occurred because of Walpole's often documented, ostentatious quest for personal gain, which made his self-interest appear unenlightened and primitive." Fielding's attacks on
Walpole, however, were "essentially brief interludes in his otherwise consistent support of the Whig establishment" (McCrea 17).

1737 was the year when Fielding's plays would provoke the government to the extreme. The increasing impact of Fielding's plays, and those of his contemporary satirists, caused the government to react by passing the Theatre Licensing Act in June 1737 which brought both plays and players under the control of the Lord Chamberlain. It mandated all new plays and all changes to old plays be licenced by the Lord Chamberlain. This effectively put Fielding out of business as a theatrical satirist since none of his satire would ever get past the censor. However, he found a rich alternative mode of writing in the novel, culminating with *Tom Jones*.

In the twentieth century Joseph Stalin ruled the Soviet people with an iron fist from 1922 to 1953. Rigid censorship was applied to literature. Yevgeni Shvarts wrote *Drakon (The Dragon)* in 1943, a story based on the legend on Sir Lancelot and the dragon. The satire was aimed at the political rulers and the quest for power and tyranny. Shvarts also addressed corruption in the government and the military, and their indifference to the needs of the people (Segel 282). The first production of *The Dragon* was in 1943. It was "praised as an anti-fascist and anti-war pamphlet." But it was only allowed to play one night in both Leningrad and Moscow. A 1962 revival was received warmly by audience and critics but was again taken out of production. At the date of publication of Segel's book (1979), no further productions had been allowed by the Soviet government.

In the United States of America it is alleged that Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible* as an allegory, or parable, for the topic of Senator Joe McCarthy and the investigations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in the 1950s. Had Mr. Miller written his play at any
other period before or since, we could easily find alternative, appropriate allegories. If Mr. Miller had written his play eight years earlier it would have been an ideal allegory for the post-Pearl Harbor witch hunt of the Japanese Americans. In 1944, in Korematsu v. U.S. the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the exclusion of Japanese-Americans as per Executive Order 9066. Mr. Miller's message is equally valid in the twenty-first century. In 2001, there was a potential for a massive witch hunt against Arab-Americans. In the same way that it was so easy to hold all Japanese-Americans responsible for the 1942 Pearl Harbor attack, it has become just as easy to hold the entire Arab-American population responsible for the destruction of the World Trade Center and to carry out a witch hunt against these people.

Vaclav Havel's plays were censored during the communist era in Czechoslovakia. Following the suppression of the Prague Spring of 1968 (a brief period of liberalization in Czechoslovakia under Alexander Dubcek), Havel was banned from the theatre and became politically active. This resulted in several periods of imprisonment and constant government surveillance. Havel's first play after the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia was Spiklenci (Conspirators) which he wrote in 1971. It was smuggled out of the country and performed in Baden-Baden, Germany. It is a political allegory about the replacement of a dictator with a democracy. The Prime Minister's advisors form a false conspiracy to overthrow his government, the purpose of which is to stimulate a stronger military, censorship, and torture of prisons which they think will preserve their democratic ideals. Amazingly, unlike all previous writers who wrote against tyranny, Havel was given the opportunity to lead his country's government. Havel was the 9th President of Czechoslovakia from 1990 to 1992 and the 1st President of the Czech Republic from 1993 to 2002. Conspirators was not produced in the Czech Republic until 1992.
The use of allegory will continue throughout the world as a means of delivering a message that would otherwise be blocked by oppressive regimes. As long as oppressive regimes continue to exist, these messages will be relevant. *Fate of a Cockroach* was a significant publication in 1966 because al-Hakim was trying to convince Nasir and the people of Egypt to change their political direction. Without major changes in strategy, they were doomed to repeated failure in their conflict with Israel. This play was al-Hakim's way of warning Nasir and the Egyptian people of the impending defeat at the hands of Israel unless there was a major shift in government policy and military programs. Al-Hakim foresaw the 1967 war looming and the play was a virtual prediction of the outcome. Because of the strict censorship in place during Nasir's regime, outright opposition to Nasir's policies was not possible. Challenge to the government was suppressed so political allegory was the last resort of the playwright. It allowed al-Hakim to make his position known without directly provoking Nasir.

But his critique and warning were not acknowledged and embraced by the government, as is usually the case for political writers in repressive regimes. Usually, if their work is understood they are treated as enemies of the state. Many must flee into exile to avoid prison or death. But al-Hakim did not get arrested, possibly because of the special relationship he had with Nasir. Nasir had read and re-read *Return of the Spirit* as a young man and regarded al-Hakim as the "spiritual father" of the revolution. Nasir has protected al-Hakim on several occasions. For instance, in 1953 al-Hakim's *Pygmalion* had just been performed at the Salzburg Mozarteum and received to great acclaim by the Austrian press. On returning home the Minister of Education (al-Qabbani) attempted to pension off a number of "unproductive" officials, including al-Hakim (Director of the National Library).
Nasir protected him because of the respect in which he was held "in literary and artistic circles in Europe." He asked, "Do you want them to say we're savages" (Long 64)?

Al-Hakim never provoked Nasir directly with his political commentary. He always used allegory. Maintaining "face" is an important part of Arabic cultural and societal status. By using allegory in his opposition and criticism of Nasir, al-Hakim allowed Nasir to maintain his dignity and respect. Nasir was, therefore, not embarrassed, did not lose respect, and was not forced to respond directly to al-Hakim's message. In this way, al-Hakim avoided the punishments that were meted out to other critics of the regime. Al-Hakim's international fame in the 1960s was also a mitigating factor and served to protect him from repercussions. Any punishment he might have received for merely speaking his mind would probably have met with uproar from the international press and, once again, Nasir might have been concerned about being considered "savage."

_Fate of a Cockroach_ is still relevant now. The situation in the Middle East is worse now than when al-Hakim wrote his play. The Arab world is still faced with the lack of an accepted leader, a political entity who could bind the Arabs together in a common objective. Members of the Arab League continue to act on behalf of their own governments and do not have common goals. Nasir was not the only egomaniac who wanted dominance of the Arab world. In more recent history we have seen attempts at dominance by Saddam Hussein who envisioned himself as the reincarnation of Nebuchadnesser only to be defeated by his own personal megalomania. Individual nations, and groups within these nations, have increasingly been at war with each other; for example, Sunni versus Shia in Iraq, Hamas versus Fateh in Palestine, Iran versus Iraq. If this energy could be devoted to the creation and expansion of a true United Arab community, then it would be a force to be reckoned with.
Al-Hakim's message is as valid today as it was in the time of Nasir, and perhaps even more so. If you want to defeat your enemies, find a leader who has the confidence of the people, whose desire to lead the Arabs is for the good of the Arab world, and not filled with delusional fantasies of wealth, power, or omnipotence. Put aside your in-fighting, both ethnic and religious, support each other, work together to form a cohesive group. Let your people live in a liberated environment with a basic standard of living. Grant your military, scientific, academic and literary professionals the freedom to work, and to voice their ideas and opinions. Only then will the Arab countries become a dominant force in the Middle East.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In the twentieth century the Middle East has experienced countless military conflicts centering on land dispute. Despite politicians' denials, oil has been at the heart of two gulf wars. Looking beyond these conflicts, the Middle East has been a source of playwrights and novelists who use their art and talent as a platform from which to speak out against political injustice: writers such as Taha Husayn, Naguib Mahfouz (the first Arab author to win the Nobel Prize for literature), Mahmud Diyab (Strangers Don't Drink Coffee and The Storm), Sa'dallah Wannus (The King is the King), Walid Ikhlasi (The Path), and Yusuf al-'Ani (The Key), some of whose works have been translated into English. Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk was recently indicted for writing novels which came into conflict with the Turkish government and those who want to impose religious orthodoxy on the people. Following the cancellation of the indictment, in 2006 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for his works dealing with "the symbols of clashing cultures."

In the forefront of these writers of the Middle East is Tawfiq al-Hakim. He was a major literary figure in the twentieth century in Egypt and in the Arab world. His work is multi-dimensional. For his plays, novels and short stories, he draws from sources such as the Qur'an, the Bible, Arabic and Islamic history and folklore, and European history and
Amongst his more important political themes he includes subjects such as war and peace: negotiation versus military conflict; the legitimacy of rule; the misappropriation of military resources; and the eradication of the use of poverty and hunger as a tool for domination of nations and peoples. Under the umbrella of social reform and moral issues he includes such themes as hunger and poverty; the greed and excess of the wealthy; reconciliation of the classes and society; his hope for an Egypt based on a solid work ethic not the wealth that comes from an accident of birth; the materialistic approach to marriage; misogyny and women's rights; and moral issues such as murder and suicide. His philosophical messages comprise his belief that the Egyptian past provides not a goal to return to, but a solid foundation on which to build for the future; the reforming educational role of the poet; the conflict between heart and intellect, two opposing forces that need to be balanced; and the recurrent theme of man versus time and space.

His writings include plays, novels, short stories, memoirs, autobiographies, and newspaper articles. His many years spent working as a lawyer in the Egyptian legal system gave him an insight into the workings of the Egyptian government. His knowledge and insight of the government under Gamal Abdul Nasir allowed him to speak out against unjust actions of the government - albeit in allegorical terms. He understood and experienced the problems and issues of twentieth century Egyptian society and these issues are interwoven into his works. His experience, together with his great wit and humour, assisted him with the development of his many characters and his descriptions of Egyptian society, both urban and rural.

After al-Hakim's return from France in 1928 many of his plays were written for reading rather than performance. This may have been the beginning of al-Hakim's use of
the concept of ‘theatre of the mind’ to refer to his works. Following the failure of the inaugural performance of *The People of the Cave* in 1933, the only full-length play produced on stage for the next 20 years was *Sirr al-Muntahira (Suicide’s Secret)* (1937).

Al-Hakim felt there was a gap in Arabic literature because the Greek and Roman classics had not been translated into Arabic until recent times. He attributed this "shortcoming" to the fact that the ancient Arabs probably believed these plays were for performing, not reading and so did not translate them. He decided to set about "plugging the gap", by writing what he termed his *Diverse Theatre* so it could be classified separately from the two collections of his plays which he titled *Theatre of the Mind* and *Theatre of Society*. Twenty plays written between 1928 and 1956 fall into this *Diverse Theatre* category; Hakim describes these plays as "psychological, societal, rural or political and so forth." He aimed to do in 30 years what the dramatic literature of other languages/cultures took 2,000 years to do.

In 1959 al-Hakim was nominated by Nasir as Egypt’s permanent representative to UNESCO, so he spent 1959-60 in Paris. During his time at UNESCO he prepared a proposal for a Peace Plan Office. His proposal was based on his belief that space travel would never have been realized if not for the dreams of writers such as Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. He visualized generations of intellectuals pondering and struggling over the dreams of Verne and Wells before they were realized as fact. Al-Hakim believed that the same theory could apply to peace, hunger and poverty. First someone had to dream that a solution was possible, and then the intellectuals would have to turn the dreams into reality.

Unfortunately he never presented his proposal to UNESCO, claiming insurmountable difficulties. He did not, however, identify these difficulties. Instead al-Hakim chose an
alternative path. He used his fame to get his causes across to the public, both Egyptian and international. He used his plays as a vehicle for his political and social reform messages. The plays he wrote during the 1960s, following his return to Egypt, were amongst the most important he wrote. I believe this is borne out by the fact that more plays from this decade were translated into other languages than from any other decade.

Al-Hakim's exposure to European culture and thought during the two periods he spent in France enabled him to become a bridge between east and west literature. He embraced a wide range of modern literary styles with relish. This was indicated by the writing of his experimental play *The Tree Climber* and his Brechtian play *Princess Sunshine* following his exposure to contemporary European drama during his second stay in Paris in 1959.

Al-Hakim's disillusionment with Nasir's policies became obvious in the mid-1960s. In 1966 he wrote *Anxiety Bank* which was intended as a warning to Nasir about the condition of Egypt. Nasir understood the allegorical message but did not heed the warning. According to al-Hakim Nasir understood what he intended but he did not accept al-Hakim's views. Rather, he plunged forward on his own course" (al-Hakim, *Consciousness* 38). Al-Hakim followed *Anxiety Bank* with *Fate of a Cockroach* later the same year. Once again Nasir did not heed al-Hakim's allegorical warning of impending disaster in the form of the 1967 war. When a university professor was arrested on trumped-up charges in 1966 al-Hakim wrote to Nasir that "this is a black stain on the face of the revolution which cannot be defended before history." Al-Hakim managed to use his relationship with Nasir, and Nasir's belief that al-Hakim was the "spiritual father" of the 1952 revolution, to avoid retaliation for circumventing the strict laws governing censorship and political opposition
which Nasir put in place. The only direct opposition that al-Hakim displayed against Nasir was in the 1970s when he instigated a protest against the loss of “free pens,” or the journalistic voice, when Mohammad Husayn Haikal was removed from the Egyptian newspaper, Akbar al-Yaum. The ensuing investigation resulted in prison sentences for Haikal’s personal secretary and his wife, but no penalty was issued against al-Hakim.

I believe that al-Hakim’s works are vital reading today because his messages and insights are timely. Unfortunately, only a small portion of his canon is translated into English. I would like to see more universities offering courses in al-Hakim’s works in translation so his plays and novels could become more widely-read and studied. Possibly more of his works could then be translated into English. It is important that we learn more about the Middle East from an Arab perspective and not rely upon western journalism. In his works, al-Hakim delivers this perspective to the reader.

The themes of al-Hakim’s plays which were valid at the time of publication are still valid in today’s social and political climate. For example, in Salat al-Mala‘ikah (Angel’s Prayer), 1941, an Angel tries to persuade two tyrants, similar to Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, to try peace and desist from mass destruction. In Bayn al Harb wa’s Salam (Between War and Peace), 1951, Diplomacy out-wagers War in a game called Trump, protecting Peace in the process. This play was written as a response to crises of the Arab world, such as the struggle for Palestine which persists today. The Sultan in al-Sultan al-Ha‘ir (The Perplexed Sultan), 1960, has to decide whether to obtain his manumission by the sword or the law. This play addresses legitimacy of rule, possibly questioning Nasir’s right to the presidency. It also deals with the dilemma of world leaders to solve world problems by the sword or by law, i.e. by military action or negotiation. The problem of the elimination of poverty and
hunger in the world is dealt with in *al-Ta' am li-kull Fam (Food for Every Mouth)*, 1963. In this fantasy play an animated family "appears" in a water stain on a wall in the apartment of an Egyptian couple. The family has a son whose life project is to eliminate hunger from the world. In *al-Warta (Dilemma)*, 1966, a professor of criminal science becomes involved with a group of thieves and comes to the realization that "academic research cannot be pursued in total isolation from ethical consideration." Al-Hakim believed that inventors of the atomic bomb could not absolve themselves of responsibility for it. All these themes and messages of al-Hakim's plays have valid considerations today.

This thesis represents a major milestone in my journey to a broader understanding of the Arab world and its literary offerings, specifically those of Tawfiq al-Hakim. I hope that the readers will use the information I have provided to acquire an appreciation of the Middle East and its literature, starting with Tawfiq al-Hakim.
APPENDIX

LITERARY WORKS OF TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

PLAYS


- Shaharazad, 1934
- Angel's Prayer (Salat al-Mala'ikah, 1941)
- Solomon the Wise (Sulayman al-Hakim, 1943)
- King Oedipus (al-Malik Udib, 1949)
- Princess Sunshine (Shams al-Nahar, 1965)

Plays, Prefaces and Postscripts of Tawfiq al-Hakim. Volume Two Theatre of Society.
- Between War and Peace (Bayn al Harb wa's Salam, 1951)
- Tender Hands (al-Aydi al-Na'ima, 1954)
- Food for Every Mouth (al-Ta'am li-kull Fam, 1963)
- A Journey to Tomorrow (Rihla ila'l-Ghad, 1957)
- Dilemma (al-Warta, 1966)
- Poet on the Moon (Sha‘ir ‘ala al-Qamar, 1972)


- The Fate of a Cockroach (Masir Sirsar, 1966)
- Song of Death (Ughniyyat al-Mawt, 1945)
- The Perplexed Sultan (al-Sultan al-Ha’ir, 1960)
- Not a Thing Out of Place (Kull Shay‘ fi Mahallil, 1966)
NOVELS AND NOVELLAS


MEMOIRS


SHORT STORIES

BIBLIOGRAPHY


[Translation, provided by Dr. Joseph Zeidan: Tawfiq al-Hakim: Thinker and Theorist]


