

Literary Drama and Leadership: A Study of *The Sultan's Dilemma* by Twafiq al-Hakim

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Abstract

Drama in all its guises presents us routinely with conflicts of interest and moral dilemmas. The choices made at these crucial moments in characters determine the future leadership. It is in this light that this paper offers an introspection into the life of the sultan in *The Sultan's Dilemma* authored by Twafiq al-Hakim through the use of psychoanalytic theory which is based on the notion that an individual is motivated more by unseen forces that are controlled by the conscious and rational thought. This paper examines the moral obligation of a just ruler as he is caught in a situation that could easily be solved through the sword rather than going according to custom. The paper submits that drama is a powerful tool that literary artists employ as a 'searchlight' to capture the leadership strains in African society in a bid to restore sanity.

Introduction

The world is a stage and drama a mirror of society "- this expression is heard in many languages and countries, and probably it is as old as drama itself. The origin of drama is difficult to trace and its development in human society is hard to describe based on verifiable facts. Originally the ancient Greek word drama means "action". This term is said to have been used for the first time, in connection with what we call drama, about 560 B.C. by a Greek called Thespis when he enriched, his religious singing and dancing choirs with a costumed, masked person who expressed a part of the action in meaningful words and gestures. Since that time drama has been the indication of that art which represents a human event in the presence of a more or less involved audience and which is focused on Man. As to the origin of drama, we can only assume that it developed from religious rites, this is because examples of such development are found in different places of the world, and as far as Africa is concerned, one may think of the masquerades in Nigeria and a great many dances and rituals, as Okot p'Bitek describes in *Horn of my Love* (1974)

According to Graig (2005:132), leadership is defined as a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational goals. Robert et al (2004) affirm that leadership involves a complex interaction among the leader, the followers, and the situation.

It is however a difficult task to define what makes certain persons to be "leaders". For example, some researchers define leadership in terms of personality and physical traits, while others believe leadership is represented by a set of prescribed behaviors.

About the Author

Born in 1902 in Alexandria, Tewfik Al-Hakim has occupied a central place in the Arab literary scene since he first made a name for himself in the 'twenties'. He is known primarily as a playwright with an output of some seventy plays, and one of Cairo's treaties has been named after him. He has also produced several volumes of autobiography; at least two of his novels are landmarks in modern Arabic Literature. In 1921 Tewfik al-Hakim studied law at the Sul

Taniya Law School and graduated in 1924 during this period the Azhar University was a ground for the earlier generation. Afterward, Tewfik Al-Hakim went to Paris to pursue higher judiciary studies in 1924 where he got a chance to live freely. There he immersed himself totally in acquiring the knowledge of classical and modern European literature in general and that of the French stage in particular. He was negligent towards his main subject of law education. Tewfik al-Hakim stayed for some years in France, but he could not complete his doctorate in law due to his deep involvement in theatrical activities; finally, he came back to Egypt from France in 1928. Since then, Tewfik al-Hakim held a succession of posts in the legal service in different parts of the country. In 1951 he became Director of the National Library Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyah and in 1956 he became a member of the Superior Arts Council. Moreover, he worked some time as the Egyptian representative with UNESCO in Paris in 1959. He was awarded the first State Prize in Literature in 1961. A Theatre entitled Masrah al-Hakim was also formed in Cairo in 1963 and the same was named after him which opened with the performance of his 201 own play 'Pygmalion'; it is considered one of the greatest achievements and honors in his artistic life. As one of the outstanding dramatists, Tewfik al-Hakim started writing different plays; firstly we may mention his first play *al-Daif al-Thaqil* (The Unwelcome Guest) and in collaboration with his friends he composed four other plays namely *Aminusa* (1922), *al-Mar'a al-Jadidah* (1923), *al-'Aris* (1924) and *Khatim Sulaiman* (1924) and in 1925 he completed his sixth play 'Ali Baba in France. He composed the play *Rassasa fil-Qalb* especially for the society instead of the promotion of acting but unfortunately that society did not survive long enough to put it on the stage. The playwright Tewfik al-Hakim was involved in different issues of socio-political aspects; for which he dared to write more other plays one after another. They are namely *Khuruj min al-Jannah* (Expulsion from the Paradise), 1928; *Ba'd al-Mawt* (After the Death); *Sirr al-Muntahirah* (The Suicide Girl's Secret), 1929; *Hayat Tahattamat* (A Bullet in the Heart), 1931; and *al-Zammar* (The Piper, 1932. After these he concentrated on *Ahl al-kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave) published in 1933; then he continued writing dramas and he wrote *Shaharzad*, published in 1934; *Muhammad* in 1936; *Pygmalion* in 1942; *al-Malik Oudib* in 1949, etc. and so many dramas he composed, for which he earned a great success that led to the development of Modern Arabic Literature. Evaluating Tawfiq al-Hakim's dramatic skill M.M. Badawi writes as follows: In many respects, al-Hakim seemed to follow in the footsteps of his distinguished predecessor, Muhammad Taymur (1891 – 1921). Like Taymur, he fell under the spell of the theatre while still a student in Egypt. They each went later to France to pursue higher studies, but instead of law, they devoted most of their energy to the study of the 202 French stage. In France their interest in drama was further developed, their taste refined, and their ideas sharpened their views of what Egyptian drama should be like formed. Of course, al-Hakim was a much more intelligent and much more widely read man. Nevertheless, in their different ways, after their return to Egypt, they were both intent on writing serious specifically Egyptian drama which rose above the level of the popular theatre. As such, we can boldly say that Tawfiq al-Hakim is a prolific Arab dramatist, who left more than eighty plays and earned a climax position in the domain of Arabic literature. Tawfiq al-Hakim died in July 1987.

In the thematic context of his dramas, we find him to be inspired by other European dramatists that he brought about in his different plays and dramas. His plays are successful in giving a series of vivid pictures of life in the Egyptian countryside; the yawning gulf that separates the rich and the poor, the corruption of men in authority, the hypocrisy of the outwardly pious clergyman who secretly lends money at exorbitant interest, above all the dullness and utter emptiness of village life, which drives the notables and functionaries to spend their evening's gambling and drinking. He picked up the theme for his plays from the glimpse of the way the

women-folk live in Egyptian society and the lack of trust between men and women, husbands and wives, which is revealed in the way wives resort to all manner of tricks, including stealing from their husbands, to obtain material gain as we found in his play “*A Bullet in the Heart*”. In addition, we find him to pick up the theme from classical literature like the Holy Qur’an, Arabian Night, and Christian legends, and in this connection, *Ahl al-Kahf*, *Shaharzad*, *Pygmalion*, and *al-Malik Oudib* may be exemplified. As a revolutionary dramatist, Tawfiq al-Hakim also picked up some of his dramatic themes from society to awaken the Egyptian people. He was thinking mainly of Egypt, its king, and its revolution and finally, he wrote his plays like *al-Daif al-Thaqil* and ‘Praxa’.

The drama consists of three acts as a volume of the play. It is filled with the culture and philosophy of contemporary Egypt and outside as well. Al-Hakim designed it with the story of a Sultan who was actually a slave-soldier of Mamluk period, and he ascended to the rank of monarch, known as Sultan. He found criticism of people from the point of his slavery to the earlier Sultan.

Synopsis

The play explores the dilemma posed by the discovery that the Sultan in question has never in fact been freed. It appears from the text of the drama that the earlier Sultan had no real heir of his own. Twenty-five years back he purchased a male slave finding him very intelligent which made him think he should give the slave the opportunity to rule over the state in the future after his death. As such, the slave was brought up as his child with full care and education. After the demise of the Sultan, the minister of the state and the chief justice made the slave to seat on the throne of the Sultan. But it was tittle-tattle among the subjects that the present Sultan did not have manumission and remained as wealth of the state exchequer. For the benefit of it, he should be manumitted first and only then he will get the right to rule over the free people of this state. As such, he fell into a dilemma on how to subdue the people of his state exercising his power as was insisted by his minister. In this connection, the chief justice suggested that the Sultan should display a public auction sale before the general people, so that someone may purchase the slave Sultan and manumit him accordingly. At the primary level of discussion, the present Sultan hesitated on the matter of his manumission, but after a long argument with the minister and the chief justice, he had to accept the course of manumission.

As the Sultan accepted the proposal of his manumission, he was bound to comply with the state law and accordingly declared that he chose the law (*al-qanun*) instead of the use of a sword (*al-saif*). The minister and the chief justice came to know the desire of the Sultan through a conversation they had. As a result of this, an auction sale was held publicly, where he was purchased by a lady who also had a bad reputation in the city, she was the highest bidder with thirty thousand Dinars. Accordingly, the lady agreed that when the muezzin called the dawn prayer she would purchase the slave Sultan and manumit him at the time. so, she invited the Sultan to her residence to have a conversation and they began to know each other better; their personality came to light; the slave Sultan disclosed that the lady is free from the charge of whore, she is a woman of culture and art lover, in return of that the lady was pleased to express that the Sultan is pious, of good conduct and amicable behavior. In the course of their sweet dialogue and reciprocal conversation, the Sultan came to know the reality of the rich lady, while she also inquired of his life history. The Sultan honestly admitted that her life was better than his life considering the position that he faced. In that case, the lady was hopeful that he would remain as the Sultan of the state; Moreso, the lady tried to know if he had someone as special and beloved as his soul. But the Sultan gave no room for a love affair saying no time to consider

that due to severe engagement in the duties of the state administration. While discussing, the muezzin gave the call to the dawn prayer before its actual time; both of them being surprised at the prayer call (adhan) and came to know that it was the plan managed by the chief justice who was the law bearer. The chief justice believed that the manumission would be completed only at the time of the muezzin's call to the dawn prayer, whether it was the proper time of the prayer call or not he ignored thinking only the manumission of the Sultan. Under such circumstances, the Sultan made a declaration of his rejection of the call and decided to remain in the vicinity of the lady until it got to the prayer at dawn. Seeing that the trickery had been exposed and the love for Justice by the Sultan, the Lady said to him: "You are now free, Your Majesty! In return for the lady's generosity, the Sultan gifted her with a ruby from his turban and said: "I shall never forget that I was a slave of you for a night.

Analysis

The sword is used in the play as an instrument of tyranny and its administration of justice. At the same time, if abused it can be used to violate the same laws it is used to fulfill.

Cadi: I mean that you have a choice, your majesty. You can employ it for action, or you can employ it for decoration. I recognize the undoubted strength possessed by the sword, its swift action, and its decisive effect. But the sword gives right to the strongest, and who knows who will be the strongest tomorrow? There may appear some strong person who will protect your rights from every aggression because it does not recognize right. And now there's nothing for you to do your Majesty, but choose: between the sword which imposes and yet exposes you, and between the law which threatens and yet protects you.

Sultan (thinking a while): The sword which imposes and exposes me, and the law which threatens and protects me?

The sword is employed by Al-Hakim to depict how a sultan can be torn between the law, and the application of the sword as the ultimate tool of carrying out the rulings. This implies that the sword can be seen as a tool for delivering justice and at the same time can be used to bring an end to evil deeds. The play represents the inner conflicts that exist in modern times, well-disguised in early thirteenth-century societies. The indecisive Sultan has inner struggles of either fulfilling the wishes of his subject or administering justice. It was in the capacity of the Sultan to reject the idea of him being sold in the public auction and silence the tongue with the edge of the sword. He decided to go by the law and do the right thing by giving himself to be sold which he was given to the highest bidder who was a woman with a very bad reputation. Subsequently, the process of manumission started and when the "Deed of Manumission" was placed before her, she was firstly reluctant to put her signature on it with an argument – she could not lose her property in any way, but she wanted the Sultan to remain in his capacity as the Sultan. When she finally gave an affirmative signal, the "Deed of Manumission" was placed before her by the chief justice. On that occasion, the lady requested the Sultan:

Lady; I have a final request.

Sultan; what is it?

Lady: That you give this night to me, Your Majesty- a single night. Honor me by accepting my invitation and being my guest until the daybreak. "You give me this night to me, Your Majesty – a single night. Honor me by accepting my invitation and be my guest until daybreak. And when the Muezzin gives the call to dawn prayers from this minaret here, I shall sign the deed of manumission, and Your Majesty will be free."

In response to that, the Sultan benignly accepted her invitation and followed the lady into her house with great pleasure.

The real significance of the drama lies in the power of the protection of law and rights, and it cannot be defended by the sword. The submission to justice is a matter of glory, elevation, and power. We have discovered that society needs the leadership of the law in the mode of perfectness, which is a more and more necessary thing than any other matter. It appears to us that the role the Sultan plays lies in the law. We also come to know that the nation needs justice and trustworthy Judgment; it, therefore, has a strong connection with the need for a successful strong army, because the army defends the motherland from any rebellious movements and external forces.

Traditional, modern African dramas and dramatizations have potent roots in the African worldviews. The Greeks have been credited with the birth of the theatre; early history proves that Ancient Egypt precedes them in public performances, which were mostly pageant-like, religious in character, ritualistic, and to a large extent devoid of drama (Csapo and Miller, 2007). What cannot be removed from these performances is the fact that these performances and rituals carried elements of drama and to a very large extent dramatic too. The Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus, a script of the ritual in which the king took part. It contains among other things, illustrations of the scenes, the words spoken by the actors representing the various gods, and explanatory remarks. The text contains what has been interpreted as staging instructions concerning the actors for a grandiose play where a great number of performers including supernumeraries, props such as statues, and backdrops were used. Symbolic dances which may have been holy rituals and ballet scenes formed part of the performance.

For most of the dramas of African societies in the 20th century, religion functioned as a tool to check on the excesses of government and the social codes of society. Ebrahim Hussein in *Kinjeketile*, Ngug wa Thiong'O in *Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Wole Soyinka in *Kongi's Harvest*, *A Dance of the Forest*, and *Death and the King's Horseman* demonstrate the use of religion in the resistance of power; and in the case of *The Trials of Brother Jero*, the use of religion to withhold power.

As asserted by Mark Shaw (2009), more than five decades after independence, African societies have remained in a vicious cycle of conflicts, stunted development and finally characterized by all indices of destructive governance; this time not as a result of colonial invasion but by the character of its leaders.

In *The Sultan's Dilemma*, there is the theme of clashing traditions with modern values. The sword is used in the play as an instrument of tyranny and its administration of justice. The sword, in this play, is shown as an instrument that can be used to carry out justice and at the same time, if abused it can be used to violate the same laws it is made to fulfill. Al-Hakim used the sword to depict his dilemma of being torn between laws, and the application of using the sword as the ultimate tool of carrying out the rulings. This implies that the sword can be seen as a tool for delivering justice and at the same time, it can be used to bring an end to evil deeds or the commission of injustices. The play represents the inner conflicts that exist in modern times, well disguised in early thirteenth-century societies. The indecisive Sultan has inner struggles of either fulfilling the wishes of his subject or administering justice.

S I Afegbua et al (2012) opines that the challenge to African leaders is thus to develop the capacity that would enable us to strike a balance between the values of African societies and the governance that our nations must follow. However, the concern must be to blend the two rather than to treat them as if they were mutually exclusive. The political power in Africa became concentrated in one political party and finally in the hands of one leader. Making the rise of the supremacy of the office of the President over all organs of government, most African Presidents enjoyed re-election in perpetuity without any competition.

Kamuntu (1993) observes further that consequent resistance to the concentration of power in the hands of one man – the President, was brutally suppressed with greater violations of human rights, resulting in massacres and millions of Africans becoming refugees or displaced and many qualified African's seeking employment opportunities in foreign countries in search of personal security. Africa's continuing crisis presents a tremendous challenge to the continent and its leadership.

The depictions of the Sultan as a slave signify the enslaving of leaders who use force to support their rule. They are, therefore, enslaved by their methods. The play is a strong advocacy for the use of negotiations as a means of resolving issues. This is driven home when the sultan and the courtesan spend the night in her house discussing on what should be done.

The play presents a sudden twist of events and ironical parallelisms, this can be seen when the Sultan turns out to be a slave and has to be auctioned so that his new owner can release him. The ironies include the fact that the condemned man had once traded the Sultan as the slave and now, before his execution, he has to auction the one man who can reverse the judgment. In other words, he has power over his judge while he is still condemned (Lawall, MacK, and Lawall). This is ironic since the Sultan has the power to forgive him and save his life. Nonetheless, he has to auction him in public. The author uses irony to draw a parallelism between the condemned and his judges. He also cleverly puts his readers in an imaginary dilemma similar to that experienced by the wine merchant and shoemaker. They cannot help but think what they would do with the Sultan as their slave. The leaders are put in a similar situation imagining on behalf of the condemned man what he should do with his new powers as the sultan's auctioneer. The ironies do not end there. We are then taken into a situation where the Sultan is bought by a courtesan. The courtesan is seen as an immoral being in this society, yet she helps the Sultan make a moral choice. Al Hakim's play is full of moral parallelism that in the end helps the Sultan escape from his dilemma. By doing this, the Sultan is the ultimate symbol of authority and freedom, yet turns out a slave, whose freedom lies on the goodwill of one of his subjects. Additionally, the same man that he only can save is put in a position where he has powers over him as his auctioneer.

Afegbua et al (2012) asserts that leaders and their cohorts in Africa have simply privatized the state for their selfish interests. Leadership in Africa is highlighted to be characterized by primordial parochial, personalized, and selfish tendencies, political brigandage, ethnic rivalry and cleavages, clientelism, and privatized state apparatuses. Indeed, respected visionary leaders who are of proven integrity are needed to captain the ship of the nations of Africa, such a leader of the people must have a vision and mission.

The arbitrary and repressive measures by African leaders and their inability to apply governmental regulations throughout the national territory is a sign of weakness. Paradoxically, the independent African states consolidate power at the political center and extract considerable

economic resources from society; yet they spend much of it on themselves and lack the capacity to spur the country's development as a whole.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this paper submits that drama a fictional representation of the existing political economic as well as social events of the society to which it emanates presents the political predicament that the modern world is facing through the Sultan who is in a fix as to either use forceful authority to establish his kingship or apply the law that might be hard to achieve.

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