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FUTUROLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE DRAMAS OF TAWFĪK AL-ḤAKĪM

Dramaturgy of T. al-Ḥakīm (born in 1898, Alexandria¹), one of the most distinguished writers of Egypt, is unconventional and varied in both its form and essence. Al-Ḥakīm is a writer of continual experiments, looking for new forms, conventions and better ways of expression of his ideas. Beside the social and political problems, culture and customs², the author in his meditation concerning Egypt and all the Arabic world, also includes the man and surrounding him reality, and also, looking ahead into a distant future, gives the reader a vision of problems of 21st century. Even at present he is trying to bring the reader reflect on the possible results of the rapid development of civilization with all its devices i. e., of the world nowadays called "science".

The weakest point of the 21st century (according to the writer's visions) would be the lack of harmony between the rapid development of material culture and the level of spiritual culture and morality. In order to show the reader this complex problem, al-Ḥakīm takes his inspiration from science-fiction as the modern form of a fair-tale, easy to percept and already firmly established, as a form, in the Arabic literature ("Tales of One and a Thousand Nights"). The contents of the dramas - a choice of dramaturgical conflicts and their development, gives the author the opportunity, as a pretext, to display the real social, political, moral and philosophical problems.

Our problems that have been existing for years, are just a small part of the ones awaiting us in the future. Technical development gives the human race unlimited possibilities. In order not to be taken unawares, the man should undertake a kind of "proflactics" early enough to be adequately prepared to exploit the real values of the development. Al-Ḥakīm thinks it necessary some rules to be determined, at present, that would help people to adjust to the possibly hard conditions of the nearest and more distant future.

This problematics is being discussed in the plays: Rihla'ilā-l-ḡad (Journey into Tomorrow)³, Šā'ir 'alā'l-ḡamar (The Poet on the Moon) and Takrīr ḡamarī (Moon Account)⁴. Since these plays have been inspired by "science-fiction" as the modern form of a fair-tale, al-Ḥakīm is able to show freely his ideas and conceptions, so far-away at the moment.

In the play "Journey into Tomorrow"⁵ the author presents two murderers sentenced to death. One of them is a famous doctor who killed out of love to a woman and fell a victim to an intrigue. The other one is an engineer who was killing his wives out of greed. Both of them were revoked the punishment under condition of being the only crew members of a space journey. During the flight the space craft missed its route and landed on an unknown, far-away star. Neither time nor positive and negative subjects existed on this star, there were no physical processes. Out of lack of other occupation, the travellers materialized, each other, visions of the past. Finally, the engineer was able to repair the space craft and the crew returned to the Earth after three hundred-year absence. The doctor and the engineer found on the Earth a world of science and technology where all the human activities were being controlled and checked by the electronic apparatus. However, it was evident that even this world was not free of conflicts. The doctor came in a contact with a girl belonging to a group of people dissatisfied with lack of occupation and with the lack of spirit in the

world of "science". They were looking for a real ideology, a goal, work and art, and tried to fight the machines in order to preserve the best human feelings and to defend the reality against dehumanization. Helas, "the revolutionaries" were found out by the authorities, and the doctor's friend was sentenced to either isolation or an operation of brain that would check any further, damaging activity. In such a situation, the doctor proposed to take the punishment himself and thus, for the second time, sacrificed himself for a woman.

In the play "Journey into Tomorrow", al-Ḥakīm returns to a topic already discussed in 'Ahl'al-ḡahf (Inhabitants of the Cave)⁶, that is the man's fight with the time. Here, a distinct change of the writer's point of view can be noticed. Along his new idea, the man can success in this fight by opposing to the indifference, alienation and by preserving his true feelings and thoughts. The writer also discussed here some other problems, such as freedom, power, meaning of work in human life, idealism and utilitarianism. Here, al-Ḥakīm is a philosopher meditating on the complicated problem of rules and acts controlling the life of the man.

Also the one-act play "The Poet on the Moon" gravitates round the problem of defence of humanism. This is a story of an imagined space journey. Two cosmonauts - explorers and scientists are accompanied by a poet who passed a special training. When on the moon, there starts the conflict between the idealist and dreamer and the cool, resonable scientists. After the landing, the cosmonauts begin their research by considering the moon as a subject for experiments, only. The attitude of the poet is quite different. He is fascinated and not being interested in the research, looks for a contact with creatures that could possibly inhabit this planetoid. Indeed, he is able to catch the sound of such creatures and, at the same time, becomes sensed by them. That results with an exchange of ideas on the earthly matters i. e. the problems of the contemporary world. In the meantime, the cosmonauts when doing their research found deposits

similar to gold, diamonds and other valuable minerals. Thrilled by the finding, he wants to go back on the Earth at once in order to account on the success of the expedition. Here, the indifferent till now poet changes his attitude and categorically requests the information on the riches to be kept secret, and wouldn't allow any specimens to be taken to the Earth. There is a sharp discussion and thought the poet wouldn't like to give up, persuaded by the creatures decides to return home. When on the Earth again he attempts to warn the management of the expedition against the dangers that could result out of the information on the riches on the moon. However, there is no danger any more because the analysis proved the would-be valuables to be only "cheap materials... clay of glass"⁷.

The application of "science-fiction" in this play, when usually that form is used in the prose, provides an interesting experiment. Nowadays, a journey to the moon is quite real but any contact with cosmic creatures is still just a literary fiction. The inspiration for the "wonders" appearing in the play is not a contradiction to the laws of science but reflexion on their limitations. "Science-fiction shows here the author's fears of the possible results of a rapid development of science and technology. Science ceased to defend against the lack of imagination and begins to pull the human race down into an abyss.

By application of "science-fiction", al-Hakim discusses such problems as the conception of right and wrong, rights and duties, responsibility, indifference, induration and, first of all, makes the reader aware of the necessity of prevision i. e. futurological thinking. According to the writer, an unsuitable exploitation of the results of technical development would bring the world to face a disaster. The man must reach a state of psychical, moral and ethical maturity. Only this could defend him against the chain of events that could happen in case the fruits of development fell into the wrong hands. The poet says: "this is not imagination but foreseeing the result that could come.... It is about

the time to start thinking about that..."⁸. Al-Hakim feels that the main problem of both nowadays and future is to preserve humanity. After setting off the first sputnik in 1957, the author wrote: "Great joy, brought to my soul great hopes. One shouldn't doubt that if the man's reason succeeded over the earthly gravitation it can not have the victory over the other power, the one heavy on the human soul. And here the man should be assisted by writers"⁹.

This point of view is clearly presented in the play "The Poet on the Moon". Al-Hakim, as the poet, gives his opinion on the part of the humanist in the contemporary world. According to him, man should not be "a machine without spirit", "a man-like apparatus"¹⁰ but first of all, should "think and feel"¹¹ and that is that counts most. The intellectual development in itself is not enough because some things are not possible to be grasped by the mind; there are necessary intuition, sensibility and imagination, and first of all the heart - "... heart is what machines can not be..."¹². Not everything can be considered according to technical values. The questions of the Director of the Centre for Space Research, concerning the poetry - "What theory does it base upon?... In what laboratory were the experiments conducted?... Where does it lead to?"¹³ are senseless. The poetry as well as all the humanities would be absolutely useless in such a context.

The discussion in the "science-fiction" convention, on the problem of the contemporary and future world, is being continued in the one-act play "Moon Account". The action takes place on the Earth where two moon creatures landed in an office by chance and witnessed a discussion between an army and a political leader and a famous Chinese scientist temporarily arrested. The case concerns a great discovery¹⁴. The Chinese elaborated a simple method of food and clothes production out of air and water and intends to apply his discovery on the whole world. On the other hand, the leader and the politician afraid that the realization of such scheme could disturb all the present economic,

political and social structure, try to obstruct it. When unsuccessful in persuading, in offering money and threatening, they finally decide on murder.

In this play, al-Hakīm considers the direction of the development of civilization and its possible results. At the moment, these problems are far-away from Egypt but, at the same time the should be considered as possible to appear at any time. There are no isolated problems but they are always followed a great many bigger or lesser side-ones. The best example for this is the case of scientific discovery, presented in "Moon Account". One would think that realization of a sensational and easy way of getting food and clothes out of air and water would not only allow to liquidate hunger but also solve a lot of social problems. However, there are the great many of the sideproblems that seem to be more important than the discovery itself. In case of realization of the presented discovery all the existing institutions, created by man, would be useless. Thus, in such paradoxical situation, nobody would be able to work in his own profession. That's what worries the Leader and the Politician: "(Leader) I shall be sitting and chewing carrots as a rabbit... (Politician) I shall accompany you my friend... There won't be need for politics.... I shall also sit and chew something.... I don't care for carrot. Let it be cucumber"¹⁵.

The new discovery would ruin all the existing social goods. All the ideas would have to be revaluated and new ones created. The existing convention of work would require a new, different meaning: "(Chinese) The new society will require another kind of work of you..."¹⁶.

Still, on the other hand, "the revolutionary discoveries", according to al-Hakīm, should not be opposed, since each of these is a step in the development and stimulates changes. Some discoveries have to await the proper moment for a long time: "The same was said at the discovery of steam.... Opposed the owners of sailing vessels... Manufactures dreaded the electricity"¹⁷.

Also penicillin, radio and television were introduced late. Thus, societies should prepare for the proper acceptance of the achievements of the modern development of science and technique. Here is the task for humanists, people of higher ability of perception, evaluation and foreseeing.

The problems touched by al-Hakīm in the discussed plays can be placed in one, closed group of points that give the answer, all together, on one question only, that is what and to what extent can be done by the man himself, with help of his own spiritual and physical forces only. There is a limit that can not be crossed either by an individual or a group. There are lots of processes independent of human activity. By such presentation of the problem, without the both-sides effect "man-nature, nature-man", all the struggle to obtain any vital changes of the situation of man, is completely useless. This matter can not be solved by the technique or a sensational discovery or great riches. The man must get to know himself first ("gnoti se auton") and master his own nature.

NOTES

¹ J. A. Haywood, Modern Arabic Literature 1800-1970, London 1965, p. 197.

² These problems are discussed (for instance) by K. Skarżyńska-Bocheńska [in:] Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska 19 i 20 w. (New and Contemporary Arabic Literature 19 and 20 century), Warsaw 1978, p. 573-614.

³ T. al-Hakīm, Rihla 'ilā 'l-ḡad, al-Kāhira 1958.

⁴ T. al-Hakīm, Šā'ir 'alā 'l-kamar, Takrīr kamarī [in:] Maǧlis 'al-'adl, al-Kāhira 1972.

⁵ See some reflection about this play in Haywood, op. cit., p. 198.

⁶ T. al-Hakīm, Ahl 'al-kaḥf, Beirut 1973.

⁷ T. al-Hakīm, Šā'ir 'alā 'l-kamar, p. 126 l. 11.

⁸ Ibid., p. 113 l. 5-7.

⁹ K. Musofirov, Socialnye dramy T. al-Hakima (Social dramas of T. al-Hakim), Tashkent 1972, p. 4.

¹⁰ T. al-Hakim, Šā'ir 'alā'l-kamar, p. 90 l. 9.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 113 l. 10.

¹² Ibid., p. 91 l. 9.

¹³ Ibid., p. 86 l. 13-15.

¹⁴ T. al-Hakim introduce the similar problem in very interesting play at-Ta'am li-kulli fam (The food for everybody), al-Qāhira 1963.

¹⁵ T. al-Hakim, Takrīr kamārī, p. 64 l. 15, p. 65 l. 12.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 65 l. 4-5.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 62 l. 11-13.

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A NOTE ON HERODOTUS II,80

Salutations and honour, the customary forms of kindly respectful address, are usually expressed by formalized gestures. They are shown especially on meeting or on occasion of ceremonious approach. Existing in all periods of history and in all cultures, they have taken many forms, including bowing, kneeling, prostration and various gestures of hands and arm.

Herodotus, Greek historian who at different times¹ visited Egypt and made a long stay there was fascinated by this country and its age old civilization developed independently of all Hellenic tradition. He expressed this fact in his history of the great Persian wars of invasion where he had an occasion to describe Egypt, the people who inhabited it, its natural production, divine, geographical position, monuments and so forth. Herodotus had the first-hand knowledge of many facts he described; it refers to important information he compiled and small events as well². Moreover, being a clear-sighted man he got sight of many events more or less important and took them into his work. As one of the examples may serve his account of the Egyptian salutation where he states: ἀντὶ τοῦ προσαγορεύειν ἀλλήλους ἐν τῇσι ὁδοῖσι προσκυνέουσι κατυέντες μέχρι τοῦ γονατος τὴν χεῖρα³ "instead of speaking to each other when they meet in the streets, they make an obeisance sinking the hand to the knee"⁴.