



“Voyage to Tomorrow”: Modern Arabic Science Fiction

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Abstract: This paper is aimed to analyse time and space as the prominent themes of modern Arabic science fiction on the example of the novel “Voyage to Tomorrow” by Tawfiq al-Hakim. In this research a combination of two research methods - documentary analysis and literature review - was used. Documentary analysis involves obtaining data from about ten scientific articles and theses. Documentary analysis was used to obtain general data about the subject of the research. Results of the research make it obvious that time travel is one of the most contagious ideas in science fiction. In modern society where time is a unit of value and instant gratification is prized, the idea of traveling through time appears more than ever in books, movies, and pop culture. Arabic science fiction writers try to incorporate the latest theories about the nature of the universe to give their stories greater realism. A pioneering figure of modern Arabic science fiction, Tawfiq al-Hakim, is the focus of attention in the paper because of his evolutionary and panoramic view of history and time in his novel “Voyage to Tomorrow”. Qualitative methods, documentary and literary analyses used in the research allowed the author to come to the conclusion that the ideas of the novel approach nature as transformational, rather than static and unchanging, and time as directional, rather than cyclic. The paper also shows how different traditions were combined in the “Voyage to Tomorrow” reflecting peculiarities of modern Arabic science fiction.

Keywords: Arabic Literature, Science Fiction, Time, Space, Subgenre, Dystopia

1. Introduction

The history of science fiction genre in the Arab world is still fraught with disagreements and discrepancies with respect to its origins, significant contribution to almost all forms of science fiction was made by such prolific writers as Zakariya al-Qazwini, Ibn al-Nafis, Youssef Ezeddin Eassa, Mustafa Mahmud, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Nabil Farouq, Ahmad Suwailem, Nihad Sharif, Mohammed Aziz al-Habbabi, Omayma Khafaji, Muhammad al-Ashry, Kassem Kassem, Taleb Omeran, Kassem al-Khattat, Abdallah Khalifa, Tiba Ahmad al-Ibrahim, Lina al-Kailani, Sulaiman Mohammed al-Khalil, Ashraf Faqih and others. One of the earliest examples of science fiction is “A True Story” written by Lucian of Samosata, a rhetorician and satirist who was of Assyrian descent. Lucian depicted tales of travel to outer space, interplanetary warfare and conquest, contact with alien life-forms, among other things. [1] However, in the Arab world, science fiction flourished later (6th-12th c.) and took the form of travel writings, or cosmographical treatises that earnestly engaged with the extraordinary and the occult. The literature

like that was called the “ajaib” literature, or mirabilia. The “aja’ib” literature ranged from expositions on natural phenomena or extraordinary human feats of a semi-mythic stature to mariners’ tales and folkloric material, and drew substantially from the Qur’an and the religious tradition of Islam, as well as from popular fairy-tales and beliefs. A significant author from this tradition is Zakariya al-Qazwini. [2] Fantastic-philosophical treatise is another tradition of Arabic science fiction. The most popular themes of this tradition are contact with the outside world and doomsday apocalypse, for example, novels of Ibn al-Hafis. [3] Egyptian science fiction made significant contributions to almost all forms of literary expression in the genre. Tradition of Egyptian science fiction is based on the process of popularizing science, outlining a dystopian future (Youssef Ezeddin Eassa) [4] or discovering new physical laws (Mustafa Mahmud). [5]

All traditions mentioned above were harmoniously united in the literary masterpieces of Tawfiq al-Hakim, whose landmark novel “Voyage to Tomorrow” defined the emergence of the modern Arab science fiction as a distinctive

genre. Al-Hakim is known as “the father of modern Arab science fiction,” and he influenced a whole generation of writers to produce works of science fiction throughout the last quarter of the 20th century. Within the history of Arab science fiction, he is most noted for his futuristic literature that distinctively matches modern science-fiction motifs, albeit with a different accent, such as fantasy tale and mythological story. Al-Hakim weaves in discourses on philosophy, theology, and sociology even as he takes on themes of futurology, eschatology, cataclysmic doomsday, and death and afterlife.

2. Method

2.1. Research Approach and Research Design

The research methods and the methodology implemented for this study are mostly theoretical. This article makes use of qualitative research strategy, where the research approach implemented has been that of interpretivism. This approach is implemented by the researcher in order to synthesize facts which are derived mainly from secondary sources, and which are qualitative in nature. He also observes that one characteristics of interpretivism is that these facts are abstract in nature, and governed by a variety of factors which are non-tangible and difficult to measure. These can be social and cultural factors. Therefore for the purposes of this research, the author chose the interpretivist approach, rather than the pragmatist approaches. This research makes use of a qualitative research strategy in the sense that there will be no numeric data or quantitative data was produced. A qualitative research strategy is particularly applicable for the purposes of this research, where the connection between several different variables (“culture”, “literature”, “Arabic science fiction”, and “prominent science fiction themes”) had to be established through interpretation of different sources concerning Arabic science fiction. Also, the research makes use of triangulation because triangulation gives the opportunity to approach the research objectives from different viewpoints, obtaining a more nuanced view of the connections between the different variables. For this study, triangulation was very useful because the researcher aimed to find the intersection between two different variables belonging to different spheres of Arabic literature – science fiction themes and culture.

2.2. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

For the purposes of this research, the author has decided to use a combination of two classic philological sciences’ research tools – documentary analysis and literature review. Documentary analysis involves obtaining data from existing documents (about ten scientific articles and theses) without having to question people through interview, questionnaires or observe their behaviour. Documentary analysis is the main way that the author obtained data about his research subject. This research combines elements of linguistic, philological and social sciences, that is why documentary analysis turns

out to be the most effective and objective. Documents are tangible materials in which facts or ideas have been recorded. The author used items written or produced on paper, such as newspaper articles, government policy records, leaflets and minutes of meetings. Items in other media have also been used, including scientific-popular films and plays based on literary masterpieces, reliable websites and authentic photographs. Documents helped to reveal a great deal about the topic of the article. Some documents are part of the public domain and are freely accessible, whereas other documents may be classified, confidential or otherwise unavailable to public access. In case when such documents were used as data for the research, the researcher came to an agreement with the holder of the documents about how the contents can and cannot be used and how confidentiality will be preserved.

3. Result

Tawfiq al-Hakim’s contribution to an emerging genre of science fiction in Arabic literature is outstanding. His first work is “In the Year One Million” (1947), a short science fiction story, where the author envisions a future in an expansive time frame, when disease and death have been eradicated, distinctions of gender have given way to a homogenous androgyny, and procreation has been rendered redundant with laboratory conceptions. This dystopian future of eternal life is also bereft of love, art, and poetry. The story ends with people, who, in their struggle to win back death, break into the laboratories and destroy the equipment infusing the air with nutrients. Disease returns to the world eventually, and with it, death and fear. [6] Then, he published “Poet on the Moon” (1972), “Moon Account” (1972), and “Conversation with the Planet” (1974). It must be noted that al-Hakim held an allegiance to the propagation of science-fiction writing in the same way he held an allegiance to the development of Modern Arabic Theatre. However, his attitudes towards and efforts in the service of the latter are symptomatic of a vision and philosophy which also form the essential basis for his interest in science fiction, and his dabbling in futuristic and utopian works. That is, it is in his philosophy for the theatre that we can also find a rationale and a context for his interest in science fiction.

Between 1920s and the 1970s, al-Hakim produced a remarkably diverse corpus of plays, more than eighty in number, ranging from adaptations of Greek tragedies to experiments in the absurdist tradition. It is in light of the philosophy underlying this monumental theatrical mission that we must appraise the identification of al-Hakim as a significant writer of science fiction. Al-Hakim was among the first few authors who imported the genre of science fiction as it proliferated in the West during that time, and one can find strong influences of Wells, Huxley, and Orwell in his works.

The most significant contribution of al-Hakim in science fiction is his full-length play “Voyage to Tomorrow” (1957). It should be noted that is specific to the genre of science

fiction and its relation to the theatre. Notwithstanding the prevalence of an active science-fiction drama in the West, there was a common predisposition that theatre, which in its nascent form was consumed with concerns of unity of time and place, is a logistically inadequate medium for the expansive temporal and spatial features of science fiction. The advanced technologies, intergalactic warfare, and alien life-forms that find sublime expression in the novel are more often than not deemed impossible to reproduce on stage with the same impact. However, during his sojourn in Paris, al-Hakim was thoroughly taken in by the idea of plays written solely for the reader, that is, with the explicit intent of publication and not production. This was a novel proposition for him, for he had never envisioned a play as a literary form in itself. He readily espoused this idea, probably also in light of the fact that his plays enjoyed little popularity on stage, and he claimed that even his most famous play, "People of the Cave", was written for publication. Al-Hakim, over the course of his career, wrote a number of plays that he called *Theatre of the Mind*, plays intended as literature and aimed at intellectual provocation. This foray into the realm of an intellectual theatre freed him from the dramaturgical impositions that science fiction plays seemed to pose, thus paving the way for a play like "Voyage to Tomorrow", a full-length science-fiction play, and probably the first of its kind in the Arab world. [7]

The precarious position that al-Hakim negotiated between subservient emulation of European modernity and mindless celebration of an Egyptian identity evinces most palpably in "Voyage to Tomorrow". The play is distinctive in that it closely engages with two of the most common motifs of science fiction, travel to outer space and travel through time. In the four-act play, al-Hakim sets every act in a radically different spatial-temporal environment, each bearing little relation to the other. The first act happens in a jail cell on Earth, the second in a rocket in space, the third on an unknown planet completely different from Earth, and the fourth act takes place back on Earth, albeit 309 years have transpired since the events of the first act, and the world has reached the age of automation and complete mechanization. In this wide array of starkly different settings, the only thing that al-Hakim keeps constant, if one can say that, is the human mind, thus drawing attention to the very conditions that come to define human condition.

4. Discussion

The play "Voyage to Tomorrow" by Tawfiq al-Hakim begins in a jail cell on Earth with the Convict, an accomplished doctor by profession, awaiting death for the murder of his wife's first husband. However, we soon learn over the course of the Convict's conversation with the jail doctor that his crime of passion for her was part of a cunning plot orchestrated by his wife. The Warden arrives to inform him that his wife is there to meet him, and the Convict makes up his mind to kill her and entreats him to leave them alone for a minute. However, the Warden returns, not with his wife,

but with a Representative from a scientific agency who has a proposition for the Convict that he should agree to assist the agency by embarking on a mission to space, a mission offering only one-in-a-hundred chance of survival. The Convict agrees to the proposition, but quickly learns that this new arrangement alters his agreement with the Warden, for he is no longer permitted to see his wife, thus frustrating his scheme for vengeance.

Al-Hakim posits a particular relationality of the human being with time in this opening scene of his play, which he sets on Earth in what can be interpreted as a generic present. The Convict on death row, facing execution on the very next day, is caught in an existence that brutally denies him a future. Thus, for the Convict, the future is known, and it is nothing. As for his relation with the past, he is tormented by the realization of his wife's double-faced treachery and is unsympathetic to the fact that he threw away a happy life and a prosperous medical career with a horrific act of passion that went essentially unrequited and is utterly meaningless. Thus, in the first act, al-Hakim envisions a life of an unwanted past and no future, but with a present brimming with potentiality. But the Representative's proposition changes this equation. The Convict is offered a glimmer of a future in all its uncertainty, which, as he quickly realizes, must naturally deplete the present of its potential, to reduce it back to its quotidian mundanity that is constantly looking toward the future for its validation.

The second act opens with the Convict waking from the effects of a drug to find himself in a space capsule. Much to his surprise, he realizes that he is not alone on the mission. He soon makes acquaintance with the Second Convict, an engineer by profession, who was also offered the mission after being on death row for murdering people in order to sponsor his scientific aspirations with their estates. They realize that it has already been three days since their launch, and have only a brief conversation with the scientists on Earth before their capsule darts past the communications range. The instant the television receiver loses signal, all connection is lost between the two convicts and Earth. While the action in the first act proceeds rather tediously, setting up the "reality" against which the space-time irregularities of the other three acts must position themselves, al-Hakim quickly delves into the philosophical questions that constitute the nuclear concerns of the play. In this severance of communication, al-Hakim explores an array of implications through the conversations of the two convicts. Unlike the futureless world of the first act, here, the convicts feel, at least at first, a certain assurance of the uncertainty of what the future holds, albeit not much. However, against this stabilization of the future as assuredly unstable, the relation of the convicts with their past takes on a distinctive shape, and al-Hakim pushes the severance of communications with Earth to its philosophical limits. For this severance with Earth is also a severance with their pasts. With little possibility of a safe return, their earthly lives, actions and crimes no longer have any meaning in this new existence. When the Convict insists that they are still murderers by law,

the Second Convict remarks, "In the view of the law, the Earthly law. And there's no more Earth. Look out this crystal window. You won't find the Earth." [8] However, this erasure of the past, as they quickly realize, has profound implications on their present. Al-Hakim raises the crucial question of individual identity as defined in social and cultural terms. For the vast distance that separates them from Earth also separates them not just from Earthly law but also from the very cornerstones of civilization, morality, love, and art. Even as the Convict, a doctor with a penchant for philosophy and art, grapples with these questions of identity and self, the Second Convict, a man of a scientific temperament, staunchly locates his identity within the social and political context he comes from, thus denying their existence in a space capsule any semblance of humanity. He asserts that name, age, address have all lost their meaning in a place where even "here" is meaningless. The two convicts differ in that the Convict is consumed by the relation of the past to the present, a relation that is embroiled with the question of his identity, whereas the Second Convict, unperturbed by the erasure of his past, is more distraught at the implications of an unchanging future of gliding aimlessly in space on the present lived moment. These opposing temperaments come clashing into each other. The Convict discredits the Second Convict's stance on the question of their humanity by positing that even when they are a million miles away from Earth and civilization, the thing that constitutes them as human beings, their sense of morality, is still preserved within them, and as long as they remain alive, humanity shall permeate every moment of their existence. Moreover, the Convict calls the Second Convict a "filthy murderer," asserting that "there's no power which can deprive me of the right to judge people and things. I still retain in my soul feelings of respect and disdain." [8] In this instinct to judge, the Convict locates the persistence of distinctly human qualities, and unlike the other convict who insists on a loss of humanity with the loss of context, he asserts, "We preserve them alive wherever we go." [8] Thus, through the different positions that the two convicts occupy with respect to the meaning they attribute to their lives, al-Hakim explores the possibilities of meaning infusing our relationship with the world around us by questioning the very limits of what constitutes us as human. The conversation of the two convicts is abruptly interrupted by the console, indicating that there is a meteor darting towards them. However, the spaceship, which at first seemed to be on collision course with the meteor, narrowly misses being hit. The reactions of the two convicts during this dramatic turn of events is particularly telling, for while they are concerned, neither of them show any sign of panic. Al-Hakim, beginning with the finality of death defining the future in the first act, and proceeding through the assurance of an uncertain future, now gradually strips the uncertainty of that assuring quality to further complicate and nuance the convicts' relationship with time. Against the uncertainty of death in space, the certainty of death on Earth, the precise fate they had escaped, now appears more appealing to the convicts.

Al-Hakim sets the third act on the unknown planet, after the spaceship has crash landed. The two convicts survive the crash, despite losing a lot of blood. In fact, they feel perfectly healthy and alive. As they gather themselves up and set about their first reconnaissance of the planet, they realize that their physiology has been drastically altered on this new planet. They find themselves able to survive without having to breathe, they feel neither hungry nor tired, and neither heat nor cold, and that they are capable of communicating their thoughts to each other without even vocalizing them. On that unknown planet, the two convicts realize that they have been transformed into beings that function on electricity, beings that no longer have any need to engage in human pursuits of food and shelter. Necessity has been rendered redundant, for survival is no longer a contest but is given. The two convicts who were biding their time on Earth have, in this new world, become ironically immortal. Al-Hakim transforms the uncertainty of the future that pervaded the lives of the two convicts in the space shuttle in the previous act back into a definitive certainty. Not long after the two convicts make sense of their surroundings and understand the nature of their new existence, they begin confronting the new crisis that this existence brings about. As the Convict remarks, "Here's the problem. What work shall we do?" [8] In the absence of necessity, work has also been rendered redundant. With the assurance of their survival, the two convicts have been stripped of any need to engage in any form of labor, and this void, the absence of meaning that the negation of work engenders, frightens them, "But we must work. It is not possible for us to pass this eternity without doing something... We have an intellect. The intellect refuses to remain still for long." [8]

In this exposition of the relation of the present to the future, al-Hakim also weaves in the relation of the two convicts with their pasts. They soon realize that the electromagnetic waves that they transmit with their minds are also capable of telecasting their past memories onto an invisible screen in space, much like a television set. As the Convict reminisces fondly of his wife, sitting in her accustomed chair and knitting a sweater, an image of her exactly as he remembers comes alive in front of them. The Convict's feelings towards his wife gradually change over the course of the play. His initial anger slowly dissipates with the drastic change in his circumstances, and he no longer feels a desire for vengeance. On that unknown planet, where the future is eternal and yet nothing, he is satisfied to simply dwell on the fond memories of his past, to look at the beautiful figure of his wife knitting a sweater for him. But the Second Convict does not share his sentiments. As an orphan who grew up in the care of his uncle, listening to stories of smugglers and thieves that his uncle harbored in his coffeehouse and as a man guilty of many horrendous crimes in his past, the Second Convict has little desire to look back. For him, the past is a burden, and it is for this reason that he obsesses about the future. Thus, while the Convict in his nostalgia is content with resurrecting the images of the past for all eternity, for the Second Convict, this is an unwelcome

proposition. Remarking on his condition, he says, "It is really atrocious to be granted an eternal life with that past I always wished to flee." [8]

The convicts, after a brief interrogation of their relationship with their pasts, return to dwell on the question of their present in the context of their eternal future, the question of what work they can do. The Second Convict interprets the curse of eternal life as the death of change itself. That is, on the unknown planet, where everything persists eternally, nothing can possibly change, or as the Convict notes, "Nothing will happen here." [8] Against the context of this redundancy of work and unchanging eternity, al-Hakim also appraises the nature of art. As they rack their brains to find something to do, the Convict's suggestion of indulging in art is also rejected by the Second Convict, who asserts that it is impossible to create art, or even science for that matter, in a world where they are incapable of producing any change. In a constant world, or in a world devoid of any context from which he comes, thus even art and science are impossible. Al-Hakim, through this negation of art and science, also returns to the essential question of what makes us human. On this new planet, neither their physical bodies retain any semblance of the human nor can they indulge in any form of activity that is characteristic of a human.

As the conversation between the two convicts progresses, a heavy sense of hopelessness descends on them. Their hopelessness stems from their chronic inability to reclaim the present lived moment from the void of meaninglessness. The two convicts, who are conditioned to feel that their lives are entitled to significance, can find no means by which they can be significant. There is an interesting play of intertextuality that al-Hakim seems to weave into the text that must be noted. One of al-Hakim's most famous plays, "The Tree Climber" (1962), assumes significance for its engagement with the Theatre of the Absurd that had taken the European theatre scene by storm over the previous decade, and scholars have located distinct influences of Beckett and Ionesco in it. However, while "Voyage to Tomorrow" can hardly be termed absurdist, there seems to be a citation of Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" in the play, particularly in the third act. The situation of the two convicts and the distinctive quality of their temporal engagement is remarkably similar to the futureless and hopeless boredom and ennui that plagues Vladimir and Estragon, and their conversations are reminiscent of the two tramps trying to pass the time, to fill the meaningless void with meaning. Moreover, biographical accounts of al-Hakim's life suggest that he travelled to Paris in 1957, where he claimed to have watched plays by Beckett and Ionesco. Notwithstanding that, al-Hakim, a keen observer of European theatrical traditions and as someone proficient in French, might have had the chance to read the original text of "Waiting for Godot". The strongest suggestion of Beckettian influence in the script can be found at the end of the third act. As the hopelessness of their condition becomes too much to bear, and as the present stubbornly resists its own emancipation in meaning, the two convicts, like Beckett's tramps, begin to contemplate suicide.

The Convict, looking at the tall, needle-like mountain in the distance, suggests, "What if we scale the mountain until we reach its peak and then throw ourselves off? Wouldn't we fall and shatter?" [8] Reminiscent of Vladimir and Estragon looking at the tree and contemplating hanging themselves. And just as the two tramps are cruelly reminded that even death will not be easy for them, that the rope might not hold strong to kill them, the two convicts too are thrown deeper into the abyss of hopelessness as the possibility of their survival from the fall haunts them. [8, p.304] The two convicts, of course, do not attempt suicide for the point of their contemplation is for al-Hakim to push the critique of an eternal future to its abject limits. Having driven that point home, al-Hakim quickly turns toward taking the action of the play forward. Over the course of their discussion on suicide, the Convict's attention falls on the rocket and he stumbles on a better idea than trying to kill themselves – to try and repair the rocket. This idea swiftly transforms the nature of their condition, for now; there is suddenly a ray of hope in the void of hopelessness, a possibility for change to take place. And more importantly, the convicts now have work to do. Their present has found meaning and has, once more, been rendered significant. And al-Hakim ends the act with the indication that it is probably this ability to produce meaning to our lives alone that makes us human, for the Convict, jubilant at this idea, says, "Yes. Let me embrace you. We're human once again." [8]

In the final act, al-Hakim takes readers back to Earth when the two convicts, having successfully repaired their space ship, return home. However, time, too, assumes a new ontology when taken out of its worldly context, and 309 years have transpired since they left Earth on their mission. The mission itself had become a part of history, and scientists for generations had hoped and waited for their return. The two convicts, now heroes, were repositories of knowledge that the scientific community, the state, had a keen, vested interest in. To acculturate them to the realities of this futuristic world and assist them in drawing up a report of their observations in space, they are each assigned an assistant. However, before they can get to working on the report, the two convicts are brimming with curiosity, and direct a slew of questions at their assistants. Through this conversation between the convicts and the assistants, al-Hakim paints a vivid picture of the new world that they occupy. [9] It is in this act that al-Hakim overtly engages with the theme of utopia that is so central to definitions of science fiction. The utopia that al-Hakim portrays three centuries in the future is a world that has reached the age of complete automation. At first, this world seems to resemble a socialist utopia. All basic essentials of life are provided for by the state. Hunger has been eradicated, for food is now manufactured chemically with nutrients extracted from the basic elements of nature. Medicine has advanced to such a degree that disease has been vanquished, and life expectancy as gone up tremendously. War has become outmoded. Currency has no place in this society, and everything is available to anyone who needs it. However, this seemingly

utopian world is fraught with a new set of tensions that complicate it, for in this new world of the future where all necessities have been taken care of, the crisis that plagues its people is the crisis of work. With the people no longer needing to work to earn a living, the motivation to work has been culled from the realm of necessity and placed in the realm of enjoyment. Work is engaged in for its own sake, for the sheer pleasure of it. The real crisis of this society is that there aren't enough jobs for everyone anymore. In this sense, the fourth act invokes the same conditions that defined the two convicts on the unknown planet in the third act, and while the technological advancement of society denotes a utopian progression, al-Hakim also invokes the hopelessness and meaninglessness that is an inevitable consequence of this utopian condition. The boredom and misery that characterized the lives of the two convicts on the unknown planet is the everyday reality for the millions of unemployed in this world. The world of the future, with its automation and technological advancement, is a reference to the model of modernity, that is impelled by Science and Reason. Al-Hakim completely undermines the utopias of modernity through self-sacrifice of his protagonist, for his act is an utter renunciation of the rationality and Reason that form the cornerstones of scientific development. [10] Even as al-Hakim acknowledges the benefits to this rationality in the advancement of civilizations, as is evidenced in his agenda for the Arab theatre and in his indulgence in the genre of science fiction, he nonetheless attributes it with a certain dehumanizing function that stifles love, art, and all that is beautiful in this world. Thus, Tawfiq al-Hakim's science fiction, while characterized as science fiction principally due to its emulation of the genre as it developed in the European countries, also markedly divested from it, and in that sense, "Voyage to Tomorrow" can be properly called a work of Arabic science fiction.

5. Conclusion

As Arab literature is so much focused on classical themes, modern Arabic science fiction seems to be a genre with a philosophical belief in the tenacity of humanity and the potential of the mind. Tawfiq al-Hakim is widely regarded as one of the brightest representatives of modern Arabic science fiction. He made significant contributions to almost all literary forms. He always believed that true science fiction could not really exist until people understood the rationalism of science and began to use it with respect in their stories. His psyche is craving new types of stories – ones that can inspire and empower the co-creation of more inclusive futures. Among the numerous types of Arabic science-fiction works, Tawfiq al-Hakim's "Voyage to Tomorrow" takes special place. Questions of enduring values during an age of scientific advances and material prosperity seem to be posed on several levels in this work. Motivations for murder and degrees of guilt may be different for particular individuals, but the comparative effects do not appear to be diminished by

traversing immense distances or through the passage of several centuries. Other forms of attachment and repulsion that originally seemed fixed in particular points of space and time also have a lasting quality, which the first convict realizes when he calls forth the image of his wife from a distant planet many light-years away. At other times, when the two convicts discuss such matters between themselves, differences of temperament and indeed of values emerge. There, the ironic convergence of themes across a period of several centuries is skillfully developed. Story set in the future is often judged, as time passes, on whether it comes true or not. Although the philosophical issues posed by Tawfiq al-Hakim in this work may seem perplexing, if not daunting, there are some indications that the writer did not mean them to be taken too seriously. To be sure, the presentation of weightier issues is supported by a certain number of specific devices which create an atmosphere that is suitable for unnatural events. There are many close and evident connections between science fiction and dystopian fiction in al-Hakim's works, yet neither, in deeper examination, is a simple mode, and the relationships between them are exceptionally complex. Thus, the task of the most of Tawfiq al-Hakim's science fiction works is not to predict the future. Rather, it contemplates possible futures and makes the readers to think it over.

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