

<p><b>Dr. Lana Younes</b>  <b>Department of English</b>  <b>Faculty Of Arts</b>  <b>Cairo University</b></p>	<p><b>Tawfiq al-Hakim's</b>  <b>Adaptation of Molière's</b>  <b>"Theatre of the Absurd" and</b>  <b>"Animal Fables"</b>  <b>In his Socio-Political</b>  <b>Satire: Suq al-Hamir</b></p>
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### **Introduction**

The Egyptian author, Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987), is best known as one of the founders of the modern Arab theater. In his works, he mixes European techniques with themes mostly deriving from the Eastern cultures, including his one-act play "Suq al-Hamir" or "The Donkey Market". This one-act play, "Suq al-Hamir", appeared on the pages of Al-Ahram, the Cairo daily newspaper, on February 12, 1971 and was later translated into English by Professor Dr. Roger Allen. The dramaturgy of Tawfiq al-Hakim is unconventional and varied, in both its form and essence. Al-Hakim is a writer of continual experiments who sought new forms, conventions, and better ways for the expression of his ideas. Despite his emphasis on cultural and social problems in Egyptian society, Tawfiq al-Hakim looked ahead into the future, giving the reader a portrait of conflicts and facing drama in the Arab world in the twenty-first century.

### **Synopsis of "Suq al-Hamir"**

"Suq al-Hamir" is a social satire modeled on examples of Molière's "Theater of the Absurd". Tawfiq al-Hakim cleverly depicts the discourse of animal fables in the guise of the talking animal. The

significance of the talking donkey in "Suq al-Hamir" lies in his dual role as man and beast, allowing al-Hakim to satirize the absurdity of the human condition in modern society.

This one-act play narrates a farcical tale involving two unemployed villagers, a farmer and his wife. The scene opens in a nearby donkey market where two unemployed men linger, discussing their lives and noting how they are going nowhere. The two unemployed villagers are a sample of local inhabitants who possess no particular ambitions in their lives.

The dilemma of these two men illustrates the absurdity of the human condition, for these unemployed villagers represent typical Egyptian townspeople who are trapped in an existence absent of meaning. However, they express an unconvincing innocence because both appear to be bored with themselves, yet they are definitely not boring. When the unemployed man discloses his urge "to put the rope around his neck" in order to have at least someone "guarantee him something to eat,"<sup>1</sup> this act gives the unemployed man a purpose, i.e. to play the role of the donkey. Yet it is a satirical purpose because the guise deprives the villager of his definition as a man.

Furthermore, the unemployed man longs for the life of a donkey and willfully relinquishes his humanity in order to become one. With respect to this personification, although he maintains the characteristics of a human being, he had no identity and no purpose in society until he chose to transform

himself into a donkey:

"2<sup>nd</sup> Farmer: If only I was a donkey...

1<sup>st</sup> Farmer: What's the matter? At least you will have someone, who will guarantee you something to eat...

2<sup>nd</sup> Farmer: You're are right, anything rather than loafing around hungry like this..."<sup>2</sup>

The donkey represents the beast of burden and the bearer of hardship. Al-Himar (the donkey) is a patient animal the way al-Mas'udi described Marwan, the Umayyad's Caliphate. He called him Marwan al-Himar.<sup>3</sup> The donkey is also a symbol for pure simplicity, the characterization of simpleton. Al-Himar represents wisdom rather than foolishness as Tawfiq al-Hakim has displayed his donkey in the following plays: "Suq al-Hamir", "Al-Himar Ufaker" (the donkey who cogitates), and "Has-has al-Habub" (the cute donkey).

#### **Animal Fables as Satire in "Suq al-Hamir"**

The idea of using animals in social or political satire is old, belonging to an ancient literary genre. It goes back to the Artasachtra literature in India, where the first animal fables were written in Sanskrit, in a book of five fables called "Panchatantra". Animal fables were used to teach the children of the princes and kings the art of politics. One of the most famous collections of animal fables was the famous book of Kalilah and Dimnah. It was later translated from the Sanskrit into the Persian, and then into the Arabic by Ibn al-

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Muqaffa', who was executed by the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur in the eighth century. Although the circumstances surrounding Ibn al-Muqaffa's death are uncertain, it may have been due to the political satire in his writings.

Kalilah wa-Dimnah originated chiefly in India where the nucleus of the collection is known under the name "Panchatantra", or "The Five Books". These fables descend from the Indian Sanskrit folktales. Later these fables migrated from India, landing in Persia where they were translated from the Sanskrit into the Pahlavi language. A Persian convert to Islam, 'Abdallah ibn-al-Muqaffa', around 750 A.D. rendered the tales into the Arabic language. The Persian translation was called Anvar-ibn-Suhayli, or the "Lights of Canopus", and it was a French translation of this work that La Fontaine used in his second edition of his fables, as the Persian form Pilpai for Bidpai indicates.<sup>4</sup>

It was the milieu of the Egyptian countryside that gave birth to al-Hakim's confrontation with the social problems in Egyptian society. Al-Hakim utilized animal fables in a series of one-act plays known collectively as the "Theater of the Donkeys" which reflects what goes on in the society and he labels it as "Masrah al-Mujtama'". His sharp satire employed in such animal fables as "Himari Qal Li", "Suq al-Hamir", "Shajarat al-Hukm", and "Himar al-Hakim" caused mass appraisal both from the populace and the intellectuals of his audiences.

Through everyday episodes or conversations, fables can be eventful, exciting miniature adventures, or they can take the form of lifelike

drama. They can be non-realistic, and formal, allegories, or philosophical disquisitions, or they can fit into traditional modes and read like fairy-tales, or picaresque travelogues.<sup>5</sup> In al-Hakim's often metaphorical fables, several of these elements are present at once, where they appear as picaresque allegories or philosophical fairy-tales.

Animal fables serve as a potent vehicle for satire because they are firmly set in the animal kingdom. Since these animals are inherently rustic, such characters can be easier shown as fools. Disguise is an essential element in the message of the traditional fable, which purports to be a story about animals, but in reality it is designed to teach human beings a lesson.<sup>6</sup> In this genre, the moral may be spoken by an animal character, demonstrated by al-Hakim's unemployed man as the donkey Hsawi, rather than directly to the reader in the form of a clear lesson.

#### **Social and Political Uses of Animal Fables**

A full appreciation of Tawfiq al-Hakim's drama requires an intimate knowledge of Egyptian society. When animal fables are used in al-Hakim's theater, the dialogue is effectively balanced, comparing and contrasting tragedy with pathos and absurdity. People regard acting as an art, while to others it means folly and madness. Nonetheless, a good balance exists between the popular and the intellectual in this type of satirical comedy, despite its deceptive representation.

Al-Hakim's collection of donkey fables thrives on political gossip, usually transforming fantasy

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into fact. The characters are masked abstractions, being animals, or donkeys. It produces stereotypes, taking after the Japanese "kabuki", where the characters always wear masks. In this case, the unemployed man disguises himself as a donkey. The visual and verbal differentiation must be noted throughout the play. With respect to the symbolic interlude, the function of the mask is to hide the individuality of the characters.<sup>7</sup>

Al-Hakim's emphasis on dialogue as central to the drama is clearly shown between the farmer and the unemployed man (in the guise of a donkey). Al-Hakim successfully applies sharp social satire throughout the dialogue between the donkey and the farmer using comic elements that stem in large measure from the protagonist. As persona or second self, the unemployed man as donkey represents the author's satirical approach to major political and social reforms that he implies should take place in Egyptian society. His humor is sometimes hilarious, and his portrayal of the national milieu in the last decades confirms the idea that, in tragicomedy, the play can range from tragedy to farce.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Animal Fables as Social Metaphor**

Al-Hakim brilliantly weaves political and social anecdotes into the fabric of animal fables through his satirical expose of the Egyptian society and its perplexity. Utilizing animal fables as social metaphor in many of his one-act plays, al-Hakim directly recreates the atmosphere of social events, even with its tragic aspects (the dilemma of poverty in rural Egypt - the unemployed villager who agreed

to become a donkey in order to survive), more effectively than could a descriptive narrative. In the writer's absurd universe, no historical events are immune from comic and satirical treatment. It is, however, an error of aesthetic judgment to regard his humor as essentially entertaining or trivial.

In "Suq al-Hamir", al-Hakim reveals how black humor - when falling under the umbrella of social satire - often serves to emphasize the catastrophic effects of tyranny on a simple and ignorant people, led blindly to the humiliation of crushing defeat.<sup>9</sup> Al-Hakim, in the guise of comedy-drama, uses black comedy (tragicomedy) because to him the difference between tragedy and comedy is not always straightforward. This play may appear like a comedy, but it has a tragic side to it in the form of poverty, oppression, and despair.

In "The Donkey Market", al-Hakim exposes the tragic element of farce. The dualism of comedy and tragedy in the play's social satire leaves the reader with the incompatible feelings of mirth and horror. The psychic tension created by these conflicting emotions enhances artistic pleasure, as we experience political and social realities which are simultaneously absurd and incongruous, but ugly and pathetic.

Brevity forms an essential part of the conception of fables, probably because the successful fable needs to make a clear point.<sup>10</sup> Al-Hakim in "The Donkey Market" used brevity to create effects that are witty, elegant, clever and alternatively strikingly bold. In his short one-act plays, the author's juxtapositions of words can be dense and

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rich or simple and crude, underscoring his satiric themes throughout "The Donkey Market".

**Influence of Theater of the Absurd on Animal Fables:**

There are elements of the absurd in al-Hakim's work, reflecting the influence of the Theater of the Absurd on the author's thoughts. This is particularly the case in Tawfiq al-Hakim's play, "Suq al-Hamir". According to Badawi, al-Hakim was strongly influenced by French dramatists such as Molière and Anouilh, who likewise concerned themselves with social dilemmas confronting their society. They all dealt with the social phenomenon of the Theater of the Absurd in their plays. The influence of these French dramatists on al-Hakim stemmed from al-Hakim's three-year sojourn in Paris, where he studied drama and theater.<sup>11</sup>

Gaensbauer said that the divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. The term "Theater of the Absurd" has never been universally accepted. French critics generally refer to these plays as *nouveau théâtre* (new theater). Other labels proposed include theater of the derision, theater of cruelty, *avant-garde*, anti-theater, and meta-theater.<sup>12</sup>

The phenomenon of the Theater of the Absurd is a twentieth-century idea, a literary reaction to the Second World War in Europe. The absurdist playwrights, such as Sartre, Camus, Beckett, Adamov, Genet, and Ionesco, as young men were scarred by the same deplorable events: Stalin's dictatorship, Hitler's ascent, the self-deception of the Western



democracies refusing to concede the obvious. All of these occurrences reinforced the conviction that absurdity was ruling unchallenged in Europe. According to Gaensbauer, the era of the French theater of the absurd stretches roughly across this time-frame, the two decades between 1948 and 1968.<sup>13</sup>

However, this notion of satire vividly performed upon the stage can be traced back to the theater of Molière, as in his most famous play, "Tartuffe". Molière, the great French social satirist, is regarded by some critics as the father of the theater of the absurd. His plays encompasses a broad spectrum of ideas and images which have challenged critics' and spectators' notions of what an evening in the theater should be. Molière's notion of the function of comedy was "to critique morals with laughter." The artistic technique of "la commedia dell'arte" and farce were derived from Molière's theater.<sup>14</sup> However, according to Nurse, today the Molière specialist can no longer take for granted the thesis that his author's work is essentially satire, with a basically polemical purpose, rooted in a coherent system of moral values.

Tawfiq al-Hakim directly incorporates the influence of the Theater of the Absurd in his use of animal fables vividly described in his play "Suq al-Hamir". When the unemployed man chooses the persona of a donkey over his normal persona as a man, al-Hakim blends the idea of the animal fable with aspects of the absurd. In doing so, al-Hakim underscores the satirical relationships imbedded in modern Arabic society, using comic elements to the point of absurdity to illustrate the dilemma of being human in

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a world refusing to recognize the value of being human, especially those without money and those who are "local and not foreign produce". By blending the influence of the Theater of the Absurd with animal fables, al-Hakim intends to critically satirize modern Arab society.

### **Critical Analysis**

Despite the serious social issues he satirizes, al-Hakim utilizes a comical technique to tie together the three characters of the farmer, his wife, and Hasawi (the unemployed man as donkey). The play is a hybrid of two literary genres, The Theater of the Absurd and animal fables, incorporating both as vehicles for satirizing social problems in Egyptian society.

At the beginning of the play, the author centers his dialogue on the uncertainty of why a fine human mind chooses to forsake his intelligence in order to impersonate the body of a wild beast (the donkey, Hasawi). The dialogue between the two unemployed men becomes a verbal game of farce where the satire is often light for the pleasure of the audience. For example, the "hee-haw" of the donkeys may symbolize the social significance of the donkeys, as when the men discuss the difference between themselves and the donkeys:

**2nd: You can hear it for yourself.**

**1st: You mean the braying...?**

**2nd: Exactly...the braying."<sup>15</sup>**

In his subtle way, al-Hakim equates men to donkeys,

yet satirizes how even the donkeys have more "voice" than these two men. The problem of voice for these Egyptian villagers strikes at the core of al-Hakim's satirical view of modern society. In al-Hakim's characterization, the farmer symbolizes the social structures keeping the villagers from expressing themselves vocally.

From the beginning of this one-act play, one recognizes the irony of how the unemployed character desires and longs for becoming a freely-speaking animal. Only after converting into Hasawi is he allowed to think and express himself openly.

**"2nd: Donkeys aren't like us...**  
**1st: Donkeys spend their entire**  
**life working quietly and speaking freely...**  
**2nd: Freely?**  
**1st: I mean loudly...<sup>16</sup>**

Likewise, al-Hakim illustrates social satire by expressing how the two unemployed men are worthless because they are locally-produced and not imported. They imagine themselves for sale in a market similar to the donkey market, but understand the futility of that concept:

**"2nd: Why won't anyone buy us?**  
**1st: Because we are local produce...Money**  
**has to**  
**be spent on foreign produce..."<sup>17</sup>**

Al-Hakim satirizes the social problems confronting the Middle East, a region increasingly influenced by external pressures. While the focus of

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the political arena remains foreign, local problems remain unresolved. The knot in the tongue of the donkey may represent the Palestine occupied Arab land by the Israeli government. The problem of the occupation ties every Arab's tongue because it represents a form of forced colonial presence that remains unresolved.

"1st: ...hold on a minute, the knot is not untied yet..."

Farmer: What knot?

1st: The one in my tongue! You have embarrassed me...you've made me forget how to talk!"<sup>18</sup>

The unemployed man happily agrees to transform himself into a donkey in order to secure his meals from the farmer. He had no problem eating fodder and beans:

"farmer: What about food? You cannot possibly eat straw, clover, and beans..."

Hasawi: I'll have beans...but stew them for me... Manna from heaven!..."<sup>19</sup>

This is another example of al-Hakim's delicate social satire. The people of the Egyptian nation were always ridiculed for eating the fava-beans (the foul) because it is the food of donkeys. Egyptian villagers are always seen as simple and humble people. Anything can make them content, for they are portrayed as a simple nation.

Al-Hakim depicts a mixture of social and political satire in the way Hasawi accepts to do any job as a donkey except riding him:

**"Hasawi: Everything a donkey  
does except using me to  
ride on...you'll fall off..."<sup>20</sup>**

It may be said al-Hakim is pointing to the political despotism of the regime during Nasser's era, which utilized the Egyptian masses as donkeys, not regarding them as people with brains who knew how to think. In the play, the farmer is told he can absolutely depend on Hasawi's intelligence, wisdom, and good-measures if only he trusts him enough to discuss the issues before the farmer makes a decision.

**"Hasawi: that's my job...I can manage it. I'm a  
donkey, but I got a mind as well.**

**Farmer: A mind?! I'd forgotten about the question  
of your mind!...**

**Hasawi: Don't worry!My mind is at your service...  
You can always rely on it. Just one thing:  
allow me to speak to you quite freely and  
lets have some give and take when we speak to  
each other..."<sup>21</sup>**

The wife is opposed to having an open dialogue and freedom of expression and was totally against the donkey's suggestions, i.e. donkeys are not allowed to think.

**"wife: I am afraid of that muttering and  
grumbling of his!... What is this cheek?...  
Didn't he tell you not to say any more... Keep  
your trap shut... firmly closed... You're a  
real dumb idiot!"<sup>22</sup>**

The wife exemplifies al-Hakim's poignant political

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satire, representing a government which holds little regard for its people. Specifically, this may be a reference to the 1952 Revolution, when Nasser promised his people to look forward for reformation after the King Farouk's corrupt regime. However, he deceived them, and treated his people with brutality, lies and dictatorship. No one was allowed to express their views freely. The government viewed the Egyptian masses as brainless donkeys.

By becoming a donkey, the unemployed man rejects reality in favor of what he sees as a more humane, rational system, a greater social justice, and a more equitable distribution of wealth. Tawfiq al-Hakim satirizes all classes of society, the authors, and the writers throughout "The Donkey Plays". Like the artists and philosophers before al-Hakim, he asks the question, 'What does it mean to be human?' The answer he gets is disturbing: to be human is to seek endlessly for an identity and a universe in which to enjoy it. This is the plight of our species.

This position should in no way be construed as a brand of Existentialism or a doctrine of Absurdity. While these two schools both address what they see as the fundamental contingency and perplexity of human experience, they nevertheless have no difficulty elaborately constructing the two poles, subjective or objective, of that experience.<sup>23</sup>

In "Suq al-Hamir", the doctrine of Absurdity, for example, puts man in a meaningless universe but does not hesitate to enumerate the characteristics of that universe nor to suggest ways for man to cope with life in it. Absurdity arises not so much from man questioning himself as from his interrogating the

universe and adapting to its refusal to answer.

### **Symbolic Characters**

The main character is the "second unemployed man" who represents the ordinary Egyptian common person. We can relate him to the phenomenon of Existentialism. He is a nonentity who attempts to collect things and make them look good, but he cannot because he is a nothing person. He plays an imaginary game with his own witty imagination and perspective of the world, although his life is scattered and disconnected.

Hasawi is the social and political consciousness of the Egyptian masses. The wife and farmer personify the traditional Arab government administrators. Some governments in the Middle East are operated by one controlling figure, one party, with many "donkeys" surrounding it. The masses generally cheer the decisions of these government's representatives, applauding mindlessly, blindly, braying "hee-haw" like donkeys.

In al-Hakim's plays, we can see his political satire through his donkeys. He boldly points his finger at the government, at Nasser's regime and maybe at the king's regime, before him. We could see his socio-political satire clearly in "Suq al-Hamir" when also adopting the name "Hasawi" which represents the masses of the ordinary Egyptian people. He is the social and political conscience of his people. Selecting this particular name for the donkey clearly emphasizes al-Hakim's awareness of his personal rural, social environment as every Egyptian villager is a Hasawi and owns a Hasawi.

Al-Hakim pictures the simple yet ignorant

villager's wife who would keep on borrowing until she would become destitute without planning for the future.

**"wife: Next planting season can look after itself...but we are here today..."<sup>24</sup>**

Likewise, al-Hakim illustrates how social conventions and how traditions impact upon people's lives and attitudes. The word "fear" fills people's conscience, seeing what the government does is wrong.

**"Have you got anything else to say?!..."**

**I...I am afraid..."<sup>25</sup>**

But this manifests itself as institutionalized fear. Hasawi is afraid of the government, that is, the farmer and his wife. People were not allowed to think. If they did and opposed the ruler, they ended up in political prisons, like thousands who were thrown into political imprisonment during Nasser's regime. Nonetheless, Hasawi insisted to say what he thought right. Here al-Hakim is sending a strong social message.

**"Yes, I must say what's on my mind..."**

**and relieve my conscience..."<sup>26</sup>**

Using the donkey in particular is an interesting device because the donkey has two qualities: the quality of patience, doing the work without complaining; and the quality of fools, never causing trouble. But the donkey here represents another important quality of al-Hakim, for he is not foolish.

On the contrary, he represents wisdom. Another important quality of al-Hakim's donkey is his vulnerability and helplessness by being unemployed to the point that he was compelled to accept becoming a



donkey. He could be bought and sold, and meanwhile he had nothing to lose. On the contrary he would be provided for with food and shelter, while in his human state, he had nothing. The donkey here is used as the wise fool but unfortunately oppressed and powerless.

The donkey also represents very vividly the masses of the Egyptian people who can think but should not. They are not allowed even if they wanted to. It is also very interesting that in "Luq al-Hamir", the person who becomes the donkey is the person who has no aim (the unemployed). They are so oppressed, or more cleverly, oppressed because they are able to think and sort things out. The main characters in the play are personified in Fallahin Misr, the farmers of Egypt. This is where we see that political satire becomes social as well. The problem is what should be done and what is dictated by convention. For example, the farmer wanted to secure next year's crop, but his wife was more dominated by social traditions and conventions. She has to keep her appearances even if they go bankrupt.

Again, this shows how vividly al-Hakim was able to reflect the Egyptian peasants and how they were dominated by poverty and social conventions.

Tawfiq al-Hakim's social satire mainly refers to the oppressed Egyptian nation and how helpless they are to the point they have no problem transforming into donkeys.

**"2nd: If only I was a donkey...just  
look how pleased he looks with  
himself...Put the rope around my neck and**

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let him (the farmer or government) take me away?!"<sup>27</sup>

Based in the Qu'ran on the notion, "*al-fitna ašadd min al-qatl*", al-Hakim refers to the tendency to believe the opinions and gossip said about other people in their absence.

"wife: Too much medicine in your ears  
is stronger than magic..."<sup>28</sup>

The issue of consultation has more than one aspect here because consultation is originally the Islamic framework of any government as it says in the Qu'ran "*Wa Šhawiruhum fi al-'Amr*". This is also a satire indicating that people are no longer tied to the correctness or the authenticity of the true Islamic Shari'a Laws.

#### **Relationship between audience and theater**

The influence of written drama i.e. the theater of the mind verses the acted drama on stage is known to be one of many of al-Hakim's themes. However, there is the question of act-ability on stage. This one-act play is a comedy that can be acted on the stage.

The theater role/stage and audience participation emphasizes catharsis, i.e. the audience sees someone more stupid than themselves in performing comedy drama. On the stage the audience sees mankind being portrayed as vulnerable and unable to deal with the superior and unknown forces (like the gods). The theater tries to make you perceive

man as being less than normal. The comedy theater makes man feel superior, even by ridiculing their actions.<sup>29</sup>

In "Suq al-Hamir", al-Hakim successfully involves his audience with both their minds and their hearts throughout the play by constructing it with enough action to sustain the audience's interest throughout, never sinking to cruel humor or farce. Such an ardent and keenly satiric play is very welcomed on the stage as it receives an explicit popularity among its audience the Egyptian fans, in specific, and the Arab viewers in general. Traditionally, Egyptians are famous for their reliance on satiric humor in the form of transforming everyday tragedy into farce as no other people that we know of can transform their pain and struggle into humor and tearful jokes.

#### **Conclusion**

Tawfiq al-Hakim has become today a de facto Egyptian national cultural treasure. He is an important novelist and essayist, but much of his career was devoted to the theater. His frankly expressed goal has been to make drama an integral part of Arabic literature to match the role he plays in the contemporary Arab society, disguised as theater.<sup>30</sup>

Al-Hakim has written a number of plays including such attempts as using the colloquial language in dialogue. "The Donkey Market" is written in colloquial Arabic with comic situations involved which are of universal appeal.<sup>31</sup>

Al-Hakim was symbolized as the "prophet of the

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oppressed". Conditions of political repression in Egypt favor the expression of opinions through the medium of jokes. Traditionally, Egyptians tend to vent their frustration through satirical jokes, i.e. they express their disapproval towards their governments by mimicking them. For example, jokes about Nasser concern lack of freedom of speech, police torture and the failure of socialism. Jokes about Sadat focus on his wife Jihan, his relations with the Coptic Church and political corruption. Mubarak's reputed incompetence and lack of intelligence have likewise been satirized.<sup>32</sup>

In the years preceding the war in 1967, dramatists like Al-Hakim vividly mimicked the political climate after Egypt's defeat to Israel on television talk shows. These social commentators criticized the absolute dictatorship of Nasser's regime. Nothing was accomplished by the government after the defeat because Nasser used his charismatic powers, giving the people lengthy speeches in order to keep them hypnotized by these talks, and not thinking about their loss. There is a hideous mockery in al-Hakim's description of the Egyptian ruler, making us continually aware of the sinister humor of cruelty and the cruelty of humor. The market comedy of the situation is superbly communicated through the dialogue among the characters of the two unemployed men and the farmer in the opening scene.

In terms of social reform, symbolic structure, and realism are products of artifice using farcical segments.<sup>33</sup> Al-Hakim used farce with words in his play, for the most part, the donkeys in Hakim's

fables are men in beast's clothing, animals with brains. The author's inspiration in electing the genre of animal fables for his social satirical plays distinguishes him from earlier fabulists as to him - "a Fable may speak truth." The genre contributes to a freer and deeper fondness to drama.

Tawfiq al-Hakim is known as the "Father" of the Egyptian Theater. Hakim's theatrical dialogue communicates brilliantly his literary sublime to his audience. Hakim's comedies may also be used to consider a further problem - to what extent is humor or the laughable necessary for comedy? It has been found that it is 'not wholly laughable.' The play, "Suq al-Hamir", may elicit laughter, but his object in writing the play was not primarily to raise a laugh or entertain his audience, but rather to satirize some person or thing or society by casting ridicule on them. This derision appears to be the product of a moral viewpoint. Al-Hakim's play is the work of the satirist, the moralist, and the author of critical comedy. His play will be remembered because it appeals to both emotions and reason.

The differences between critical comedy, and uncritical (pure) comedy, although they are often very slight, have been thoroughly discussed by al-Hakim. Satire may be so mild at times that it can barely be detected under its mask of laughter. Still, the fact remains that we do not laugh at the satirical as such; we laugh at the purely comic qualities with which the play is accompanied or in which it is enclosed.

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The movement of the satirical comedy is suggestive of the rituals from which comedy and satire are sprung - "from conflict to social harmony, joy, and abundance."<sup>34</sup>

"Who is so patient of this impious world,  
that he can check his spirit, or rein his  
tongue? Who can behold such prodigies as  
these, And have his lips seal'd up? Not I:  
my soul Was never ground into such oily  
colors, To flatter vice, and daub iniquity:  
I will scourge those apes And to these  
courteous eyes oppose a mirror . As large as  
is the stage whereon we act..."<sup>35</sup>

ENDNOTES:

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15. Tawfiq al-Hakim, Al-Hamir (Beirut: Dar al-Shruq, 1972), p. 82.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 84-85.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
20. *Ibid.* p. 93.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
23. Dorota Rudnicka, "Futurological Problems in the Dramas of Tawfiq al-Hakim", p. 263.
24. Tawfiq al-Hakim, Al-Hamir (Beirut: Dar al-Shruq, 1972), p. 99.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
29. H. Metawie, "Egyptianizing Theater in Egypt, 1963-1970," International Dissertation Abstract, 47:1 (July 1966), p. 22-A.
30. William M. Hutchins, Play's Prefaces and Postscripts of Tawfiq al-Hakim Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1984), Intro.



31. Tawfiq al-Hakim, Translated by Professor Roger Allen, "The Donkey Market", Arab World, (Oct. 1971-Feb. 1972), p. 20-28.
  32. "The Politics of Laughter", Folklore, Spring 1992, 103:1, p. 75.
  33. Paul Starkey, p. 38.
  34. Jerry Lewis Kasperek, Moliere's tartuffe and The Traditions of Roman Satire (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 29-30.
  35. Ibid., p. 61.
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