

Marn: Why, are we not dreaming now?

Iam: yes... yes..., my God... what is the dividing line between dream and reality? I am confused... (p. 117).

The above excerpt embodies the condition of delirium and agony which the cavemen have gone through.

In conclusion, al-Hakim in his play *The Cavemen* has explicitly been influenced by Plato's 'The Simile of the Cave' in his handling of the theme of reality versus illusion. The situation in which one finds al-Hakim's characters is slightly different from Plato's prisoners of the den, since Plato's objective in his 'Simile's is to present a philosophical discourse about the two states of mind called Belief and ascent of the mind from illusion to pure philosophy, and the difficulties which accompany its progress. In contrast, al-Hakim expresses his objectives in his introduction to *King Oedipus*, that he tries to look at one of the 'Islamic legends' with the eye of Greek tragedy and bring about a fusion of the two mentalities and the two literatures.'

Yes. Yes Good bye .. 0... 0... I don't care I can see my disaster now. I feel the great distress of what has happened to me. Neither Marnoush, nor Iamlikha passed through a similar misfortune. Their is a step which separates you and me... A semi-night The step turned out to be endless seas. And the night turned out to be generations... I extend my hand to you while seeing you alive and beautiful in front of me, then an enormous great being stands between us, It is history! Yes Marnoush was right... Our age passed by, and we are the property of history now. We wanted to return to our time but history avenges... Good bye! (p. 108).

This quotation emphasizes Michelena's suffering, despair and disappointment. As noted earlier, Michelena and his fellows thought that their stay at the cave was no more than a night or so. But Michelena came to the conclusion that the lost time in the cave could be estimated at more than he expected. Therefore, Michelena, Marnoush and Iamlikha decided to go back where they belong: a return to the cave; an escape from reality to illusion. This is a reminder of Plato's prisoner who was released and cured of his delusions. This experience would be painful to him and 'he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows' (*Republic*, p.279). When the prisoner was told that what he used to see was mere illusion—as Prisca's world to Michelena—and that he was now nearer reality he would be at a loss and think that what he used to see in the den was more real than what he had experienced outside.

In their state of confusion, after their return to the cave, the cavemen began raising questions about their existence before and after their exposure to reality. In the cave, each one of them wonders if their experience in the city and their awakening from their sleep was a reality or a dream.

Marn: Dream? Ecstasy? Reality? Oh my God! I have lost my ability to discriminate.

Mich : Yes, it was a dream which resembled reality.

Iam : It is quite clear... It resembled reality.

Marn: Michelena... Machelina... How did you know it was a dream?

Mich: If what we have experienced was not a dream, then we are dreaming now.

begins to doubt the nature of the relationship between her and the king. This suspicion stems from his belief that the 'new' Prisca he sees now is his beloved Prisca. This state of suspicion marks the essence of misunderstanding and confusion between him and Prisca, Particularly when he sees the cross on Prisca's breast thinking that it was the one he gave once to 'old' Prisca: 'It is my cross... therefore she is my beloved'.

As a result of his experience with the present reality, Michelena is convinced of his failure to create from the 'new' Prisca, his 'old' Prisca. He recognizes that he has no place in this world and he does not belong to it.(14) Regarding this Michelena speaks about his love for Prisca in his dream:

...I loved Prisca of my dream... In that dream she was a stranger to me. There was no contact between us... All that was a kind of fantasy which distorted reality... As art, the dream sometimes can not reveal reality as it is... (p. 118).

Michelena's love for Prisca helps him to live in an ivory tower, in the world of his dreams. For this reason, he tries to ignore the real situation and to adjust himself to the new conditions, pretending he is not three hundred years old.

Michelena: ... Whatever you hear about the 300 years, it is a matter of figures and numbers only... it can't change any thing ... (pp. 79-80)

Furthermore, 'he made a temporary contract with life, but that contract did not last long. ...It seemed that this experience has pushed him further to live beyond reality... and made him to live in dream..' (15)

Michelena is deluded by his passionate love for the 'new' Prisca, who confronts him with the fact that she was named prisca because of the close resemblance to 'old' Prisca. After a long argument, Prisca confirms to Michelena the truth of the matter. For the first time since his arrival in Tarsus, Michelena becomes aware that his beloved died 300 years ago.

(14) Ghalié Shukri, *Derasat fi Adab al-Hakim (A Study in al-Hakim's works)* (Beirut: 1982), p. 188.

(15) Taseidet Hammoudy, *Athar al-Ramziyyeh fi Masrah al-Hakim (The Impact of Western Symbolism Upon al-Hakim's Theatre)* Beirut: Dar al-Hadatheh, 1986), p. 120.

elena to go back to the cave (13). Marnoush mocks Iamlikha's suggestion and prefers to stay, for he views things differently. Marnoush's belief in the reality of the situation under the reign of a Christian king encourages him to go and meet his wife and child. Marnoush is disappointed because his dreams are not fulfilled. Therefore he returns to the place where he begins crying over the loss of his wife and child. Marnoush now awakens to a new reality. He recognizes this reality after he has come to know the truth. Like Iamlikha before, Marnoush's efforts to convince Michelena to return to the cave are futile.

... There is no place for us in this new life and we do not understand these creatures and they do not understand us either. These people are strange to us, even if we can imitate their style, it does not mean that we should associate with them.. Yes, Michelena, the distance between us and the city is about three hundred years. And Iamlikha is neither insane nor is he lying. I realized the truth just now... Here is *another world surrounding us as if it were an overflowing sea, and we are not able to live in it, as if we were fish in a sea which changes from fresh to salt water.* (pp.77-78, our emphasis).

Marnoush's reasoning for wanting to return to the cave marks the only means to escape from the 'fictitious' situation to the 'real' one.

Undoubtedly Marnoush and Iamlikha reach for the tangible whereas Michelena plunges into the spiritual. Upon his arrival to the king's palace, Michelena recognizes the 'Hall of Columns'— which linked the past with the image of Prisca. This brings about his old memories about his secret meeting with the daughter of Dougianus, 'old' Prisca. When Michelena sees the king's daughter, 'new' Prisca, he thinks that she is his beloved. Michelena's indulgence of his fantasy provokes him to believe that he is living in actuality. His love for 'old' Prisca blinds him from listening to the warnings of Iamlikha and Marnoush. Michelena's overwhelming affection is reflected in his behavior towards 'new' Prisca. When he notices that Prisca is used to go to the king's chamber every night, he

(13) Naji Najeeb believes that the audience sympathizes with Iamlikha more than with Marnoush and Michelena because they give time and pretend to rationalize their behavior. see *Tawfiq al-Hakim wa Usturat al-Hathara Tawfiq al-Hakim and the Myth of Civilization* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1987), pp. 77-89.

wants to visit his family; and Michelena wants to wash and dress in fashion. Such acts of conduct make the king believe that these men are insane. Moreover, the king becomes pale, irritated and calls for Galias for help. Besides, the king expresses his inability to communicate with these strange creatures. Meanwhile, in spite of their efforts to go back to what seems to them 'normal life', they were surprised to be treated as 'saints'. Since there is a gap of 300 years separating the two parties, the citizens of Tarsus are looking at the cavemen as 'saints'. Therefore the king orders Galias to supply them with everything they need. But all the cavemen want is to go back to their own reality.

The cavemen react astonishingly towards the people's reception and attitudes. While the king was talking about the blessings that are bestowed upon them by the appearance of the cavemen during his reign, we see that the cavemen can not apprehend the king's words and they believe that he is mad. This mutual misunderstanding leads to the confusion between actuality and delusion.

One of the cavemen, lamlikha, is the first to come into direct contact with the real world. His experience in the city is expressed in terms of bitter nostalgia. According to lamlikha the 'real' Tarsus does not exist at all, but what they see is the 'delusive' resemblance of Tarsus. He sees life impossible among the people. Moreover, he is frightened even to look at them because they seem to be creatures from another world and belong to a town which he was never acquainted with before. Even his two friends who are wandering in the palace trying to cope with the new conditions seem strangers after their long and close relationship. He tells them,

A little while ago you become strangers to me. you are the only ones left after everything passed like a dream. Centuries and generations died out as if in one night. Ah !If you knew, you are blind to what I saw just now in a street in Tarsus, if this be still the city of Tarsus, (p. 63).

Furthermore, lamlikha tells his friends that everything appears to be strange and he himself is an alien to others. Also, lamlikha's dog is seen as weird creature, and is harassed by the dogs of the city. After lamlikha realizes his real existence, he tries in vain to convince Marnoush and Mich-

The prisoner's adaptation and recognition of reality undergo a process of reasoning. First he is compelled to be accustomed to the sight of the material world outside the cave and he will see his shadow. Next he will be able to look at the reflection of men and other objects in water. And then he can see the objects themselves (*Republic*, p. 280). If the prisoner returns to the cave his eyes will be blinded before he gets used to darkness, a process that might take sometime.

This process of reasoning which transfers the prisoner from illusion to reality and back to illusion and the disparity between these two states seems explicitly conveyed in al-Hakim's *The Cavemen*. From the very beginning of the play we are confronted with the two states of illusion and reality. In the first stage direction at the opening of *The Cavemen*, al-Hakim says: '(Total darkness where nothing could be seen except shadows of two men sitting cross-legged...)' (p.5). This darkness of the cave is mentioned explicitly as well as implicitly by the character of the play in the first act (pp. 5, 607, 15-16, 19, 23, 24, 25-26). It compels the hunter and the people of Tarsus, who came to the cave out of curiosity to believe that the cavemen are ghosts. At this moment reality (people of Tarsus) come face to face with illusion ('ghosts' i.e. the shadows of the cavemen). Thus both parties reacted towards each other surprisingly. When the people of Tarsus see the cavemen they were terrified and began screaming 'Ghosts... Dead... Ghosts...', and Leave the cave in disarray.

At the sight of the people, the cavemen remain lying calmly as if they were motionless statues, thinking of the screams which filled them with terror and made them as if they were deaf and blind.

The first encounter between the cavemen on the one hand and the king, Galias and Prisca on the other, which occurred in the palace, emphasizes the idea of illusion versus reality. The presence of the cavemen results in confusion.

The king and his daughter Prisca are disturbed by the news which Galias narrated about the three believers who took refuge in a cave three hundred years ago. When the king hears the story of the hunter, he believes it. Later, Galias is able to convince the king of the authenticity of his story. At the 'Hall of Columns,' each one of the cavemen expresses his need: Iamlikha wants to go to look for his sheep at the pasture; Marnoush

racters can not see for themselves that the sun is rising and sinking every day during their stay in the cave. For the time being the cave signifies the only world for the cavemen until Iamlikha, under the pressure of need, leaves the cave. This is the outset of the awakening that they discover the sun is shining outside but there is no heat penetrating into the cave:

Iamlikha: outside the cave... I found the cave's mouth. It is very close. But... it is strange... that neither heat nor light can enter the cave (p. 24).

Iamlikha's meeting with the hunter outside the cave provides us the first reaction towards the new situation. For the hunter, Iamlikha is a strange, terrifying creature who does not belong to reality. For Iamlikha, the hunter is insane because he is at first terrified and later thinks that the coins which Iamlikha showed are a treasure. Moreover, the hunter's disappearance suggests that he was an illusion because Iamlikha is living in his own world. Similarly, in Plato the released prisoner comes nearer to reality:

Then think what would naturally happen to them if they were released from their bonds and cured of their delusions. Suppose one of them were let loose, and suddenly compelled to stand up and turn his head and look and walk towards the fire; all these actions would be painful and he would be too dazzled to see properly the objects of which he used to see the shadows. So if he told that what he used to see was mere illusion and that he was a now nearer reality and seeing more correctly, because he was turned towards objects that were more real, and if on top of that he were compelled to say what each of the passing objects was when it was pointed out to him, don't you think he would be at a loss, and think that what he used to see was more real than the objects now being pointed out to him?' (*Republic*: pp. 279 -80)

When the prisoner is released to look towards the light (the outside reality), he would be unable to see the realities of which in his former state, he had seen the shadows. When the prisoner is approaching nearer to reality and his eyes are turned towards more real existence he has a clearer vision. Then he will not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now confronting him.

Cavmen, al-Hakim presents us with three men and a dog who took refuge in a cave while fleeing from the fanatic Roman emperor Daqyanus, (11) and slept there for over three hundred years. Undoubtedly, the cavemen were unaware of the fact that they had slept that long. They believed that they slept only a day or two:

Mich : How long have we stayed here?

Mar : A day or part of a day.

Mich : How do you know?

Mich : Have we ever slept more than that? (12)

Later, Michelena and Iamlikha become uncertain about the time they have spent in the cave, especially when they discover that their hair and beards have grown very long. Iamlikha asserts his suspicion by telling a story which his mother and grandmother had told him about a believer who took refuge in a cave and slept a month there. It seems that Iamlikha's sense of time has changed and his awareness of the possibility of sleeping more than a day has developed in the right direction. Meanwhile Marnoush thinks that Iamlikha's reasoning is ludicrous. He accuses him of being insane and a believer in fairy tales:

Iam : We might have stayed a month.

Marn : How come! A month? ! where have we been all this time?

Iam : We have been asleep.

Marn : Why not? ...

Marn : This is an old woman's tale.

Iam : I believe this tale. Nothing is wrong about it (p. 26).

This confusion about the idea of time embodies the discrepancy between illusion and reality. Like Plato's prisoners who spent a long time in the cave believing that the shadows of the real objects thrown by the fire on the wall of the cave were the real objects themselves, al-Hakim's cha-

(11) The Roman Emperor, Decius who reigned from 249-251 A.D., was a violent and fierce persecutor of Christians. In Islamic literature Decius was known as 'Daqyanus' and the name stands as a symbol of injustice and oppression.

(12) Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Ahl- al-kalif (The Cavemen)* Cairo: Dar al-Nah-dha, 1933), pp. 5-6. All citations hereafter appear in parentheses are taken from this edition.

the prisoners in the cave with their legs and necks chained so that they can not move, and can only see a wall before them. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way and a low wall built along the way. The moving figures of animals are reflected on the wall before the prisoners.

The prisoners would mistake shadows for realities. And when released they would still persist in maintaining the superior truth of the shadows. When dragged upwards they would be dazzled by excess of light. At length one of them would see the sun and understand his nature. When he remembers the old habitation and the wisdom of the cave and his fellow prisoners, he would felicitate himself on the change and pity them. But when he returns to the cave he would see much less well than those who had never left it. Therefore, the prison is the world of sight; the light of the fire is the sun and the immediate source of reason and truth.

Tawfiq al-Hakim remarked that the conflict in *The Cavemen* springs from the struggle between reality and illusion (9). This theme is a recurrent one in al-Hakim's 'intellectual' theatre.

Tawfiq al-Hakim's *The Cavemen* presents us with three men who took refuge in a cave which is wrapped in absolute darkness. They slept in the cave for over three-hundred years. When they woke up, they thought they had spent a day or so in the cave. When they are exposed to the outside world and are confronted with the new life, they could not cope with reality; and the cave, their old reality, disappeared and became a dream. When they returned to the cave, they realized that their life in the outside world was only a dream and the cave now is their sole reality. Therefore the cavemen are confused between reality and illusion.

In both Plato's 'The Simile of the Cave' and al-Hakim's *The Cavemen*, the idea of illusion and reality is expressed through 'time' (10). In the

(9) Ibid., pp. 43-44.

(10) For more discussion of the concept of 'time' in al-Hakim's *The Cavemen*, see Ahmad Shams-ElJin al-Hajjaji, *Al-Ustura fi al-Masrah al-Misri al-Hadith, 1933-1970 (Myth in Modern Egyptian Theatre 1933-1970)* (Cairo: Dar al-Maaref, 1986), p. 459-465; and Mohammed Mandur, *Masrah Tawfiq al-Hakim (The Theater of Tawfiq al-Hakim)* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahdha, 3rd ed., 1965), pp. 43-47.

asura form the Holy Quran, (4) and the Christian story of 'The Seven Sleepers of the Cave' as reported in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (5) he relies heavily on Plato's 'The Simile of the Cave' in *The Republic* (6).

In adapting this story from Plato, al-Hakim aims at not simply extracting a story from the Quran and setting it in a dramatic framework but looking at an Islamic legend with the eye of Greek tragedy and bringing about a fusion of the two mentalities and the two literatures' (Intro.) (7)

This paper will examine to what extent al-Hakim's *Ahl al-Kahf* (*The Cavemen*) is influenced by Plato's 'The Simile of the Cave.' Plato's 'Simile' is employed and adapted by al-Hakim in order to achieve his objective—reality versus illusion. It focuses on the two states of mind, belief and illusion. Plato shows the difficulties which accompany the ascent of the mind from illusion to pure philosophy (8). He presents us with the image of

- (4) *The Holy Koran*, Al-Kahf xviii, Verses: 9-27.
- (5) The bare Christian story... is told in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (end of chapter 33). In the reign of a Roman Emperor who persecuted the Christians, seven Christian youths of Ephesus left the town and hid themselves in a cave in a mountain near by. They fell asleep, and remained asleep for some generations or centuries. When the wall which sealed up the cave was being demolished, the youths awoke. They still thought of the world in which they had previously lived. They had no idea of the duration of time. But when one of them went to the town to purchase provisions, he found out that the whole world had changed. (Cited in Abdulla Yusuf Ali *The Meaning of the Glorious Gur'an*. Vol. 1, p. 730).
- (6) Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Sir Desmond Lee, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 278-86. Hereafter cited as *Republic* followed by page number in parentheses.
- (7) According to Richard Long, al-Hakim's intention was to 'emulate the European way of doing this' [to give dialogue a genuine literary worth]. *Tawqif al-Hakim: Playwright of Egypt* (London: Ithaca press, 1979), p. 22.
- (8) For more discussion of Plato's 'Simile of the Cave,' see Eid Dahiyat 'The Platonic and the Aristotelian Literary Concepts of the Particular and the Universal' *Al-Balga*, Vol. 1 (September, 1991), pp. 13-20.

The Impact of Plato's 'Simile of the cave'
on
Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Cavemen)

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In a letter to his friend Andre, Tawfiq al-Hakim says:

I read and read until I have almost read every thing.. I have been involved in reading the literature of all nations, their philosophies and arts... I believe that artists in our time should be encyclopedic (1).

This quotation is an acknowledgement of al-Hakim's extensive reading of the literature and philosophy of the west.. Moreover, in *Ufsur min al-Sharq* (*A Sparrow from the East*) (1938) al-Hakim emphasizes his exposure to western civilization; he mentions that a man who went to Paris for education should become acquainted with various ideas and thoughts 'from the Greeks to Voltaire' (2).

In his introduction to *Al-Malik Odeeb* (*King Oedipus*) [1949], al-Hakim stresses once again that he has been influenced by western writers such as Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Moliere, Racine, Ibsen, Pirandello and Shaw (3).

In writing his play *Ahl al-Kahf* (*The Cavemen*), al-Hakim draws upon various sources. Although al-Hakim's primary source of inspiration was

- (1) Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Zahrat al-Umr* (*Life Bud*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1944), p. 19.
- (2) *Ufsur Min al-Sharq* (*A Sparrow from the East*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1938), p. 97.
- (3) 'Introduction' *Al-Malik Odeeb* (*King Oedipus*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 1957) pp. 44-49 . Hereafter cited as 'Intro'