CHAPTER IV

ANALYTICAL STUDY OF *UFSUR MIN AL-SHARQ*

Usfur min al-sharq is a socio-political novel of Tawfiq-Hakim, published in 1938. In the novel, al-hakim uses some of his own experiences in Paris of the twenties. Bron and brought up in Egypt,al-Hakim was sent to france in 1925 to study for a doctorate in law, he devoted himself to Western literature and arts. This sojourn provided him with face to face contact wihth Western culture. Like other Arab students studying in the West, he foud himself challenged by the West's material superiority. Henceforth the contrast between Estern and Western cultures became dominant concern in his writings.

Muhsin, the Protagonist of the novel, an Egyptian student in Paris, is given to dreaming and contemplation. Enabling the reader to draw an interesting analogy between the author and the character that gives the novel and autobiographical touch, he hardly pays any attention to his studies, but spends his time in the Louvre museum and attending concerts of classical music. He has two friends who represent conflicting points of view. Andre is a modern intelligent worker who makes good and finally becomes a successful businessman. He and his wife give their oriental friend practical advices as to living in Paris and dealin with Parsian women, which he ,however, ignores. The other friend, who speaks for religion and the sprittualism of the East is Ivan, a consumptive Russian refugee and a disciple of Tolstoy. Significantly enough, he dies in the course of the novel, without fulfilling his dream of going to the East, the land of spiritual values.

The most interesting part of the novel is the love story.Muhsin falls in love with Suzie,the cashier at the box office of the Odeon Theater. He

spends hours waching her in silent adoration from the neighbouring cafe, not daring to say a word to her, as if he were still in Cairo. His practical French frieds advise him to give her a present and invite her to dinner, which the girl easily accepts. He invests her with mystic qualities associated with Beethoven's symphonies and Puccini's operas and is crushed when she drops him in favour of her boss.In his talks with his Russian friend, the hero identifies her with Europe, a blue-eyed nymph, lively and beautiful but egoistic and imotionally shallow.

In this novel, Al-Hakim deeply explores the theem of the conflict between the materialist West and the spiritual East. The clash of cultures that the young students from the Arab countries studing in Europe experience in their won lives is well portrayed in this novel. Al-Hakim's merit, as the noted Arabic critic M.M. Badawi comments, lies in having identified the theem and stated it for the first time in Arabic novel.

It is a novel of intellectual contrast between the spiritual East and the materialist West. The theme of contrast is firmly established by a comparison of the opening and closing chapters. In the first chapter, Muhsin, the Egyptian hero is given the nickname, "Sparrow from the East" by his French friend Andre``as he catches Muhsin eating dates on the street of Paris.[98] Andre`` drags Muhsin to a church for the funeral of an acquaintance's relative, only to abandon him there temporarily and Muhsin's eastern perspective is revealed far more in his sensitivity to the spiritual dimension of the service than by the dates. Andre``, who represents the western perspective, replies when chided by Muhsin for not allowing him proper time to prepare before entering the sacred place like church. He says: "Going there is the same for us as entering a café. What is the difference? Each is as much a public site as the other. One

[98] Tawfiq al-Hakim: *Usfur min al Sharq* p. no. 13.

has an organ. The other has an orchestra."[99] Muhsin corrects him saying: "To the contrary, in the former, we encounter the heavens….. It's not easy for the soul to ascend at any moment. It definitely requires efforts.[100] In the French church Muhsin experiences the same feeling that convulsed his soul each time he entered the mosque of al- Sayyida Zaynab in Cairo. So he realizes that the house of God is identical in essence in every place and every age.[101] Finding himself in a queue of people making the sign of the cross over the corpse, he is so flustered that afterwards he does not know whether he signed a cross or crescent.[102] Seated in a cafe with Andre`, Muhsin has a reverie, recalling a dream in which he is accused of killing someone. In his reverie his minds moves by association of ideas to a painful memory of the 1919 revolution. He remembers witnessing the murder- by a mob of fellow demonstrators- of a young British soldier. That atrocious sight wiped from his mind the thought that the victim was an enemy of Muhsin's homeland.[103] Although implicated only in the most intellect fashion with the soldier's death, he felt responsible for it.

The exasperated Andre` asks rhetorically, "Are you Easterners fools or sages? Muhsin retorts, "That is our genius to combine the two qualities in one like the folk sage Joha or Mulla Nasr-ud-din."[104]

In the next to the last chapter, Ivan(Muhsin's aged friend who is a Russian migrant) declares:

"All of Europe now is nothing but an anxious, bewildered person who thinks discursively and uses opium."[105]

In chapter twenty, Ivan explains to Muhsin that there are two types of learning: one of the hidden secrets of the universe and the other of the

[99] Tawfiq al-Hakim: Usfur min al-Sharq , p. no.22.
[100] Ibid., p. no.22.
[101] Ibid., p. no. 13.
[102] Ibid., p. no. 14.
[103] Ibid., p. no. 17-18.
[104] Ibid., p. no. 60.
[105] Ibid., P. no 181.

universe's manifest aspects. If Europe has mastered the latter, European learning is one-sided whereas Eastern wisdom embraces both worlds in equilibrium. Ivan had explained earlier that Eastern prophets have given mankind the world of the imagination and that the best days of Westerners are those they pass in the dreams of Eastern prophets.[106] There are therefore two worlds: this one and the next. Ivan laments that "modern European culture does not allow people to live in more than one world. Whereas the secret of the greatness of ancient religions was that they enabled people to live in two worlds.[107] The novel is about the tension of these two perspectives. Chapter 10 is devoted to a discussion of them. One is limited to early concerns and sciences; the second is illuminated by heavenly wisdom. Al-Hakim linked these two perspectives to the worlds of *al-Waqi* (reality) and *al-Khayal* (imagination). The latter term might be glossed here not simply as imagination. But also as myth: a story that lends meaning to life. The failure of Muhsin's romance with Suzie tempts him to abandon the earth for the heaven. He feels he is distancing himself from the earth…. to return to heavens, to his heaven from which he had fallen.[108] Here at least temporarily, Muhsin becomes the character of Shahrayar in Al- Hakim's play *Shahrazad*, having freed himself from earthly lust, rises heavenward like untethered balloon in a way untenable for a human being. He has a life time experienced life from three male perspectives represented respectively by the slave, who sees the world from the bestial perspective of physical desires: the vizier who sees the world shaped by the emotional wants, and Shahrayar, as resurrected by *Shahrazad*: a being whose desires are purely intellectual.[109] Shahrazad must have some characteristic perspectives, but

[106] Tawfiq al-Hakim: Usfur min al-Sharq , p. no. 100
[107] Ibid., p. no. 169
[108] Tawfiq al-Hakim: Usfur min al-Sharq p. no. 153
[109] Al-Hakim: Taht al Misbah al-Akhdar (Cairo, 1941, P. no. 51.

in this play she is the victim of the male gaze and seen from these three male perspectives. Her reality is exactly what each male decides it to be. Of course, she can only see her veil, not the reality. The three male perspectives here recall Plato's three parts of the soul: desire, spirited ambition and reason. The occupation best suited for these three were merchant citizens, military or police officials and philosopher king which parallel roughly, the three male occupations or perspectives in the play. Al-Hakim also distinguished between lust and love. In an essay entitled *Man's Fate* Al-Hakim discussed Shahrazad and explained how Shahrayar progressed through the three stages just sketched.[110] By contrast in the same collection of essays, in one entitled Shahrazad and Montmartre, al-Hakim described Shahrayar transformation as being from a child who plays with physical toys to a man aflame with love for everything pertaining to the spirit, detesting anything material; in other words, from a material perspective to a spiritual one. Since Shahrazad fashioned the new Shahrayar if she is associated with single perspective it would be the spiritual.[111] One way to reconcile al –Hakim's two versions is to equate the slave's bestial perspective with that of unenlightened males and the spiritual perspective with both the vizier's heart and Shahrayar's heart, as two subsections of the spiritual perspectives. At this point al-Hakim's oft repeated suggestion that equilibrium is a necessary part of human life and it reminds us that neither Shahrayar nor the vizier alone is an adequate role model. Heart and intellect need to be balanced.According to M. M. Badawi(the noted Arabic critic)*Shahrazad* "depicts the tragic results of man's attempt to life on the level of intellect alone to the total disregard

[110] Tawfiq al-Hakim: Usfur min al-Sharq , p. no. 51
[111] Tawfiq al-Hakim: Usfur min al-Sharq, p. no. 51

of the emotional and the demands of the material world." He also mentioned that the work has its own unique atmosphere.[112]

In the first chapter of the *Usfur min al-sharq*, Muhsin's characteristic somber attire befits the funeral and subsequently attracts the attention of an American family, who mistakes him for a famous artist. In the chapter twenty Muhsin defends Europe against Ivan's charges and refers to Beethoven, describing him as a prophet who brought a divine message of love and peace, one capable of bringing divine light to the heart. In other words, even his emphasis varied over the decades, spirituality and artistic genius are compatible and even comparable. Muhsin restrains himself from telling Ivan, "Yes, today, there no longer is an East, for it has became a jungle with monkeys in its trees wearing western garments in a disorderly fashion indicative of a total lack of comprehension.[113]

Usfur min al-sharq ends with Ivan's dying charge to Muhsin to carry a remembrance of him to the Western source of spiritual light. If this work which is more a book-length sermon than a novel, opens with Muhsin's participation in the funeral of a European he never knew, it ends with the symbolic burden of performing a ritual act of remembrance in the East for a deceased European friend.

Roger Hardy attempts to portray al-Hakim as one of the foremost exemplars of an era of the Westernized liberal intellectuals and an enthusiastic admirer of European civilization. That his faith in European arts and science was not shaken to buy his belief that Europe's colonial yoke had to be thrown off seems overly simplistic. There is far less intellectual posturing about East versus West and far more description of the reality of shattered hopes and lives in al-Hakim's highly regarded

[112] I Tawfiq al-Hakim: Usfur min al-Sharq, p. no. 48
[113] M. M. Badawi: *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature,* , Oxford University Press, 1993, P. no. 190

Yawmiyyat Na'ib fi-l- Aryaf , which reveals the devastating effects on everyone of a mindless attempt to superimpose a European style legal code on unprepared people of a different legal and cultural heritage.[114]

In Vencivenga's dialogues, the two senses of the word materialist are linked, since a materialist who assumes that the world is composed of objects is only able to experience the world by grasping the objects that compose it. The same is true in al-Hakim's *Usfur min al-sharq* , where Americans in particular are stereotyped as people created from reinforced concrete devoid of spirit, taste and a past that go to Europe thinking that money will buy these for them. In the first chapter Muhsin casually stereotypes Americans as extreme materialists who have dollar bills inside their chests where normal people have hearts. The connection holds the other way too, since as Muhsin points out, 'Egoism knows only the life of the actual.'[115]

In the second chapter of *Usfur min al-sharq*, al-Hakim contrast political ideas with realities, as the chapter opens with Muhsin reading Plato's *Republic* in the kitchen of a French working class family while Muhsin recalls his sensation on ascending the grand staircase of the Paris Opera House, clad in sham formal attire. To his charging he senses the connection between wealth and the arts. In the following chapter, the French family's orientation is discussed in the context of the perceived relationship of French family life which has been based on complementary gender roles. Andre`w's mother warns him and his wife that he cannot held responsible for their child's lack of manner, if both of them continue to leave the child with her while they work eight hour shifts in a factory.[116]

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[114] Rozer hardy: *A Note on Tawfiq al-Hakim*, University of Texas Press, 1989, p.no. 20
[115] Ibid., p. 170
[116] Rozer hardy: A Note on Tawfiq al-Hakim, University of Texas Press, p. 42-43

In the last chapter of *Usfur min al-sharq*, Muhsin witness the death of Ivan, whose final hope is to escape to the spiritual East. Muhsin delicately attempts to dissuade Ivan, realizing that daily realities of representative Eastern countries such as Egypt were at last in that epoch far removed from the spirituality that Ivan happily projected onto the East. Badawi for once mispresents al-Hakim when he says: "Through the lips of Ivanvich al-Hakim asserts the real superiority of the East, the cradle of all religions." Instead Muhsin the hero of the novel seeks a balanced approach as he attempts to thread his way between cultures. In al-Hakim's *Usfur min al-sharq* the more extreme statements about Egyptian spirituality reflects the views of the Russian visionary Dimitri Merejkovsky and are not put in the mouth of the Egyptian hero but in that of a European character. Ali Jad panned *Usfur min al-sharq* for its unsupported assertion, half truth, numerous over simplifications and what one may call wayward analysis. In fact there is very little in the novel that is not made to serve the author's tendentiousness. Both Badawi and Jad, in effect, collapse Muhsin and Ivan into a single character.

The structure of Usfur min al-Sharq seems to be somewhat developed than that of al-Hakim's his *Awdat al-Ruh* and *The Yawmiyyat Na'ib fi-l- Aryaf* .

According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* the term 'construction' refers to arrangements of anything. Literary the construction of a plot of a narrative should be relevant and consistent from the beginning to the end as it should develop through certain stages such as- beginning, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement (conclusion).[117] In this ground it may be called that the novelist of the novel *Usfur min al-sharq* has little sense of either form or construction.

[117] . A. H. Abrams (ed.): The Glossary of Literary Terms, madras, Macmillan India Limited, 1992, P. 127, 128

The author is very skill in bringing about the opening logically in the novel. In the very opening chapter he has succeeded in introducing the major characters and main theme of the novel. In the opening chapter we meet with Muhsin, and his mate Andre`w. Muhsin stands out to be the hero of the novel. Andre`w is a comic character that remains active to add to the comic resources in the novel. His talks and attitude do nothing except what is comic and humorous.

Thus the novel in structure is a good one though it bears the same weakness like that of his other novels. But it is not exactly recognizable where the climax of the novel meets or where the denouement happens to take shape. In other words to ay it may be commented that the novel *Usfur min al-sharq* has neither beginning nor definite denouement but only an unrecognizable middle where the mental conflict of the hero of the novel reaches its height but without having any definite solution.

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Again we meet Muhsin reading Plato's Republic in the kitchen of a French working class family while Muhsin recalls his

[118] William Maynard Hutchins: Tawfiq la-Hakim: A Reader's Guide,. Lynne Rienner Publishers.., London, 2003, page no. 50-51

[119] William Maynard Hutchins: Tawfiq la-Hakim: A Reader's Guide,. Lynne Rienner Publishers.., London, 2003, page no. 51

sensation on ascending the grand staircase of the Paris Opera House, clad in sham formal attire. To his charging he senses the connection between wealth and the arts. In the following chapter, the French family's orientation is discussed in the context of the perceived relationship French family life which has been based on complementary gender roles. Andre`s mother warns him and his wife that he cannot held responsible for their child's lack of manner, if both of them continue to leave the child with her while they work eight hour shifts in a factory.[120]

William Maynard Hutchins in his book *Tawfiq la-Hakim: A Reader's Guide* says that Al Hakim's *Bird from the East* and *the Sacred Bond* ate intellectual debates that assume dichotomies between a spiritual East and the material West and between cerebral males and material females respectively. To escape being labeled patriarchal discourse, they need true translation into the concepts of more recent as debates. Its solidarity is the theme running through *Return of The Spirit*, the corresponding theme for the *Usfur min al-sharq* ` is sequel is the contrast between the material perspective that al Hakim thought typical of twentieth century Europe and the spiritual perspective that he felt, in that era lingered on it the East in which he included Egypt. the *Sacred Bond* a sequel to the Usfur min al-sharq ` embroidered the fabrics of the contrast between the material and spiritual perspectives with the additional colures threads of the three genders, with the male perspectives being the more abstract and spiritual whereas the female is equaled with the material approach. In this philosophy of equilibrium if not explicitly in the *Usfur min al-sharq* ` or in *Sacred Bond* al- Hakim urged a balance between perspectives symbolized by the heart (religion) and the intellect (science) and therefore, it would seem also between male and female.

[120] William Maynard Hutchins: Tawfiq la-Hakim: A Reader's Guide,. Lynne Rienner Publishers.., London, 2003, page no. 45

In an influential book entitled Bantu Philosophy Placid Temples contrasted European and African approaches to reality in this way: the European assumes a world composed objects divisible into parts whereas the Africans assumes a world composed of forces. The European parallels Vencivenga's male perspective and the African his female perspective. Without adopting an Afro-centric approach it seems far to ask whether al-Hakim's eastern perspective derives form or parallels the Bantu philosophy that temples discerned in the structures of African language. Is the Bantu approach equivalent to the spiritual or idealist one, either for al- Hakim or Vencivenga? For Tempels, the European object world is as meaningful as Bantu's force world although in Senghor's *negritude*, the African who dances the other has a better understanding of it than the Europeans, who dissect and thus kills it. [121]

Al- Hakim's King Oedipus also assumes a dichotomy between the contradictory realties or truths perceived by the heart and mind; it shows that al-Hakim did not automatically associate man with intellect and woman with emotions. The hearts of Oedipus and Jocasta told them they were in love. Their minds told them that they were a mother and her son who had inadvertently married each other and produce offspring. Oedipus pleads the hearts case whereas Jocusta kills herself because she finds the mind's case the more compelling. In the *Usfur min al-sharq* `, Muhsin, who represents the spiritual perspective, falls in love with Suzie, who represents the materialist's minds-set. But the primary dichotomy is versus west. Muhsin of course, perceivers Suize through Eastern eyes, and Germane, and the wife of Muhsin's friend Andre`w ask, "this women in Paris or in the *Alf Layla wa Layla*?"[122] Although a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony affects Muhsin so profoundly, he imagines

[121] William Maynard Hutchins: Tawfiq la-Hakim: A Reader's Guide,. Lynne Rienner Publishers.., London, 2003, page no. 46
[122] Tawfiq al- Hakim: *Usfur Min al Sharq,* P. no 48.

that the curtains of Heaven have been drawn apart and that he can hear the angels and the houris.[123] One of his windows to the spiritual world is the prophet Muhammad's granddaughter al- Sayyida Zaynab. Al-Hakim's description of her as an ever resent compassionate heavenly being makes her see the Muslim counterpart of a Buddhists bodhisattva like *Kuan-Yin,* who has been assumed male in India and female in China . According to al-Hakim, Mushin would not have known how to survive for a single day had he not left that his life was linked to compassionate heavenly beings.[124]

[123] Tawfiq al-Hakim: Usfur min al-Sharq, P. no 164
[124]. Ibid., p. no 103