

---

RESEARCH ARTICLE

---

THE USE AND CREATION OF MYTH IN TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM'S *OEDIPUS, THE KING*

---

**Ali Saleh Ahmed Al-Haidari<sup>1</sup>**

Assistant Professor, English Department, Faculty of Education-Mahweet, Sana'a University, Yemen.

**Dr. S. G. Bhanegaonkar<sup>2</sup>**

Associate Professor, English Department, People's College, SRTM University, Nanded, India

---

**Abstract**

Selecting a topic for writing a literary work is the most significant step, so writers spend a long time thinking and meditating about the topics and the themes they will discuss in their writings. Some writers create new topics which are regarded as an invention of a new sphere, but some other writers do another challenge by rewriting some other classical works which have already been treated literary by many great writers. The rewriting of these old topics should contain a new treatment that includes some new ideas or perspectives to be accepted. This humble study is an attempt to highlight the use of myths in Tawfiq Al-Hakim's *Oedipus, the King*. Furthermore, it sheds light on the adaption created by focusing on different issues as well as in the art of characterization to be accepted by readers in his area. In fact, during his writing, he takes the Islamic perspective into consideration to eradicate the superstitious aspects which are not rationally accepted in the Islamic world.

**Keywords:** Myth, Mythology, Creation, Oedipus

**1. Introduction**

Mythology has a significant position in the history of human civilizations, so each nation has its own mythology that reflects the first people of that nation's way of thinking. Some myths are universal because of its existence in various mythologies of various nations. For instance, the Greek god of gods, Zeus, along with some of his deeds is the counterpart of Roman god, Jupiter. A reader of mythology can encounter many myths, which have its counterpart in diverse mythologies. Furthermore, a reader of literary works can encounter some old and modern works that re-narrate these myths or present some of their aspects. In fact, mythology is regarded as the first form of literature and many English writers have applied these myths in their works. Like English literature, Arabic literature has its own mythology that affects several literary works. Furthermore, Greek and Roman mythologies have an obvious influence on Arabic literature.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

As a matter of fact, Classical literature influences Western literature more than Arabic literature because of many reasons. Ahmed Amin and Zaki Naguib Mahmoud claim that the great obstacle that prevents Arabic writers from imitating classical literature is the differences of the societies and gustoes between the two literatures; hence, Arabic literature does not harmonize with Greek literature. On the contrary, the science and philosophy of Greek are approved and translated into Arabic, and Arabs were so interested in these fields. According to Amin and Mahmoud, this approval is attributed to the mixture of gusto and emotion in literature.

They state that whereas literature is an emotional gusto, and gusto and literature differ from nation to nation and individual to individual, Science and Philosophy are intellectual; therefore, people have some similarities in the way of thinking (Amin & Mahmoud 1943). Al-Hakim himself attempts to explain why Arabs avoid translating Greek theatre to Arabic language. According to him, Greek tragedies were not written to be read on private but to be acted on the stage. Furthermore, it was written in poetic language which confuses the translators who could not do transfer it to their own language because they did not see such a kind of art in their literature. Moreover, the ancient Arabs were paying a lot of attention to their poetry which they regarded it as the

best art. On the other hand, ancient Arabs did not live in one place, but they wander looking for water and grass for their camels and other domestic animals. Even after making some societies and inhabiting some cities, Arabs do not think of Greek drama because of its link with religion which differs from theirs. In the modern era, some Arab writers started reading, translating and even imitating the Greeks because of being treasure house of themes, style and characters—mortals or mythical characters. Due to the long ignorance to the Greek and Latin studies and literature, Taha Hussien, the Dean of Arabic Literature, asks for establishing a separate department for Greek and Latin studies. To get the agreement, he states some reasons for the needs of this department; the old Egypt was under the reign of Greek and Roman for ten centuries and the historical sources of this period were Greek and Roman. Furthermore, the historical Greek and Roman sources are the sources of the contact between Egypt and the Emperor Byzantine during the Islamic reign. Some institutions were still managed by some foreigners, so Egyptian should not depend on others to manage their lives (Bibliography of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn 1975).

Before establishing Greek and Latin studies in Cairo University, Al-Bastani's translated *Iliad* into Arabic. In his translation, he depends on the French translation because of his little knowledge of Greek. Like Al-

---

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Bastani, Taha Hussien translated some Greek tragedies such as “Electra, Ajax, Antigone and Oedipus Rex”<sup>2</sup> from French into Arabic. It can be noted that the studying mission to France granted Arabs an opportunity to get some knowledge about Classical works, and those scholars started their translation of classical works through French language. Some direct translations into Arabic debuted after some years of establishing the department of Greek and Latin Studies in Cairo University.

After translation phase, Arabic writers traced the English and French writers to use these myths in their writings. Tawfiq Al-Hakim is one of those productive Arabic writers who have been influenced by classical mythology and attempts to apply some myths in their works. The influence of classical myths as well as Quranic stories can be observed easily by reading the titles of his plays. For instance, *The People of Cave* is a play entitled after a famous Quranic story. *Oedipus, The King* and *Pygmalion* are entitled after some classical myths. In fact, Al-Hakim uses a variety of mythical aspects to constitute his plays.

## 2. Literature Review: The Myth of Oedipus and its Use in Literature

Myth of Oedipus is one of the most popular myths which have been inspired many writers from different countries and cultures. Greeks were the first to treat this myth literary and criticize it. Sophocles,

one of the first and greatest Greek tragedians, wrote plays that deal with the myth of Oedipus known as Theban Plays, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*. These three plays deal with the fate of Thebe during and after the reign of the king Oedipus. Sophocles was not the only Greek tragedian who wrote around the myth of Oedipus, but also Aristotle who discussed the myth of Oedipus in his book, *Poetics*. However, Sophocles is regarded as the most widely accepted by people for the obvious explanation included to the actions of the myth. Mark P. O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon state, “There are three versions, two Homeric and one Sophoclean, of Oedipus’ fate” and they refer to Sophocles’ version as “The most widely accepted story” (Morford & Lenardon 1985).

In the modern ages, France alone presents twenty nine writers such as Pierre Corneille, Voltaire, Jean Cocteau and André Gide who produced plays under the influence of the myth of Oedipus through Sophocles’ dramatic treatment of the myth. Furthermore, there are a lot of poetic works which contain a reference to the myth. On the other hand, this myth as well as the Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* is an issue of many critical works.

## 3. Methodology

This study is qualitative study that uses the analysis method and comparative approach to be the touchstones in order to find out the

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

identical elements and different elements used in the Myth of Oedipus and The Oedipus, the King. The research analysis elements are the title, the theme, the arrangement of events and the characters which are going to be analyzed for the sake of understanding both literary works. After that, these elements are compared to find out these elements presented from the myth and these elements presented by Al-Hakim to create a new version of the myth.

**4. Discussion**

Like English and French writers, Al-Hakim attempts to apply the classical mythology and present them devoid of the religious point of view that is not accepted by Muslims' minds. His deal of applying myths contains a treatment of one of the most popular myth, the myth of Oedipus. Al-Hakim, in his preface of the play, mentions the reasons that led him to rewrite this myth. He states, "My religious faith as a Muslim rejects the idea of a God who schemes beforehand to harm utterly innocent man" (Badawi 1987), and he adds that the major Islamic philosophers did not accept the idea of predestination, and human beings share in the fulfillment of the destiny or change it. He believes that a human being is in middle between obligation and choice. His belief comes out of the actual belief of predestination in Islam that affirms Allah's knowledge of everything happened and will happen without the restrictions of time, but humans are free to choose their acts either good or

bad. Some people will ask if Allah knows everything about future, so why did He not lead us to do good actions? Quran includes an answer for such questions; "And if Allah had known any good in them He would have made them hear, and if He makes them hear they would turn back while they withdraw" (The Oxford World Classics: The Qur'an 2005). Moreover, Al-Hakim proclaims that he is going to violate the unity of time and place on which Classical tragedy depends. However, he claims that he is forced to do that violation because of the family atmosphere in the play, and so that unity can be ignored due to family which is at the centre of the notion that leads him to select this myth.

Like Sophocles (1954), Al-Hakim used the name of the Protagonist and his attribute as a king to be the title of his play. The play is written under the influence of Sophocles' version of the myth which has a predominant position in the western literature, and it is regarded as the most popular literary treatment of the myth as well as the best source of this myth. Al-Hakim declares that before writing this play, he spent four years reading and studying this myth and the criticism around it to avoid the errors committed by other writers. Like other writers, Al-Hakim did not write about the events that took place before the opening of the play. However, he refers to some of these events in the play

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

during Oedipus's investigation of the truth of his crime as well as truth.

Al-Hakim starts fulfilling his goals of rewriting the myth in accordance with the Arabic and Islamic point of view from the very beginning of the play. The first scene displays the importance of the family life in the myth which guides Al-Hakim to violate the classical unity of the time and place. William M. Hutchin states that "Al-Hakim regrets having had to tamper slightly with the convention of the unity of place by adding scenes inside the palace." In fact, Family atmosphere is regarded as the most influential feature that leads Al-Hakim to select this myth as well as to violate the classical unity of time and place. Al-Hakim assures that "the family atmosphere in the life of Oedipus" "is the pivot of the idea for the sake of which he selected this particular tragedy to adapt" (Hutchins 2003).

Al-Hakim initiates his play with the members of the family. The first scene shows the happiness of the family and portrays them as a model family and model members of a family—a model husband, a model wife and model children. Oedipus is portrayed as a model husband because of the time he spends with his family as well as the recounting of his adventure with the sphinx repeatedly without getting bored of asking to recount it. Besides, he repeatedly refers to his fear for his family. Jocasta is a model mother as well as a model wife. As a model mother, she cares of her children and

shares them pleasure and listening to their father's story, and as a model wife, she cares about her husband, attempts to pacify him and depicts him as a the greatest hero to their children. In the first scene, she reflects the features of a model mother and wife when she explains to Oedipus in front of her children that the duty of the family is to cheer up any member feeling pain. She declares that "we are your family, Oedipus. It is our duty to cheer you up. Here we go, children! Come around your father and disperse these dark clouds from his head and heart (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

According to Oedipus, she is the one who always inspires her children to ask about his story of the beast that he killed some years ago. She justifies such inspiration by that he is regarded as the hero in the eyes of all Thebes, so their children should be proud of their father. As model children, they listen carefully to their father's adventure, and they request him to retell it time after time. To achieve his objective of paying more attention on the family life, Al-Hakim lets some expression of happiness used in the play by some family members. Jocasta praises Oedipus and his coming, and she thinks that he comes and brings the happiness with him. She explains, "You entered Thebes. You found it ready to welcome you, to seat you on its throne, and to bestow on you the hand of its queen. Thus, you came to me and lived with me. You fathered these fine, handsome

RESEARCH ARTICLE

offspring and gave us this happiness" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). Oedipus assures the happiness he had with his family and due to his happiness he forgets why he left his home in Corinth. He says, "Yes, this happiness which pervaded me and made me forget my reason for setting out the object of my research" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). In the myth, Sphinx was a beast which has the face of woman, the wings of a bird and a body of a lion. Sphinx was asking those people who are tarried out of the city of Thebe a riddle, "What is it that has one name that is four-footed, two-footed, and three-footed?" (Morford & Lenardon 1985). No one could solve the riddle but Oedipus did by referring to the man. He claims that a man four-footed in his childhood because of going upon his feet and hands, two-footed in his prime due to going upon his feet only and three-footed in his old age because of using a stick as the third foot to help him to walk. Al-Hakim has another objective of rewriting the myth declared in his introduction which is to purify the story from the superstitions, which are not accepted in Islam. The superstition of the Sphinx along with the prophecy of Oedipus's fate of killing a father and marrying a mother has to be eradicated if he would like to succeed in accomplishing that objective. However, Al-Hakim uses another technique without losing any component of the myth. The horrible sphinx of the myth is portrayed as a normal lion which is used to kill people who are hanging around the

city. Thus, Oedipus did not face a sphinx but a normal lion.

To cancel the role of God in Oedipus's fate and the superstition of sphinx, Al-Hakim depicts Teiresias, the blind priest, as the fabricator and plotter of all the misfortunes of the throne of Thebe. Al-Hakim does not provide the play with a new character that has a relationship with the truth, but he deals with the same character introduced in the myth modifying his role to fulfill his objectives. Tiresias, in both myth and play, is known with his relationship with the truth. Whereas Tiresias of the myth is the person who has the ability and power to reveal the truth by foretelling the future and discovering what happened in the past, Al-Hakim's Tiresias is the manufacturer who creates and shapes the truth. In fact, he is the responsible of all these problems and stories which drive to the downfall of Oedipus as well as his parents. In the play of Al-Hakim, Tiresias is depicted as a wicked politician who has a wicked purpose to dethrone Louis's offspring and his relatives and ascending to the throne a man who has no relation to Louis's family. Through modifying the role of Tiresias from a fortuneteller to a wicked politician, Al-Hakim's aim is to reveal that Muslims do not attribute the sins to fate or god. Safi Mahmoud Mahfouz mentions the justification of Mohammed Mandur, who criticizes the works of Al-Hakim in a book entitled *The Theater of Tawfiq Al-Hakim*, of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

this modification. "Muhammad Mandur states that, as a Muslim, Al-Hakim cannot depict fate as being malignant. Thus Al-Hakim does not attribute the plotting against Oedipus to malignant fate or wicked gods, but rather makes all the bad that happens to Oedipus result from the machinations of the blind seer Tiresias" (Mahfouz 2012).

Through adapting the role of Tiresias and depicting him as a wicked and fabricator, Oedipus lost some of his noble features. Thebes regard him as a hero and brilliant for rescuing their city from Sphinx by solving the riddle which confuse many people and due to it they died. Al-Hakim depicts the puzzle and the heroism of Oedipus as a lie which has been created for a wicked purpose. Oedipus internally suffers of becoming a hero in the eyes of people, and they do not know that he did not do that noble work that lifts him up to the state of heroes. He points out, "Indeed, I am looking forward to the day when I can free myself of that great lie I have been living for seventeen years" (Mahfouz 2012). The truth of killing a lion is revealed by Oedipus himself after feeling that priests of the temple are planning to dethrone him.

After discovering that he got married his mother and being incestuous, Oedipus behaves in a different way that drives him away of the spirit of Greek heroes. Instead of deciding to purify himself and his mother of such an incestuous marriage or feeling

guilty of such an act, he opts to stay married to his mother and prefers to leave this city with his mother-wife along with the children. In his book *Al-Ta'aduliyah Ma'a AL-Islam (Equilibrium with Islam)*, Tawfiq Al-Hakim introduces a justification for such a behavior. Etman Ahmed, in her article *The Greek Concept of Tragedy in the Arab Culture: How to Deal with an Islamic Oedipus*, explains that justification which is a general justification for all these people commit mistakes in their life, and they are about to be punished. She states, Al-Hakim "says that someone who commits an error should not be punished, but should lead a pious and charitable life to make a balance between her mistakes and her good deeds" (Etman 2004). A number of scholars such as Younes Loulidi and Etman Ahmed attempt to interpret the reasons that lead Al-Hakim to adopt such behaviors in his play. Younes Loulidi claims that Al-Hakim's aim is to portray his version of human not pure Greek Oedipus. According to Etman, the playwright's aim is to purify his play from all the mythological Greek elements. On the other hand, he aims at elevating the human greatness of his tragic hero and highlighting his limitations (Loulidi 2004).

Al-Hakim's Oedipus is portrayed as a king who likes his family as well as nation. However, it is difficult to say that he has mythological glory or heroic qualities because he did not solve a real riddle and he does not kill sphinx. Al-Hakim depicts him

RESEARCH ARTICLE

living in a web of lies which lead to his perspectives as well as collapse. He internally suffers from those lies and hopes to get rid out of them. Oedipus's internal suffering can be obviously observed when Tiresias declares that he cannot do anything for him because of being an old, and it is better for him to be in a distance watching what will happen. Thus, Oedipus threatens to reveal everything to the nation.

In spite of the attempt to create an Islamic Oedipus, Al-Hakim fails in some events to do that combination between Greek mythology and Islamic instructions. He portrays Oedipus as a blind lover who cannot desert his sweetheart and she means everything for him. Instead of depicting him trying to purify himself and his mother of the sin committed unintentionally and unknowingly, Al-Hakim portrays him insisting to keep that relationship which is completely forbidden in Islam as well as other heavenly religions. After the revelation of the truth of his origin and being the son and a husband of the same woman, his wish to keep on this incestuous marriage is stronger than his feeling of being guilty. He beseeches his wife-mother to forget what happened and to keep on with him. He asks her, "Free yourself from the truth we heard, Darling! Listen to the throbbing of your heart right now. What is it saying to you? Is it telling you that something has changed? Has your love for your young ones changed? Has your love

for Oedipus changed?" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). In his discussion with Jocasta, he proclaims his carelessness of what people are going to say, while Jocasta is afraid of the gossip about them. As a blind and loyal lover, he asks her, "Rise with me. Let's put our fingers in our ears and live in actuality . . . with the life which throbs in our hearts overflowing with love and compassion" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). While Jocasta is in a quandary over what she has to address him a son or a husband, he has nothing to confuse him, because he has already decided to remain with her as a husband. He responds to her a question what to call him;

Call me anything you like, for you are Jocasta whom I love. Nothing will change what is in my heart . . . So let me be your husband or your son. Names and epithets cannot change the love and affection rooted in the heart. Let Antigone and the others be my children or siblings. These terms cannot change the affection and love I harbor for them in my soul.... No matter what I hear of your being my mother or sister, this will never change the actuality at all...For you are always Jocasta to me (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

Both mythical Oedipus and Al-Hakim's Oedipus have blinded themselves at the end of the stories. However, the reasons that lead them to do that are different. While Al-Hakim's Oedipus, the blinded and

RESEARCH ARTICLE

incestuous lover, blinds himself to weep Jocasta, his wife-mother, with bloody tears, mythical Oedipus blind himself because of discovering that his marriage is mysterious and his wife is also his mother. Thus, mythical Oedipus does that to punish himself for committing this crime in spite of his ignorance of the reality of the relationship before marriage. Al-Hakim's Oedipus's adore for his wife-mother is great so he cannot think of losing her, so his blinded mind drives him to use her dress pin to stab his eyes and shedding out bloody tears as a simple of his grief. Mahfouz affirms that reason of stabbing the eyes of Oedipus in the play of Al-Hakim. She cites the explanation of Hutchins in the introduction to the translation of the play, "When Al-Hakim follows Sophocles and has Oedipus blind himself the act seems to be motivated by the grief of a loving husband, not by an avenging fury" (Mahfouz 2012).

Oedipus of the myth is a person who believes in God and believes in the ability of the priests to reveal the reasons of the plague as well as the solutions for the plague. Oedipus of Al-Hakim denies everything which can be proved even the god's revelation. Because of his nature of suspecting everything and his limitations to get solutions for the plague, he has a conflict with the priests. Thus, they inform him that they have already sent Creon, his wife's brother, to the temple of Delphi to

ask for revealing the reason and to get the solutions. In the myth, Oedipus himself sent Creon to Delphi due to his trust on the priests of the temple of Delphi. A priest who comes to meet Oedipus, in Al-Hakim's play, points out that "you are always investigating what you ought not and always asking questions which you should not pose... Heavenly revelation is for you a subject for scrutiny and exploration" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). Jocasta affirms that attribute, and she refers to the reason that leads him to have such manner. She asks him to "put away aside these ill-omened questions... You are no longer sure of anything since you learned you were a foundling.....your confidence in things was destroyed" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). Moreover, he himself confesses that this attribute is a part of his nature and it cannot be changed. He says to the priest, "If only I were able to free myself from my nature" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

The priest justifies choosing Creon to go to Delphi, "he is a man who does not debate reality nor dispute actuality. He will not say to the priests in the temple of Delphi: furnish me tangible evidence that this oracle truly came down to you from God and did not originate in your minds" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). It can be noticed that the priest describes Creon and his words show a hint to the nature of Oedipus. This attribute is assured after Creon's return and revealing the reason of the plague. He

RESEARCH ARTICLE

denies the revelation and accuses the priest and Creon of the conspiracy against him. He agains denies the revelation after listening to the Herdsman who was in charge to kill him when he was child and he accuses the herdsman of telling them about the story. He claims, "In actuality, you are the real source of the story... The temple priests no doubt learned it from you! For no secret is buried in the chest for seventeen years without an aroma spreading from it into the air. You are the origin of the Delphi Oracle!" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

Whereas the classical writers and mythologists deal with the myth of Oedipus as a myth of a conflict between a man and his fate, Al-Hakim looks upon the myth as a conflict between reality and truth. Al-Hakim states that point in his introduction to the play with reference to another play *The Men of the Cave*. He explains,

I looked precisely at the hidden struggle that took place in the play Ahl al-Kahf. This struggle was not just between man and time, as its readers were wont to see it, but it was another hidden fight noticed by few. A fight between "reality" (alwaqi) and truth (al-haqiqa), between the reality of a man... (Fudge 2007)

According to this explanation, it can be said that Al-Hakim does not deal with the myth negatively but positively. In other words, he does not record all the events of the play

without creating some new events, but he sheds light on other issues which have been neglected by others. His reference to the fight or the conflict between the reality and the truth along with the issue of the family is another issue which can be regarded as something new added to the treatment of the myth. The hero of the play suffers from a conflict between his real position and his true position. In reality, he is the husband of Jocasta, killer of an old man and a father of his children, but in fact, he is the son of Jocasta, a killer of his father and a brother of his children. Similarly, Jocasta appears as the wife of Oedipus and the mother of his children, but she is the mother of Oedipus and his children. Through this difference in conflict, the modification of Al-Hakim can be observed easily. Instead of depicting the conflict between a man and his fate like other writers, Al-Hakim presents the downfall of the man because of his truth. He regards the truth as the most powerful one that appears as a specter chasing the man. Furthermore, the rationality that leads the man conducting a search for his truth is the reason for his collapse. Hence, it can be said that the tragedy of mythical Oedipus is manufactured by the god, but the tragedy of Al-Hakim's Oedipus is leading by his extreme rationality. This is to say that the mythical Oedipus is obligate, and he fancies that he will rid of his suffering, but he leads to his doomed fate. On the contrary, Al-Hakim's Oedipus has the ability to select

RESEARCH ARTICLE

whether to follow this track or another. Thus, he was able to avoid his downfall, but his subservience to Tiresias and his search led him to discover the horrible truth.

Al-Hakim uses the same arrangement of events as well as the motives used in the myth. Like the myth, the play alludes to some events that took place before the opening scenes. For example, the motif that leads Oedipus to leave Corinth searching for his origin takes place in the myth and the play. The myth and the play include a reference to a drunken who jested at Oedipus's origin. That jest caused Oedipus starting a long trip searching for the truth of his origin. His first quest was in the temple by asking the oracle about the reality whether he is foundling or not, but the oracle uttered another prophecy of killing the father and marrying the mother, so that prophecy led Oedipus to leave the Corinth looking for the truth. Therefore, all the next incidents happened while he was looking for his real origin. However, the truth is horrible and leaving the quest may lead to another end which does not contain a huge collapse to the hero. Oedipus ignores the warning of Tiresias,

Beware, Oedipus!... Beware!  
My great fear is that your reckless fingers will trifle with the veil of truth and that your trembling fingertips will come to close to her face and eyes... You fled from Corinth, roaming in pursuit of her, but she

escaped from you. You came to Thebes announcing you lacked origin or lineage in order to display her to the people. She drew away from you. Leave truth alone, Oedipus... Don't challenge her!

(Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

Furthermore, Jocasta warns him of the result of his quest and requests him to give up searching for the sake of family happiness. She says, "NO, no, Oedipus! Don't do all this digging in search of a secret... You are digging now the grave for your happiness! I entreat you to desist... I'm afraid... An eternal curse is gathering to break over our heads... For heaven's sake desist, Oedipus!"... Moreover, the herdsman beseeches Oedipus to stop requesting him to say the truth, "Woe! Alas! I entreat you for heaven's sake to desist from questioning me!" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

Oedipus rejects to ascend the throne of Corinth after the death of the king who adopted him even after the Corinthian selected him to be their king. His ignorance and rejection to some alternatives that come some minutes before revealing the truth is an evidence that Al-Hakim's Oedipus is not obligate, but he is able to rescue himself and his family from that horrible collapse. His over extreme rationality is the hamartia that causes his downfall. In fact, the tragedy of Al-Hakim counts on the quest of truth. The rational Oedipus may come out of Al-

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Hakim's experience as a prosecutor. Therefore, Al-Hakim applies his experience in searching for the truth of some crimes to depict his Oedipus. On the other hand, he portrays Oedipus's bravery to encounter the truth and accept the result of the quest after mythical Oedipus. Al-Hakim's Oedipus declares, "I will continue my search for my reality ... that desire is stronger than I am. No one can stand between me and my desire to know who I am and will be..." (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). Oedipus utters repeatedly his love for search and spending his life searching for truth. He elucidates to Tiresias why he fled from Corinth, "But I fled from that kingship to search for the truth of my origin. I fled from Corinth, because I could not bear to live a lie" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). Besides, after hearing about the order of god to search for the killer of the former king, he informs Creon and High priest, "I love nothing better than searching... my whole life is nothing but search. So long as God—as you say—is the one ordering me now to search and investigate you will find me thoroughly obedient" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). He also says, "I don't fear the truth. Indeed, I am looking forward to the day when I can free myself of that great lie I have been living for seventeen years" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981), and he adds "I have no fear of the truth for myself... even if it casts me off the throne" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). This is to say that Oedipus loves search and ready to apply its output no matter what he

will lose. The myth and play is about the investigation and search, but the play pays a lot of concentrations on that investigation and search.

Although Al-Hakim creates some events in his play and proclaims his view about the fight between reality and truth as an issue which has been noticed by Sophocles and other writers, he does not ignore the other conflict between a man's will and God's will which has been discussed by others. In fact, the huge concentration is on the conflict between reality and truth, but he delineates some other conflicts between man's will and God's will as well as a conflict between a truth and a lie.

In Al-Hakim's play, the conflict between the will of God and that of man is not presented in the character of Oedipus but in the character of Tiresias. Al-Hakim, in the introduction, assures his treatment to that challenge of god by man, and he proclaims that he presents that challenge in an outstanding way. His aim of depicting that challenge is to display the consequence of that challenge. Tiresias attempts to challenge the heaven by fabricating some stories to change the fate of Oedipus as well as his father. After questioning him about the reason that causes him to challenge the heaven, Tiresias responds, "I see no god in existence save our volition. I willed and to the extent was divine..." (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). In this response, Al-Hakim may

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

have in his mind the philosophy of the existentialists such as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and others whose existential views about the world count on that the god is dead and man has to face the world around him and determines his fate relying on his mind and will. Due to his rejection to this philosophy, Al-Hakim shows the result of denying the existence of god through Tiresias.

Due to his fake divine will, Tiresias regards himself omnipotent, so it is easy for him to change the fate of Thebe; hence, he fabricated a prophecy of the son who will kill his father and learnt Oedipus the riddle of the Sphinx. The two stories are fabricated for depriving Laius and his family of the throne and terminate his dynasty in Thebe. In the first story, he deprived Laius's son and the second was to deprive Creon, Laius's brother-in-law. Tiresias thinks that he succeeded to fulfill his aim of creating these stories, so he asks Oedipus, "You don't deny that I have succeeded. That you are on the throne is nothing other than a manifestation of my will" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981). Under the threat of Oedipus to tell people the truth, he justifies his deeds saying, I will shout at the top of my voice: People! I have not imposed my will on you for any glory I cover but for an idea I believe in: that you have a will... It was not because of hatred between me and Laius or antagonism between me and Creon... rather I wished to

turn the page on the hereditary monarchy of this ancient family, to make you the ones who choose your king from wide spectrum, without regard to decent and lineage, within nothing to recommend him except his service to you and with no title for him other than his heroism for you. Thus there exists in your land only your will. That's all that should exist (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

The character of the wise Tiresias, who is respected by Oedipus and Thebes in the myth because of his religious state as a protector of the heaven's revelation, is deform in the play and becomes a liar who fabricated stories. In addition, his challenge to the God's will and regarding himself as a divine who can control the fate of others cause him to lose all respect at the end. A human who defies the will of god will not be away of punishment, so Tiresias loses his respect, and he is mocked for his deeds and for playing the role of god. God lets Tiresias pleasing what he did for seventeen years then the truth revealed to show his limitation to play the role of god. The harshest mockery is that comes out of one's deeds. The son whom Tiresias fabricates a lie about his future in order to deprive him from throne is the same one for whom he fabricates a lie to make him the king. Instead of selecting a common man as a king, he does not know that he helps the son of Laius to ascend throne. Oedipus reminds Tiresias of his pomposity of being free will and his ability to control

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

everything around. He also shows him that nothing can be operated out of the will of heaven.

You wished to challenge heaven. You banished young Oedipus from the kingship and place on the throne a man of your making. But this man you put up is the very same Oedipus you banished. For a long time you have prided yourself on your free will... yes, you truly had a free will. I have witnessed its effects. But it was always operating, without your knowing or sensing it, within the framework of heaven's will (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

On the other hand, Tiresias is shocked and does not expect that end for his machinations, so he proclaims that he cannot hear anything but laughter which he thinks is coming from the heaven above. His last speech contains a confession of the existence of god as well as the God's mockery of his deeds. Moreover, he claims that he is not blind because of god striking his eyes. In fact, the blindness here does not refer to the sight of the eyes but it refers to the prevision which eyes do not have any role. Tiresias ultimately realizes his sin as well as the punishment of God.

The heroism of Al-Hakim's Oedipus does not draw upon the heroism of mythical Oedipus who really encounters a risk to be a hero. Al-Hakim attempts to belittle the heroism of Oedipus intellectually by denying his role in solving a riddle and

physically by referring to use of cudgel in killing the lion. Therefore, his heroism in the play comes out of some machinations, and it is not like the heroism of the mythical Oedipus. Oedipus displays the truth of heroism and mocks himself of collaborating in such a mechanization,

"I am not a hero, I never met a beast with the body of a lion, wings of an eagle, and a woman's face which posed riddles... What actually met was an ordinary lion which was preying on people who tarried outside your walls I was able to kill it with my cudgel, throw its body into the sea, and rid you of it. But Tiresias, this brilliant blind man, inspired you—for his purpose, not for God's sake—to appoint that hero your king. Yes, He's the one who desired that and planned it. He is the one who taught me the solution for that puzzle about the animal that crawls on its hand and feet.... (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

Through this confession, it is easy to note the contradictory portraits of the character of Oedipus. In the first portrait, he is depicted as the seeker of truth who rejected to live in deception and left the kingdom and city, where he brought up, and people to look for the truth of his origin. On the contrary, the second portrait shows him as a deceiver who collaborate in a web of lies that control a part of his life. He himself refers to this transfer in his character when he says, "I fled from that kingship to search

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

for the truth of my origin. I fled from Corinth, because I could not bear to live a lie. I came here... only to live a greater lie" (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

In spite of his regret of living in deception for a long time, it can be regarded as a fault in his character which made him an inferior if he is compared with the mythical Oedipus who does not participate in such mechanization. Like mythical Oedipus, Al-Hakim's Oedipus believes in the divine justice, so he abdicates the throne because of feeling that the duty and honor calls upon him to do that. However, his wish along with his endeavor to convince his mother to remain his wife is another fault that emphasizes his inferiority. Moreover, Oedipus of Al-Hakim's impulsive nature and rejection of the truth are drawn upon Oedipus of the myth. After declaring Oedipus as the criminal who kills the former king in both works, Oedipus regards that accusation as a hint of conspiracy against him to be dethroned, and he decidedly accuses Creon and High Priest of plotting mechanization. Therefore, he gives them a choice of killing or banishing. The character of High Priest is presented to hide the character gap which will be realized in portraying Tiresias as scheming. High Priest plays some parts of Tiresias's role played in the classical myth. He is the one who shares Creon the truth. Like mythical Tiresias, he encounters the sentence of

death or banishment for telling Oedipus that he is the murderer of Laius.

Al-Hakim breaks some mythical rules which he knows that it cannot be happened; for instance, the prophecy of Delphi, in the myth, refers to purifying the city of a crime committed and the criminal is not punished up to that moment, but it includes an obvious reference to the name of the criminal in Al-Hakim's play. In fact, Al-Hakim knows that the prophecy of Delphi does not give its information frankly but it mentions it through some hints which lead to the complete comprehension of it. In act II, Al-Hakim denotes that notion about the revelation of the information when Jocasta asks to have a persuasive proof to punish Creon and the Priest,

... But heaven's oracle is too elevated in status for human beings to comprehend it, all the time. People rarely able to understand the divine oracle properly... God's will has goals which man's mind is not able to grasp. Thus no person has complete sovereignty over the unknown or the ability to prophesy (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

At the end of the play, humans' action is delineated as the source of divine action and the prophecies start as aromas uttered by someone and the priests form them as prophecies to be believed by people. Al-Hakim shows this idea through Oedipus's

---

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

accusation to the Herdsman of being the origin of the story.

You are the real source of the story... The temple priests no doubt learned it from you! For no secret is buried in the chest for seventeenth years without an aroma spreading from it in the air. You are the origin of the Delphi oracle (Al-Hakim 1949, tr. 1981).

Al-Hakim adopts the same end of the myth to be the end of his play in which the queen commits suicide and Oedipus becomes blind. Like the myth, the play concludes with Oedipus's request to be banished. 5.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, myths can be regarded as one of the important sources which can provide writers with the various ideas and characters to be presented in their writing. Some writers present myths along with its all elements without making crucial changes while other writers modernize these myths to suit their aims of writing.

Al-Hakim is one of prior writers who read, studied and applied the classical mythology as well as the classical works to be presented in his works. In his works, Al-Hakim attempts to adapt the aspects of the myths to fit Islamic audience. He successfully cancelled the mythical fatalism that presents God as a plotter works to destroy the man and the story of Sphinx. Furthermore, he presents some characters to

play roles that contradict their roles in the myth to fulfill his aims of blending the Greek mythology and Islamic instruction; Tiresias, the honorable prophet in the myth, is depicted as a corrupted political man who fabricates some prophecies to achieve some goals. On the other hand, Al-Hakim fails to present an Islamic Oedipus to delight the Islamic and Arabic audience. Instead of falling down because of his culpability, Oedipus falls down due to the death of his love for his wife-mother. All religions prevent such a marriage and regard it as an incestuous marriage, but Al-Hakim violates his aim for blending Greek mythology and Islamic instruction.

**References:**

- Ahmed Amin and Zaki Naguin Mahmoud. (1943). *The Story of Literature in the World*. The Committee of Composing, Translating and Publishing Press, Cairo.
- Al-Hakim, T. (1949, tr. 1981). King Oedipus. In *Plays, Prefaces and Postscripts of Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Volume 1: Theatre of Mind* (W. M. Hutchins, Trans., First Edition ed., pp. 81-129). Washington: Three Content Press, Inc.
- Badawi, M. M. (1987). *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

RESEARCH ARTICLE

- Bibliography of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. (1975). *Journal of Arabic Literature, Vol. 6*, 140-145.
- Etman, Ahmed. (2004). The Greek Concept of Tragedy in the Arab Culture: How to Deal with an Islamic Oedipus. *Documenta Jaargang 12.4* 281–299
- Fudge, B. (2007). The Men of the Cave:Tafsir, Tragedy and Twafiq Al-Hakim. *Arabica, tome, LIV(1)*, 67-93.
- Hutchins, W. M. (2003). *Tawfiq Al-Hakim: A Reader's Guide*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publisher, Inc.
- Loulidi, Y. ((2004)). Greek Mythology in Arab Tragedy: A Return of the Myth or to the Myth. *Documenta Jaargang, 12.4*, 399–405.
- Mahfouz, S. M. (Summer 2012). The Arab Oedipus: Oriental Perspectives on the Myth. *Modern Drama, Volume 55*(Number 2), 171-196.
- Morford, M. P., & Lenardon, R. J. (2003). *Classical Mythology* (Seventh Edition ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sophocles. (1954). *Sophocles: Oedipus Rex*. (R. D. Dawe, ed.) Cambridge University Press, London.
- *The Oxford World Classics: The Qur'an*. (2005). (M. A. Abdel Haleem, Trans.) New York: Oxford University Press Inc.