

## السعي من أجل الحرية في مسرحية توفيق الحكيم (السلطان الحائر) ومسرحية هنري هوانق (طفل ذهبي)

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الحرية، المساواة، العدل، الحقوق، السعادة.

ملخص البحث: تهدف الدراسة إلى إيضاح الوسائل الفنية التي استخدمها كلٌّ من توفيق الحكيم وديفيد هنري هوانق لتقديم موضوع الحرية بواسطة مسرحيتهما موضوع الدراسة: (السلطان الحائر) و(الطفل الذهبي).

يلقي البحث الضوء على براعة الكاتبين في استخدام الفن المسرحي كوسيلة فاعلة للتحدث عن أهمية الحرية ودورها في تحقيق مبدأ العدل والتسامح بين الناس. وتركز الباحثة على الأسلوب الفني المميز الذي استخدم في كلٍّ من المسرحيتين لإظهار جوانب النقص في بعض الوسائل التي يستخدمها الناس لنيل حريتهم. فالمسرحيتان تقدمان موضوع الحرية بطريقة تدفع القارئ إلى التفكير ملياً في الآثار السلبية والعواقب الوخيمة للفهم الخاطيء لمعنى الحرية وكيفية نيلها.

## **The Quest for freedom In Tawfiq Al-Hakim's Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir (The Sultan Dilemma) and David Henry Hwang's Golden Child**

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**Abstract:** The aim of the study is to discuss Tawfiq Al-Hakim's and David Henry Hwang's peculiar approaches to the issue of freedom, a theme on which both Al-Sultan Al-Ha'ir and Golden Child center. The paper focuses on the two writers' distinguished use of the theater to communicate significant messages concerning the importance of authentic freedom as a means of drawing souls together, and setting them on equal footing. Emphasis is laid on the interesting ways of handling freedom-seekers' experiences in both plays in question with the target of showing how aptly the two playwrights expose the failings and inadequacies of certain methods which people use to attain freedom. The provocative treatment of the complicated issue of freedom in the two plays makes one think about the destructive impact of enslaving people long after reading the play.

## Introduction

The idea that human beings are imprisoned in, if not enslaved by, the interests of their own selves has been effectively dramatized by Egypt's best known playwright, Tawfiq Al-Hakim (1898-1987), in his *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* (translated as *The Sultan's Dilemma*). Human beings' continuous search for the "key"<sup>1</sup> or for freedom is also the subject of the play written by the brilliant American writer, David Henry Hwang (b. 1957), namely, *Golden Child* (1999), in which he explores his family root in a serious way.<sup>2</sup> This concise paper focuses on the thematic significance of both dramas which aptly reflect the interests of their authors as dramatists as well as social critics, particularly their peculiar concepts of true freedom, and the ultimate purpose of attaining such freedom which is to free, not to enslave, mankind.

At first glance, it might seem incongruous to compare Al-Hakim's peculiar version of slavery and freedom with Hwang's. For one thing, the two writers belong to completely different cultures, and their dramas, investigated in this study, are concerned with local and national issues. Consequently, the contexts of their works seem to be far removed from each other. Nevertheless, it is the aim of this paper to show that, even considering the fact that the two dramas reflect different artistic cultures of different societies, times, and places, both center on one appealing question, how to attain true freedom? While both plays are chiefly based on the issue of freedom, each goes beyond this very theme and concentrates on the importance of making the apt choice in order to attain true freedom. Although the two plays in question work on many levels, and as a result, many interpretations of them hold true, one thing is for certain. Their authors did not intend for them to be seen as simple statements on the question of freedom. The emphasis in this study is laid on the distinguished way in which each playwright has

dramatized both the pain and humor of freedom-seekers' experiences, mainly, to assert the absolute necessity of regarding the means, not merely the end, if genuine freedom is targeted.

The dramas written by Tawfiq Al-Hakim, though full of imagination that extends to countless kaleidoscopes, are concerned with issues deeply ingrained in the Egyptian society. His *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* is a remarkable mixture of sturdy realism and evocative imagination. The way in which he handles the issue of freedom in the play assures the known boldness with which he tackles the struggle against the hardships of life in his literary works. Through a series of humorous intrigues, different aspects of slavery are exposed. The imaginative<sup>3</sup> story of the catastrophe which befalls the Sultan (the discovery that he is legally still a slave), together with the methods used to overcome it, is an effective vehicle to comment on freedom as a means of social integrity. The play shows that most people, to different degrees, are unable to enjoy liberation. The country delineated by Al-Hakim brings to our minds Eliot's wasteland, the inhabitants of which are spiritually dead or at least on the danger list. The characters of *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* denote people who do not seriously endeavor to break the shackles and set themselves free from self-jail; the reasons for such inability can be safely summed up by the word which Bernard Shaw puts in the mouth of Alfred Doolittle, in his *Pygmalion*: "intimidation." Doolittle's following words are a great help to explain the cause of the characters' actions and reactions in Al-Hakim's play in question: "That's the tragedy of it, . . . We're all intimidated. Intimidated . . . that what we are" (V, 88).

Just like Doolittle, people in *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* are "intimidated;" therefore, they submissively accept the loss of their freedom. The chief minister, the chief justice, and the executioner are not free; they represent people, of different social ranks, who are ready to keep their positions in the society to which they belong at any expense. A relevant and fair

1 The word, from T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", refers to the act by means of which humans can achieve genuine freedom. As Eliot illustrates, human beings' search for true freedom is useless as long as each of them is imprisoned by the interests of his own self. See *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber, 1940).

2 In *Golden Child*, Hwang seriously handles issues deeply ingrained in the Chinese culture, particularly the conflict between tradition and change. In other words, the play is one of his dramas which show that he has been inspired by the Chinese culture to delineate some of its features, and that he has visualized such features on the stage in an attempt to bring forth a considerable change concerning China traditional cultural legacy.

3 The word "imaginative" here refers to the very idea on which the play centers (a sultan discovers by chance that he is still slave); this, however, does not deny that the play has a theme which is relevant to its author's contemporary Egypt and at the same time of universal appeal. In addition, the character of the sultan as a "Mamluk" is drawn from a stage of Egypt's history, several centuries earlier." More details are given in Denys Johnson-Davis's "introduction," *The Essential Tawfiq Al-Hakim* (2-4). See also Derek Hopwood's Egypt: *Politics and society 1945-90* where al-Hakim's interests as a social commentator, the seriousness of the theme of the play in question and its relevance to its contemporary society are discussed in detail.

question is "To what extent each of them is aware, like Doolittle, that he is not "happy" because of being "tied neck and heels" (Shaw, V, 87). To answer this question, one needs to examine closely the behavior of the characters in order to decide whether they are aware of the rights they possess by virtue of being humans. In other words, their awareness of the loss of freedom can but emerge from their recognition that life, according to free human beings, means more than being materialistically or financially successful. In other words, "what makes us moral human beings, is our individual capacities to think, reason, choose, and value" (Fried 3).

In *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir*, Al-Hakim makes it obvious that freedom of speech should not be curtailed; otherwise, civic, religious, and cultural freedoms of any kind are not possible. The play begins with the issue of liberty of expression. The condemned man is in shackles, denied human beings' right of giving their opinions about the world around them. He is sentenced to death, though not given a trial, because of his so-called crime. Ironically, he is accused of committing the crime of talking freely about the enslavement of the sultan. "Quiet! Quiet! Shut your mouth," the executioner says to the condemned man, "I have been ordered to cut off your head right away if you utter a word about your crime" (6). The chief minister has unfairly judged the man to be guilty of the crime without giving him the chance to defend himself; then, he unhesitatingly announces his harsh sentence.

The prisoner, who symbolizes the oppressed humans, cannot think or speak freely, and, thus, he is unable to freely exercise choices. Through the comic exchange between the condemned man and the executioner, which is amusing and skillfully handled by Al-Hakim, the play exposes the deeds of those who endeavor to prevent mankind from breathing the air of freedom. The play effectively displays people who minimize the domain of choices for their fellow humans, conveying the message that the scope for freedom of choice should be expanded as this freedom is fundamental to human well-being. Discussing the intricate issue of freedom, Willie Bryan contributes to our understanding of the desirable impact of liberty on society as a whole, and the crucial role of citizens in this respect:

Freedom, to an extent, is reliant upon its citizens having the independence to build better lives for themselves and in the process of accomplishing their dreams, they lift freedom and democracy to new levels. (42)

The relationships between the characters in *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* assure the reality that individuals do possess basic set of rights, but while achieving their aims and dreams, the society to which they belong should be taken into consideration. In this connection, commenting on the goal of independent living centers, G. Laurie makes the following statement:

Independent living is freedom of choice, to live where and how one chooses and can afford. It is living alone or with a roommate of one's choice. It is deciding one's own pattern of life: scheduling food, entertaining, vices, virtues, leisure and friends. It is freedom to take risks and freedom to make mistakes. (Qtd. in Bryan 55)

It is true that individuals possess the right to live freely, but this freedom, as shown clearly in *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir*, should not be at the expense of society. "True liberty consists in the security of persons and property" (Qtd. in Conway 1). The sultan's chief minister, who represents the oppressor in human communities, has made a grave error by resorting to violence in order to keep the people silent. It is his right to find a suitable solution to the sultan's problem, which threatens his own social rank, using an apt method. His solution is but a crass attempt to suppress people's freedom of thought and expression. To do so, he gives orders to the executioner, without informing the sultan, to cut off the head of the condemned man and not to give him the opportunity to defend himself or even utter one word about the matter.

Slavery is announced from the start of the play; the condemned man is treated as a slave not a prisoner. Fettered with chains, and threatened with the executioner's sword, he can but submissively accept the cruel words, and sudden whims of the man who can put him to death at any time and by any method. The way in which the executioner deals with the condemned man, particularly the joy he displays in imposing his will on him, opens up human relations to questioning. The behavior of the executioner in this comic and ironic scene is reminiscent of the behavior of the crusty, conservative baronet, Sir Anthony Absolute, in Richard Sheridan's *The Rivals*. They both behave in a tyrannical manner, trying to exert their own wills on others. Threatening to disown and disinherit his son if he does not agree to everything he chooses, Sir Anthony denies his son the opportunity to express himself freely and the right to have any opinion different from his own. "I won't hear a word- not a word! Not one word! so give me your promise by a nod," said Sir Anthony (37). The prisoner, in *Al*

*Sultan Al ha'ir* is forced to "show admiration and appreciation" after listening to, not merely hearing, the executioner's song (15). Similarly, the hero of *The Rivals*, Jack Absolute, must not only accept the bride chosen for him but also show that he is very fond of her. In both plays, there is a reference to the same reason for conflict between people everywhere, i.e. the power which one attempts to exercise over others, even if it is done with the best intentions, in order to force them to comply with his wishes.

*Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* is a clear demonstration of its author's concern with the problems of mankind, not merely those of his contemporary society, such as the issue of slavery with which he has dealt adroitly. He handles the complex layers of slavery in a particular way, showing that only a few people are truly free. The executioner, for instance, who apparently deprives others from freedom, is not himself free. He represents a type of people for whom the value of real freedom means nothing. Such people are pathetic not because they are prisoners as much as because they are unaware of being so. The very words with which the executioner repeatedly threatens the condemned man point out that he is in a situation which is not better than that of the latter; just like the sword with which he cuts off heads, he has no will of his own. He does not possess the right of thinking as his role is just to act blindly. Mainly because of his inability to think for himself, he is easily made fool of by the lady. Her plan, the aim of which is to rescue the condemned man, succeeds mainly because the executioner is but an automaton. He stupidly sticks to the very wording of orders. What concerns him, is "the call to the dawn prayer" not the exact time of dawn, as he has had his orders to cut off the head of the man "when the call to dawn prayers is given" (18). When the lady attempts to direct his attention, before recognizing his robotic nature, to the reality that "dawn's almost breaking," and to the necessity of looking up at the sky to know the truth, he replies as follows: "It's not the sky, my dear lady that will decide the moment of fate for this condemned man but the minaret of this mosque. I am waiting for Muezzin" (18).

The dilemma in which the sultan is caught reveals the extent to which both he and his people are in need for genuine freedom. He is placed in a situation where he has to rely on one of two methods in order to attain his legal freedom. The prime minister advises him to resort to the sword as it is "able to cut off tongues." Yet, this is not the opinion of the chief justice, who upholds the law, as he believes that "the sword certainly does away with heads and tongues; it does not, however, do away with difficulties and problems" (28). In a sitting drawn from the middle ages, the issue of freedom of choice is humorously

handled and the message is clearly transmitted. Al-Hakim himself maintains that choosing the best methods to solve the problems of the world is at the center of the drama in question:

The play was inspired by the question that now puzzles the world: is the solution to its problems to be sought . . . by resorting to force or by upholding principles? Those who have the power and are in a position to determine the fate of mankind . . . are frightened and perplexed, not knowing what to do . . . The author has put this problem of choice and the present attitude to it in a historical oriental setting. Qtd. in Hopwood (149)

Hence, the author has used the sultan's problem of choice, together with the different attitudes to it, to display deep human problems. The protagonist represents all "those who have the power and are in a position to determine the fate of mankind," namely, rulers, parents, guardians, and teachers. According to Derek Hopwood, *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* reflects its author's clear concern with the politics of Egypt at his contemporary age as well as with what lies "beneath the politics," that is, with "morality in society." Hopwood demonstrates that the play is an embodiment of Al-Hakim's interest in a "human problem" deeper than the politics; it is "problem of putting honesty, love, and justice above self-interest" (148-9).

Through the problem of choice, Al-Hakim elucidates that only human beings who are truly free can put love and justice above self-interest. Judged by this principle, the sultan is a free person. He shows great reverence to justice and human love when he realizes the truth of the situation as a whole. On the contrary, the behavior of most of the other characters is that of people who can put nothing above their own interests, who show no human fellow feelings, and who care little for justice. The attitude of the chief minister has nothing to do with tolerance, human brotherhood or even justice, the achievement of which is his responsibility because of being the sultan's minister. He is well aware that he is responsible for the fix into which the sultan has found himself as he admits:

I deserve death . . . . The late Sultan could not think of every- thing or remember everything . . . . It was certainly my duty to put before him the matter of manumission, . . . and to do the necessary legal formalities. (28)

To solve the problem, and lessen the bad effects of his fault, he resorts to the only method he trusts, violence. The exchange that takes place when the Sultan discovers the whole truth uncovers the real cause of the minister's strong desire to cut off the condemned man's head. His following words assure that he believes in the worth of power, symbolized by the sword, solely: "If this man's head were cut off and hung up in the square before the people, no tongue would thenceforth dare to utter"( 28).

This "unjust system," which Anna Deavere Smith regards "our enemy" (*Twilight*, 32), is not confined to one area or to a particular people. Injustice is one of the layers of evil which continuously and varyingly, regardless of time and place, assures its existence in the human community. Just like the minister in *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir*, the policemen in Smith's *Twilight*, for instance, resort to violence to solve their problems, the cause of which is their own faults. The condemned man in Smith's play is the black people, who suffer because of "the unjust" way in which the policemen treat them. Dewayne, for instance, "was sentenced for a crime he did not do," and Tiny was killed, by the policemen, because of the color of their skin. The sultan's rebuking words: "so bury your fault by burying the man himself" (28) are but Dewayne's mother's argument, in *Twilight*, which aptly show her awareness of the police's real reason for killing the black youth. They do so, as she elucidates,

to stop us, to stop  
the demonstration  
to stop  
us from protestin' against them,  
to stop the world from knowing  
that they are corrupt. (38)

In *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir* the chief justice represents a type of people which is not better, if not worse, than the type represented by the chief minister. The chief justice has managed to present his opinion very plausibly by making his adherence to "the civil and religious law" clear. He asserts that he can accept nothing but "the legal and legitimate solution," and plainly shows that he is willing to sacrifice his life "for the sake of truth and principles"(34). It is ironic that he rejects the very law when it is used, by the lady, as a weapon against his plan. Her "way" is considered by him as "nothing but trickery, deceit, and double dealing" (55) though it is the same way which he has used; i.e. making use of the law in order to attain one's own purpose. He willingly breaks the law in order to achieve his goals. The general message of the play, in Hopwood's words, is that "those who at one time uphold the law can also break it when it suits their convenience" (Hopwood, 149). The chief justice refuses to participate in what he

calls "a conspiracy against the law" (29). He, however, conspires against it when it involves the failure of his plan. The following are his words:

Tonight I set about considering every aspect of the matter. I no longer regard myself as having been defeated. I still have in my quiver--or, to be more exact, in the law's quiver-- many tricks. (*Al-Sultan*, 81)

The chief justice, just like the chief minister, represents people who care for nothing except the attainment of their own purposes. Their actions are a clear evidence that they have contributed to the spiritual deterioration of their world, a pathetic world in which even ordinary people, not only the authorities, are willing to exploit their fellow human beings. In this world nothing is worthy except money, and everything revolves around its power. It is an excellent opportunity for both the wine merchant and the shoemaker that the sultan is still a slave, who can only be freed, according to the law, by an owner after being publicly auctioned. The great hardship which the sultan endures encourages their high hope of heavy gains. "It seems you don't understand what's extraordinary about this happening," the wine merchant says, "don't realize that it's unique. Do you find a sultan being put up for sale every day?" (*Al-Sultan*, 39). They symbolize the soulless modern technological organizations, one of the main pillars of which is the belief that one man's loss is another man's gain. Both men are too soulless to sympathize with the Sultan or even understand what humiliation and suffering he undergoes, and they are so mindless that the fate of the country as a whole means nothing to them. What concerns them, is that the presence of the sultan in the shop of any one of them will certainly publicize their goods as the wine merchant asserts while counting the things which he can do in case of buying the sultan,

Many things, very many things, my friend. His mere presence in my shop would be enough to bring along the whole city. It would be enough to ask him to recount to my customers every evening the stories of his battles against the Mongols, the strange things that have happened to him, his voyages and adventures, the countries he has seen, the places he's been to, the deserts he's-crossed wouldn't all that be valuable and enjoyable? (*Al-Sultan*, 40).

The shoemaker, on the other hand, appreciates the wine merchant's "great idea" concerning the best way of making use of the sultan; like women nowadays,

he can be effectively used as an instrument of advertising:

... sit him down in front of the door of the shop in a comfortable chair, ... put a new pair of shoes on his feet and a placard above his head reading: "Sultan Shoes Sold Here," and the next day you'd see how the people of the city would flock to your shop and demand your wares (*Al-Sultan*, 40).

What prevents both of them, fortunately, from buying the sultan together, and making him their "joint property" is that they lack the demanded amount of money. The sultan can be a great benefit in both shops; he can be made use of day and night as the wine merchant says to the shoemaker, "I'd release him to you during the day and you could give him to me for the evening." As a slave, or a "property," the sultan does not possess, in their view, any human right. He is lucky because they cannot carry out their intrigue; all they own, both, "isn't enough to buy one of his fingers" (*Al-Sultan*, 40).

However, Al-Hakim's play does not portray all mankind as selfish conscienceless exploiters of their fellow men. There is a better side of human nature, a brilliant side that illumines the darker corners of the world and gives hope of a better future for humanity. There is the character of the lady who denotes human beings who achieve a kind of inner freedom in their lives mainly because of their ability to think of people other than themselves. She fights against oppression in defense of what she believes to be her rights and the rights of the innocent around her. It is true that she commits the error of breaking the law, but her deed is but a natural response to total unfairness, and it is, indeed against error, specially that her final aim is the welfare of others. Thanks to her contrivance, both the sultan and the condemned man are rescued, the former from slavery and the latter from death. Her skillful way of using the chief justice's own weapon in fighting him is reminiscent of Portia's carefully worked-out plan by means of which she has managed to rescue Antonio and to defeat Shylock. The weapon used in both cases is the law which, to quote the chief Justice's words again, "quiver many tricks" (*Al-Sultan*, 81). Portia decides to beat the Jew by playing his own game. She skillfully drives him to the trap which he has unwittingly prepared for himself when he has harshly responded for her plea for mercy refusing to acknowledge the idea that the spirit of law should outweigh the letter. With the revelation that the law allows "no jot of blood" to be spilt (Shakespeare, IV, I, 302). and the further charges consequent on shedding any, Shylock is completely defeated. Similarly, in *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir*, the lady twists the

chief justice's demand for justice to bring about his own defeat, and she ingeniously turns the tables on him. It is the right of "the state" to take the price, "the sacks of gold," and give the lady "the goods," namely the sultan, she has bought. The lady proves that she is more than a match to the chief justice in arguing logically and using the law to achieve her own ends. Her following words are just one example:

... I am paying in order to buy and I buy in order to possess. The law gives me this right. A sale is a sale. Possession is possession. Take your due and hand me over what is mine. (56)

The sultan's significant words at the end sum up the central idea of the play, that is, those who have authority over people or are in a position of taking action should be models of observing and obeying the law. They should be fully aware that the law must be a means of regulating their own behavior not merely that of the ordinary members of the community, and that it is an instrument of preserving freedom not of enslaving people. Unlike the lady, the chief justice's inability to realize the worth of the law can by no means be excused. It is his duty to teach people, by making himself a model of honesty, that the rules of a religion or law are not mere sentences or words. Hence, the sultan's following poignant address impressively discloses how the law in the hands of dishonest men of authority can be stripped of its spiritual sanctity and rendered a mere specious means to attain their vile ends. To the Chief justice he says:

No, you have no right at all to do this. You have no such right. Maybe it was the right of this woman to indulge in trickery- she cannot be blamed if she did so; maybe she should be the object of indulgence because of her skill and intelligence. As for the Chief Cadi, the representative of justice, the defender of the sanctity of the law; the upright servant of the canonical law, it is one of his most bounden duties to preserve the law's purity, integrity and majesty. It was you yourself who first showed me the virtue of the law, and the respect it must be shown, who told me that it was the supreme power before which I myself must bow. And I have bowed down right to the end in all humility. But did it ever at I would see you yourself eventually regarding the law in this manner; stripping it of its robe of sanctity so that it becomes in your hands no more than wiles, clauses, words-a mere plaything? (*Al-Sultan* 84)

Similarly, the search for freedom is at the center of David Henry Hwang's family drama *Golden Child*. In the interview entitled "It's OK to be Wrong and/or it's OK to be Hwang," he asserts that human rights, particularly the right of enjoying liberty, are part and parcel of his main concerns as a writer. "I guess at heart," he says, "I'm basically liberal humanist" (Hwang, 2007, ); these words are embodied in his play under discussion. The play is a literary rewriting of Hwang's family history. It is a fictional work based on the childhood stories<sup>45</sup> that Hwang's grandmother told him in Southern California, especially the story of his great grandfather's break with the Confucian tradition by his conversion to Christianity, and the effect of this decision on his family. The historical lesson which this play gives is a moral one that is addressed to humanity at large. This lesson is simply that it is the right as well as the duty of every human being to strive hard to attain freedom by liberating himself from all the unreasonable fetters of the past that stand in the way of his progress and happiness. But the freedom that is worth striving for must be "authentic" freedom; i.e., genuine freedom that allows a person to take his own choices and to determine his own life without violating the freedom of others or their basic right to make their own choices. It is because of this that the protagonist fails to gain "authentic" freedom, because the freedom he gains is at the expense of that of his three wives.

*Golden Child* reflects the interest of its author, as a "liberal humanist," in "authenticity," which he has been searching for throughout his work. He asserts that he is a seeker of authenticity; that is, he, like so many other people, aspires to reach a definition of "objective truth" or "a universal standard of excellence as he elucidates in his interview entitled "It's OK to be Wrong." His main concerns as an Asian American writer, including his search for authenticity, become obvious when one examines carefully the way in which he handles the mixed influences of Christianity and western culture on the traditional wealthy family (in the China of 1918) in *Golden Child*. In the preface to the play, he emphasizes that his aspiration to depict the Chinese history truthfully and objectively caused him great anxiety during the entire time he was working on the

play. He demonstrated that he kept on questioning himself whether he, "an American, could authentically recreate the world of Old China" (viii).

Freedom and the high price for winning it are what *Golden Child* is all about. The unbinding of Ahn's feet denotes the unbinding of Tieng Bin's family from tradition as a result of the impact of the moral artistic and economic values of the western culture on him. As a daughter of a wealthy family, Ahn, the golden child, has been forced to undergo the brutal ritual of foot-binding. She has also paid the high price of enjoying freedom. The unbearable agony she undergoes when her father unbinds her feet is by no means less, if not more, than the agony of the binding. The severe pain which she experiences symbolizes the price which the members of the family have paid.

The message that is conveyed through the family's story of pain can be summarized by Hwang's own words: "conflicts . . . arise in any culture when one tries to impose change, however necessary or progressive these advances may be." However, these words should not lead us to think that he is against change. *Golden Child* itself, as he continues, "explains why change is necessary, even when it faces powerful opposition" (Hwang, It's OK to be Wrong, 3). That he advocates change, is emphasized by the comments he makes on the difficult decision, taken by the father, to unbind the child's feet. Discussing the way in which he modified the play before being presented by South Coast Repertory, he explains that the moments of taking the decision were the moments of the utmost importance, the ones chosen by him to replace "historical explanation with dramatic action:"

In search of these moments, I returned to my original text and came upon a scene involving my great-grandfather's decision to unbind my grandmother's feet, reversing a centuries-old tradition which had turned women into cripples in the name of feminine beauty. (*Golden Child* vii-viii)

What Hwang opposes, as his play under discussion shows, is the very deed of arbitrary imposing change on mankind. This deed is represented by Tieng-Bin's insistence on changing his family's life radically. *Golden Child*, like *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir*, revolves around a community in crisis. Yet, the idea is reduced in Hwang's drama to a suffering family. The difficult situation in which the members of this family find themselves brings to our minds the previously quoted statement which Al Hakim has made, that "the problem of choice puzzles

4 Hwang's concern, as a ten-year old boy, with his maternal grandmother's stories about the family is the first obvious sign of his interest, as an Asian-American writer, in his family in particular and the Chinese experience in general. For further information, see the studies entitled "Welcome Home David Henry Hwang," and "David Henry Hwang's Obi-winning play 'Golden Child' Comes to Manila" in which Gibbs Cadiz has investigated in detail Hwang's concern with his family as one of the familiar elements of his literary works.



the world. It frightens and perplexes, in particular, those who have the power and are in a position to determine the fate of mankind." The person who has the power, and who is caught in a dilemma in *Golden Child* is a head of a family. Being in a position to determine the fate of his wives and children, Tieng-Bin must have endured severe conflict when he determines to break with his people's tradition, which is symbolized by the unbinding of his daughter's feet. Hwang comments on the perplexing problem and his great grandfather's suffering while attempting to cope with it as follows:

As a child, such a courage on the part of my great grand-father seemed natural and uncomplicated. As an adult, however, I could not help but reflect upon the ambivalence he must have felt in breaking with tradition, knowing he was risking the future of his children, and would be criticized for his actions. (*Golden Child* viii)

Hwang has managed to rewrite the event of the past to meet his social aims. The way in which he has theatrically re-enacted the method chosen by his great grandfather has rendered the event an issue of universal appeal. *Golden Child* highlights the errors of the past and their unpleasant consequences. The play is based on the impact of an imposed change on the three wives' world which is seriously threatened when their husband returns home, after spending three years in the Philippines, affected by the modern world and Christianity. This change threatens to cause their loss of identity and dignity, by bringing about the end of their beliefs and status as wives. Such a loss means their defeat in their struggle, as humans, to gain their rightful position in the society to which they belong.

*Golden Child* is a play which deals with the conflict that arises as a result of coming into contact with a completely different culture. It revolves around the difficult situation in which the wives find themselves because of their husband's strong desire to break with the culture of his people. This drama aptly states that although facing a difficult choice is hard, nothing is more difficult, nor more unbearable, than the situation of one whose choices are made by others, and who can do nothing but submit. The three wives are not free human beings as "one cannot be free without choice" (Markus 352). They do not possess the right of making a choice. Accepting their husband's choice is the only thing they can do. They are women whose role in life is but to love their husband. The three wives think and act like slaves mainly because they are not sure of their identities as free humans. The main cause of their self-defeating

attitudes can be the same cause that Tom Burrell refers to while discussing the suffering of many of his contemporary black families:

Our family crisis is inseparable from our black male and female identity crisis, and brainwashing has left a great many of us fear- full, confused about our identities, and hopelessly caught in a cycle of relationship underachievement. (32)

Each of the three wives in *Golden Child* yields to the authority of the ancestors which prevents her from free thinking. They more or less embody Galimard's stereotypical view of the Oriental woman in Hwang's *M. Butterfly*:

I have a vision. Of the Orient. That, deep within almond eyes, there are still women. Women willing to sacrifice themselves for the love of a man. Even a man whose love is completely without worth. (92)

The three wives are Hwang's attempt to oppose the stigmatized distorted concept of the Oriental woman. This concept is challenged through the portrayal of the wives who are not passive humans even though they are denied the right to express themselves freely or practice free acts of choice. Like Ahn, the three wives have paid the high cost of being bound to tradition, and, then, of the painful transition. Their husband has won the battle at a great cost in their lives. The fix in which they find themselves brings to our minds the significant words uttered by the first wife, showing her disapproval of unbinding her daughter's feet: "you do not know what a terrible gift is freedom" (*Golden Child*, 30). Yet, the reality that they are victimized by certain circumstances imposed on them should not lead us to think that their tale is one of the stories or works of art that deal with passive victims.

Hwang transmits twofold message through the story of Tieng-Bin's three wives. First, it is of utmost importance to understand any culture before judging it. Through the actions and reactions of the three women, Hwang asserts his point of view that writers and people in general should not reinforce stereotypes such as the stereotype of "submissive Asian women." On the contrary, as he elucidates, they should go on searching for what they "yearn for, absolutes, certain objective realities that we can anchor our lives on" (Hwang, Authenticity, 22). Second, attaining genuine freedom essentially requires an awareness of the human nature. It is necessary, in the first place, to understand that human life cannot be arranged according to personal opinions and impulses. Blinded

by his yearn to freedom, Tieng- Bin does not consider the reality that his decision is very rigid. He does not consider the undesirable effects of his choice. The rigidity of his decision is emphasized by Hwang's own words:

". . . this is really something I've developed more in rewrites the story of Tieng-Bin is the story of somebody who's been raised in Confucian tradition, which is very rigid and fundamentalist itself. Freeing himself from that, he has to find a new big stick to beat down the old big stick. Fundamentalism begets fundamentalism. I'm trying to transcend the rigidity and creativeness that I needed, too, at a certain point in my life to become my own person" (Hwang, *Authenticity*, 53).

Tieng-Bin's struggle to change the harmful inherited cultural elements has led to undesirable results for the simple reason that he endeavors to reshape his family's life by force. His attempt and its consequences bring to our minds the scheme of the king of Navarre and his closest followers who fail to achieve their noble aim of turning their court into "a little academe" (Shakespeare, 1945, I. i. 47). Failure in both cases can but be attributed, as the two playwrights make it obvious, to rigidity. The incidents of both plays assure the reality that fundamentalism or strict rules can by no means be a suitable method of freeing the self from the prison of another rigidity, whether it is the rigidity of a dominant past or ignorance. Commenting on the reasons which lie behind the failure of the king's scheme in Shakespeare's play, Edward Dowden maintains that "human nature refuses to be dealt with in this fashion of arbitrary selection and rejection" (Dowden 63). Tieng-Bin attempts to achieve his goal by means of arbitrarily suppressing his wives' emotions. His experiment assures the validity of George Duthie's significant words: "A man's emotional being is an essential part of him and he cannot simply set it aside by force" (67).

The dilemma of Tieng-Bin is an effective instrument by which Hwang communicates a significant message to humanity at large. Bin seems to be unaware of the reality that the value of change lies in its being a means of bringing mankind together, and creating better human communities in the future. His family's painful experience assures the necessity of understanding fully the world in which we are involved physically, intellectually and emotionally. Otherwise, we will neither be able to live in it peacefully or unbind ourselves from it safely. His attempt to escape from the past of his

people and its consequences assures the significance of Lord Calverton's words, in Eliot's *The Elder Statesman*, "Those who flee from their past will always lose the race/I know this from experience" (Eliot 561). The moving tragic end of Bin's experience is mainly resultant from his lack of adequate knowledge of the world around him and the suitable way in which he should interact with it. Blinded by his strong desire to put an end to the dominating power of the ancestors, who rule the lives of his wives and children, he imposes incomprehensible change on his family. Ever since we meet him, he never shows the due respect one normally feels for the emotions and interests of the members of his own family.

When we compare the ending of *Al-Sultan Al-ha'r* with that of *Golden Child*, we come to the conclusion that the difference between the rewards and the costs of winning freedom in both plays is determined, in Hwang's previously quoted words, by the "stick" used by the protagonist "to beat down the old big one." To free themselves from slavery or rigidity, the protagonists of the two dramas use completely different methods; therefore, they reap the fruit of their decisions. The unwise actions of Tieng-Bin are the main cause of his wives' reactions. As human characters, the three wives react differently. The first wife, passively resisting, resorts to opium, the second strives to capture him by adopting western attitudes, and the third is torn between her deep love to him and the power of the ancestors. On the contrary, the sultan's handling of the crisis, in *Al-Sultan Al-ha'ir*, plainly shows his insight, tolerance and sympathetic awareness. He decides to bow to the law, and translates his following words into action: "I have chosen the law and I shall continue on that path whatever obstacles I may encounter" (*Al-Sultan*, 37). His wisdom is reflected in the respect he shows to his people's right to freedom. He is wise enough to realize that neither "the sword" nor "trickery" can be the suitable means by which he can get rid of slavery. He proves that he is able to build a democratic society distinguished by the ability of its members to interact with each other as well as with other peoples. The incidents of the play show that he is qualified to stimulate the growth of such interaction which requires, as Ismail Serageldin maintains, a great deal of tolerance:

Our creative diversity—if it is to survive the growing inter- action between peoples—requires that tolerance become inbred, and further that it must be nurtured to go beyond acceptance of the principle of freedom of expression to the commitment to defend that right of all those with whom we disagree. (Serageldin xxi)

The sultan succeeds in controlling his own self, and in going, by doing so, beyond the acceptance of the principle of freedom of speech. His actions and reactions plainly show that "Freedom stands for something greater than just the right to act however I choose—it also stands for securing to everyone an equal opportunity for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Treder 1). Convinced that the woman has the right to defend herself against the chief justice, he does not only give her the freedom to talk freely with him and with the other authorities, but also he defends her right to do so. Their dialogue is a clear evidence that he is able to be tolerant with people with whom he disagrees. He tolerates the woman's behavior because he is fully aware, as he says to the chief justice, that such a behavior is determined by her "intelligence" and "skills" as an ordinary person not one who is supposed to be a model of self-control and honesty. He, as a ruler, is able to prevent the feeling of hatred to take possession of his subjects, mainly, because he willingly defends what he believes to be their rights. His awareness that the lady, as a powerless citizen, is at his mercy does not prevent him from submitting to her will, and defending her right to own him, as her slave, for one night. Thanks to his patience and merciful nature, rather than anything else, she realizes that the Sultan can by no means be hers alone as he does not belong to one person but to the people as a whole. Having given her the freedom of choice, he enables her to be released from the interests of the self. She now realizes that it is hard to decide the fate of people:

LADY. It is painful to let you go, to lose you forever, but it is also painful to see you lose your throne, for our country has never had the good fortune to have a sultan with such courage and sense of justice. No, do not give up the rule, do not relinquish the throne! I want you to remain a sultan.

SULTAN. And so?

LADY. I shall sign the deed.

SULTAN. the manumission deed?

LADY. Yes. (*Al-Sultan*, 61-3)

At the end of the night, at midnight because of the chief justice's trickery, they both become free from their erroneous ideas of each other. He realizes that she, despite appearances and the impression she likes to give, is an honest woman who is trustworthy, and that the circumstances by which she has been surrounded have damaged her reputation. She, on the other hand, regrets her conduct before knowing what kind of man he is, her impudent way of dealing with such a modest and humane ruler. Her recognition of his noble nature causes her to admit:

I was intentionally insolent to you, deliberately vulgar and impudent. Do you know why? Because I imagined you as being quite different. I imagined you as an arrogant sultan, . . . Thus the picture in my mind was synonymous with haughtiness, harshness, and cruelty. But as soon as you talked to me so pleasantly and modestly I was overcome by a certain bewilderment and confusion. (*Al-Sultan*, 71)

The sultan has managed to find and use "the right remedy" with which Dr. Wangle has cured his wife in Ibsen's play, *The Lady from the Sea*. Al Hakim's hero succeeds in curing the lady by respecting her right to choose freely just like Wangle whose wife describes him, after being recovered, as "a good physician" for her (V. 165). Convinced that the Sultan deserves freedom, the woman willingly signs the manumission deed.

This is not the case in Hwang's *Golden Child*. Unlike the Sultan, Tieng-Bin proves to be unable to bridge the gap between his soul and those of his three wives. Consequently, the relation between him and each of them have been altogether void of mutual understanding and sympathy. When he discovers that his first wife is taking drugs, and that she has sent their daughter to spy on his lessons, his reaction shows no concern on his part with her feelings. He does not try to explore the psychological reasons which have caused her to behave in such a way. He is not aware that the real reason lies in the painful change which has been imposed on her life, as a woman and wife, after he has married his second wife. The following exchange takes place between the first wife and the second one when the latter's jealousy shows itself as a result of their husband's preference of the third wife:

SIU-YONG. When you first came to this house, I watched husband go to your bed and never complained.

Why can't you do the same?

LUAN. When he started coming to my room, you took up the pipe (*Golden Child*, 21).

Their words cause the readers to contemplate the actual cause of their actions and reactions. The incidents of *Golden Child* assure the view that "cultural values do not ultimately determine behavior . . . Rather, cultural values emerge from specific social circumstances and life chances and reflect one's class and racial position" (Wilson, 2012, 14).

*Golden Child* makes it obvious that the three wives' limited aspirations for the future are the

consequence of restricted opportunities and feelings of resignation resulting from bitter personal experiences, rather than anything else. The deeds of their husband are a clear example. Tieng-Bin ignores the feelings and whole being of one wife when he gets married to another. It is true that there is no argument on the part of the wives for freedom or such issues, yet their disapproval of their husband's treatment of them is hinted at on certain occasions such as the one of the gifts which he brings to them. Neither the first wife nor the second are really satisfied with their gifts despite the joy which they show, in the presence of their husband, on seeing them. While the second wife complains that her gift is but "a gift for the cooks," the first considers the "cuckoo clock" one of the gestures which reflect her husband's tendency to impose his choices on her: "I have got a bird that tells me the time whether I wish to know or not," said she. (*Golden Child* 21)

The first wife shows incredible control over her actions, throughout the whole play, till the moment in which she says, in her own way, enough. The bitterness with which she is filled appears in the form of nonchalant reaction to her husband's burst of anger on seeing the "opium pipe" in her room. "A husband is always the last to know, she says to him, "servants are always the first, by the way." Her response to his command that the members of his family should deal honestly with each other is but more ironical: "What is this mania for honesty?" (*Golden Child* 47). When his reaction, to the errors she has committed, makes it obvious that he understands nothing but that her wrong deeds are meant "to undermine his authority," she reminds him of his most important duty as the head of the family,

Confucius said: "In order to rule the nation, a man must first rule himself." So rule yourself! Tell me you haven't seen or heard anything tonight which would soil the honor of our family—and then have the discipline to believe your own words. (*Golden Child* 47-8)

His decision that the lives of all the members of the family should change is but one of his ideas which he imposes on his family:

I have made my decision. Or you have made it for me. I will be baptized. And all the family alters will come down at once.

(pause) The servants will search for any more of the drug you may have hidden. Then—you'll start attending Pastor Baines's lessons. We all need a fresh start, to begin a new life (*Golden Child*, 49).

The method which Tieng-Bin has used to win freedom has caused his first wife, who symbolizes tradition, to put an end to her life. She commits suicide after he smashes the picture which she worships in order to force her to break with her beliefs. He is far from knowing what kind of agony she undergoes because of his deed. Yet, winning liberation in such a rigid way has a price which he, just like the other members of the family, should pay. He pays the price when he loses his beloved wife, the woman whom he has dreamt of living with as his only wife. He laments her death, asserting that his loss of her has put an end to his happy and hopeful life:

Eling? Eling. . . How can I make you understand that I did it all for you? You must take everything now—everything with you— all my ideals, my memories of the world...all rooms I've filled to bursting with empty words—words of change, of pro-progress— all the rooms where I had hidden our future. . . . Papa, Mama— this is how you punish a disobedient son? Take from me the Iwife love, even the wife I respect, leaving me with the one for whom I feel . . . nothing (*Golden Child*, 58-9).

These words uncover the real reason behind his striving for freedom. The welfare of the family is not his priority. What stimulates him to attain freedom is his dream of living happily with his beloved wife. His words imply a reference to the real element which has rendered his search for freedom a bitter experience. Like most freedom-seekers, he, in Eliot's words, "thinks of the key . . . in his prison." He causes the members of his family, including himself, to end up suffering for he is one of the people who cannot put anything above self-interest.

At all events, through the story of Tieng-Bin, Hwang makes it clear that rigidity is not an apt method to win true freedom. He emphasizes this view in his following statement about the necessity of avoiding all sorts of fundamentalism, because none of them can help human beings in their struggle against the hardships of life, none at all:

We strive for order in our lives, for constancy, for something to believe in. . . . But human experience is contradictory. In fact our lives are a horrid tangle of ambivalences, self-delusions, accidents. In part that's what 'Golden Child' is about. The attraction of any sort of fundamentalist ideology, whether it's ethnic, political or religious, is this

need to have some certainty, so you can say, 'This is unalterable truth. If I can hang my hat on this, my life will make more sense.' But finally all these fundamentalist efforts are doomed to fail, because life is never that simple. Face it, life is inherently complex. (Otd. In Herman 2)

To conclude, each of the two works of art in question serves as a clear statement on the significance of the interrelatedness of human lives and the effect of the continuous struggle for freedom on human relationships. Although each writer has made the statement in a style that is wholly his own, the two plays are marked by a deep desire to reaffirm the common humanity in all of us. Both dramas assure the reality that human beings will go on striving for freedom, and that each quest for liberty may possess its own distinct features, due to cultural and historical variations, though the goal is the same. The essence of true freedom is the actual respect of human rights. The power of both plays lies in that they reflect the same aspiration, on the part of their authors, not to assert the importance of liberation as much as to question the means of attaining it. The different endings of the two plays cause us to ask almost the same questions about the costs and rewards of freedom, and about the best methods by which humanity at large can overcome such obstacles as violence, trickery, and rigidity in order to win genuine freedom.

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