Conclusion

Arabic drama (in the Western sense) was characterised by its absence from Arabic literature. Nevertheless, some traditional dramatic forms, such as pharaonic drama, maqama, ta’ziya plays and shadow plays existed in early Arabic drama. Although traditional dramatic forms never ceased to exercise some influence on the writings of many modern Arabic playwrights, they never developed into drama in the Western sense (Badawi, Modern Arabic Literature 330). The latter was imported to Arabic literature only around the middle of the nineteenth century. During the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt (1798-1801) the French troops were entertained by French dramatic spectacles. As the European community in Egypt increased under the modernising rule of Mohammed Ali and his successors, the interest in European opera and drama grew and performances took place both by visiting foreign companies as well as local amateurs. Thus Western theatre was introduced to the Arabs with strong aura of authority. A whole apparatus of translation and reproduction of Western theatrical cannons flourished in the Arab world. As a result, the Arabic dramatists started to appropriate Western models leaving behind the indigenous dramatic forms that could have been dynamised from within. The first Arab writers to appropriate Western drama were the Lebanese Marun al-Naqqash and the Egyptian Yaqub Sannu. They introduced Western drama into the Arab world by means of translation, adaptation and arabicisation. Though modern Arab dramatists translated and adapted Western plays, they wrote original dramatic pieces. More importantly, they assimilated Western dramatic techniques in their original plays.

During the late 1920s and 1930s the popular commercial theatre was providing a cheap diet of singing, dancing, slap-stick comedy and Arabicised French vaudevilles. It
was al-Hakim who gave Arabic drama and theatre respectability and seriousness by
publishing his first serious and mature play *Ahl al-Kahf* (The Sleepers in the Cave, 1933),
which was described by Taha Hussein as “the first work in Arabic literature which may
be properly called drama” (qtd in Badawi, *Modern Arabic Drama* 189). Al-Hakim’s
extraordinarily long and active career as a dramatist – during which he produced more
than seventy plays, covering a period of over half a century, from the 1920s to the 1970s
– not only elevated the status of Arabic drama but also made it possible to stand
comparison with modern and ancient European drama.

Al-Hakim has contributed tremendously to modern Arabic drama. His dramatic
output is classified into different categories and stages: early experimentation with drama,
theatre of variety, theatre of the mind, plays after the 1952 Revolution, and theatre of the
absurd. These stages in al-Hakim’s dramatic career reflect gradual growth in Arabic
theatre, a kind of growth that derived its momentum from both the Arabic-Islamic milieu
and Western theatrical canon. In other words, al-Hakim’s plays are ‘hybrid’ in nature, i.e.
they reflect two different traditions: Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) as well as Western. In this
sense, al-Hakim’s plays are construed in the ‘Third Space’ (Bhabha 54): it is a space that
is located between East and West, Self and Other, past and present and tradition and
modernity.

The study has examined al-Hakim’s hybridity at three different levels; textual (or
intertextual), stylistic and linguistic. Textual hybridity is the appropriation of a text or
theme from the Western tradition and then reshaping it into the Arabic-Islamic context as
in *al-Malik Odib* (Oedipus the King, 1949). Stylistic hybridity involves the employment
of an Arabic or Islamic text or theme in a Western form or style as in *Ahl al-Kahf* (The
Sleepers in the Cave, 1933). Linguistic hybridity shows al-Hakim’s artistic and linguistic talent in employing what is called the “third language”: a combination of the Standard Arabic and Egyptian dialect, as in *al-Safqa* (The Deal, 1966). These levels of hybridity in al-Hakim’s plays have been illustrated through the discussion of select plays.

Ultimately, Al-Hakim’s hybridity opens up new dimensions of experience where the mixing of Eastern and Western dramatic traditions generates something new. Al-Hakim’s hybrid plays lead their readers to a network of possible discourses and seem to emanate from a number of different perspectives. They also create a multicultural space in which variety of texts blend and form a new dramatic form. These hybrid texts are made of multiple writings drawn from Eastern (Arabic-Islamic) and Western cultures, entering into mutual relations of dialogue and understanding. As a postcolonial writer, al-Hakim has “double-consciousness.” He argues that he “moves in two worlds,” for while – as an Easterner – he has benefited from the contact with the European culture by borrowing styles and renewing methods, he still preserves his national spirit (*Pygmalion*, 49). Al-Hakim’s hybridity also can be appreciated in its ability to question what appears natural and complete, to problematise binaries East/West and Self/Other. It is a threat to colonial and cultural authority; it subverts the concepts of pure origins or identity of dominant authority through the ambivalence created by denial, unsetting, repetition and displacement (Kuortti and Nyman 9).

The study has attempted to create a space of mutual understanding between the East and the West by means of bringing the two bipolar opposites as close as possible to each other. It has focused on the commonality of humanity and emphasised the importance of difference and exchange between people of different cultures. This is a
difference in which the audiences and readers of both cultures appreciate the cultural production of each other without a sense of superiority and demonstrate fluid and flexible identities which are ‘enabling’ in terms of mutual understanding, acculturation and ‘transculturation’ (70). Al-Hakim’s hybridity can make difference into sameness and sameness into difference, but in such a way that makes the same no longer the same, the different no longer simply different (Young 24-25). The study also suggests that the relationship should be based on negotiation rather than negation, and integration rather than contradiction. This thesis seeks to address various issues by proposing a re-reading of the works of Tawfiq al-Hakim through the analysis of the hybrid nature of his plays as a part of cultural negotiation and socio-political critique.

By writing hybrid drama, Al-Hakim, among few playwrights, has achieved originality and modernity. He was the first Arab writer to be attentive to the prevailing intellectual currents and ideologies of his time. His works have been translated into a number of languages, Western and Eastern, more than the works of any other Arab writer. He is no longer just a literary giant or the greatest Arab dramatist after whom a leading theatre has been named in Cairo; he has become an institution whose literary efforts have become a legend in his lifetime.

Though this study is confined to al-Hakim’s major plays, it underscores the necessity of contextual research. It is an attempt to indicate a path for further research on enriching the body of Arabic drama, especially re-reading and reinterpreting al-Hakim’s plays and novels. Due to the huge corpus of al-Hakim’s literary writings, this thesis has limited itself to the investigation of al-Hakim’s dramatic career with a specific reference to select plays: it is beyond the scope of this research to cover all the plays written by al-
Hakim, let alone his novels and other writings, which can also be a fertile soil for further research and investigation. Moreover, the study may not have covered in detail the other dimensions of al-Hakim’s plays; for example, al-Hakim’s intellectual theatre, his views on women, his “third language” and his philosophy of life.

The texts analysed in this study are significant in that they incorporate a range of global issues that move beyond the dichotomies East/West, Self/Other and tradition/modernity. I would suggest that translating and teaching such texts in non-Arab universities, will encourage people to step outside their stereotypical perceptions, enable them to create a space for the “Other” beyond the ingrained misconceptions and images with which the Arabs have been generally associated with for long time. Basically, studying and teaching such hybrid texts can help show the commonalities between human beings and create awareness of intercultural negotiations and connections. It can play an essential role in bridging the cultural, intellectual and political gaps between the East (Arabs and Muslims) and the West as well as other world communities. These hybrid texts, implicitly or explicitly, challenge the readers to think and re-think and to revaluate their perceptions of Arabic drama and culture. More importantly, the texts open a series of dialogues between literatures and cultures and help in enhancing the knowledge of non-Arabs about the Arabic people and culture.

This study demonstrates that the themes of modern Arabic drama are not limited to any topic, but are rather rich, diverse, multifaceted, changing, challenging, negotiating and crossing borders. Modern Arabic drama reflects numerous issues treated by Arab dramatists in many ways diagnosing and re-evaluating the conditions from different perspectives and suggesting more than a solution for the issues they tackle in their texts.
They include and address issues central to contemporary Arab societies such as political conflicts, social injustices, national struggle, colonialism, women’s issues, East/West dichotomy, global politics and peace. Therefore, it is suggested that exploring such themes can serve as a site for understanding the complexities of Arab traditions, culture and politics. It is recommended that the academic studies on modern Arabic drama in general and Tawfiq al-Hakim in particular can stir the interest for non-Arabs to read the texts and develop a better understanding of the Arab and Islamic world. Furthermore, because comparative literature and cultural studies always look for connections among diverse genres, literatures and cultures, a future study could explore connections between modern Arabic drama and modern Indian drama, for example, or modern American drama.

Thus, this study goes beyond the borders of words, identities, cultures and politics, favours a transnational flavour, creates spaces for inter-cultural negotiations and bridges the gulf between traditional enemies. The employment of an approach that avoids the perpetuation of antagonistic binarisms and develops inclusionary, not exclusionary, and multi-faceted, not dualistic, patterns of cultural exchange and maturation adds global significance to this study as a connective bridge across worlds.