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Tawfiq al-Hakim, *The Revolt of the Young: Essays of Tawfiq al-Hakim*, trans. Mona Radwan, Foreword by Roger Allen, Syracuse University Press, 2015, 152 pp., \$24.95 US (hbk), ISBN 9780815633686.

When the young Egyptian singer, Hamza Namira chanted, “Listen to Me,” most likely he was not talking directly to the generation preceding his own, but was rather echoing—even if unrecognizably—the outcry of every young generation against the imperiousness of their parenting generation. This is quite true, especially in Egypt, where the overbearing attitudes of the older generations seem to prevail. However, Tawfiq al-Hakim—in his collection of articles translated and titled *The Revolt of the Young*—not only foretold such surging outcry, but also expressed, in a semi-autobiographical tone, his own dilemmatic situation at the juncture of generations. He happened to be a mediator between two generations whose relationship is marked by mistrust, disrespect, and dismissive challenge. No wonder then that the recurrent clash between generations in Egypt, as a typical patriarchal community, lies at the core of al-Hakim’s book, with an attempt to diminish the widening schism and disrespect by engaging in a constructive dialogue towards better understanding and communication. Interestingly, al-Hakim’s book that was originally published in 1984 still captures the spirit of the present age of upheavals and revolutions, as he managed to diagnose such seemingly inescapable inter-generational dilemmas and core misunderstandings.

Mona Radwan, the translator of the book, recounts that a revolutionary youth who was interviewed on Egyptian TV stated that al-Hakim’s book was quite inspiring for him. Thus, Radwan was prudent in her choice to translate al-Hakim’s last non-fictional, semi-autobiographical commentary on the gap/link between generations—an externalized clash between tradition and modernity, or, past and present cultural values. Al-Hakim’s diagnosis of the generational divide and the resulting persistent tensions within Egyptian society is erudite and versatile, not only because of his perspicacity as both a literary figure and, as Roger Allen says in his Foreword to the English translation, “a public intellectual” (xi), but also because he was a victim of these circumstances. That is why the personal and the communal seamlessly blend together throughout the book, adding an impressive veracity to al-Hakim’s sagacity.

In this book, al-Hakim focuses on the inter-generational conflict by proposing a conversational channel to reconciliation—or a dialogue based on mutual understanding and compromise as a solution to these divisive societal tensions. Most significantly, he traces the roots of the contemporary Egyptian community’s problems to its heritage of patriarchal

authority over the young. In opposition to the status quo, he argues for a cosmopolitan worldview and a concomitant “cry” against the established order.

To highlight the emotional complexities undergirding societal customs and expectations, al-Hakim shares his own personal struggles, firstly, between him and his father and, later, between him and his son. With regards to the former, in order to receive permission to pursue literature, he had to present his desires to his father in a palatable way. Later, when his own son aspired to be a musician, he reluctantly attended a musical performance led by his son; this experience turned out to be emotionally rewarding and healing for him. He felt both “overwhelming joy” and “sympathy” for the youth who performed alongside his son and in turn was inspired to think of the transformative power that youthful vigor and humanitarian cosmopolitanism held for Egyptian society. He firmly believed in the ennobling impact of artistic forms of expression, like drama, novels, and poetry, and ultimately thought that the epiphanies expressed and experienced therein coincide with humanitarianism. Hence, al-Hakim became a vocal advocate for literature and the arts as a means to elevate consciousness and, consequently, better humanity.

Throughout this book, which is composed of twenty articles, al-Hakim grapples with the idea of dialectical exchange (or dialogic communication) as a means to addressing the widening rift between the old and the young that increasingly is marked by mistrust and disrespect. On one hand he was mindful of the resulting apathy and disheartening detachment among Egyptian youth under the yoke of custom and authority; on the other, hand, he was equally concerned with staving off turbulent revolutions and upheavals that marked the age.

Here, he acknowledges that the main problem is parents’ overprotective and overbearing attitudes towards their children, once again relaying his own personal experiences by reminiscing how his father would beat him when he was only twelve years old, leaving him bleeding, because he could not understand the abstruse language of the pre-Jahili *Seven Odes* (*Mu`allaqat*), a quite demanding task for a teenager. His domineering father would even verbally abuse him, calling him an “idiot” and “ignoramus” for not being able to comprehend the “lucid” and “palpable” language of the odes. Small wonder then that al-Hakim was even afraid to utter the word “art” in front of his father, and would choose a more “reserved” synonym, i.e. “literature,” in order not to upset his father. Later on, when he became a father, al-Hakim discovered that he was unwittingly imitating his overbearing father in his treatment of his freedom-seeking son. It was at this time that he started to reconsider his relationship with his son, seeking instead a relationship built upon mutual understanding and sympathy. As a result of this personal growth he came to believe that the older generation needs to acknowledge the youth’s thirst for freedom and change; simultaneously, he contended, the younger generation needs to understand and show respect for their elders and their traditional values and principles. For al-Hakim, the confluence or “coming together” of generations is necessary for the peace and stability of a community, as well as to correctly guide an otherwise “confused” and “rebellious” young generation to transform sweeping upheavals into benevolent revolutions.

Concluding the book from a broader perspective, the last chapter is an anti-war outcry against the foreign policy of the United States. It falls within the scope of the previous chapters, crystallizing a call for change from within and freedom. Such a call for rationally guided social-political change is highly pertinent to the current uprisings in the Arab world. However, the question remains: When al-Hakim wrote these articles, was he really foretelling an unforeseen future or is what has transpired a mere repetition of a stubbornly patriarchal community? Regardless, it seems that the translation of this book is timely, and it captures

many important dimensions of the prevalent spirit of change. This book should be of much interest to readers of Middle Eastern and Arab Studies. It adds depth to analysis of the cultural, political, and social dimensions that operate fluidly across Egypt, and which were integral to the Arab Spring.

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