

A CRITICAL STUDY OF TRADITIONAL
THEMES IN MODERN EGYPTIAN DRAMA

by

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To the memory of my parents, who
both departed while I was absent
from them, striving to fulfil one
of their greatest wishes.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF TRADITIONAL THEMES IN MODERN
EGYPTIAN DRAMA

ABSTRACT

There is a growing realization that drama, since it first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century in Arabic literature as an imported genre from the West, has come a long way to identify itself with the past cultural tradition of the Arabs. The aim of this thesis is to examine the rise of traditional themes which over the years have come to constitute an important part of modern Egyptian drama. In order to explain this process and its manifold phases of development the study has been projected in eight chapters.

The first two chapters provide the general background to this thesis. Firstly, I deal with the dramatic elements in the literary tradition to be found in the maqāmāt and shadow plays in the heritage of Arabic drama in Egypt. Secondly, I present a general view of Modern Arabic literature, during the revivalist movement that was motivated by political and national considerations.

Against this setting, I have dealt with the appearance of drama and the pioneering efforts made to establish it on the firm ground of tradition as well as the reasons for doing so. This early phase reached its climax in

the poetic drama of the important poet Ahmad Shawqī, whose contribution as a dramatist has been evaluated through a critical analysis of one of his best dramatic works. It emerges from this study that Shawqī represents the natural mid-way link between the early attempts and later phase of the full flowering of Arabic drama.

In the fourth chapter I have focussed my attention on Tawfiq al-Hakīm as the dominant figure in Arabic drama up to now. Three major plays have been examined thoroughly in order to trace the influence of the Arab-Islamic tradition upon his drama, and to stress the natural and artistic fusion of certain elements blended from two seemingly incompatible cultures: the Occidental and the Oriental.

The fifth chapter is concerned with an evaluation of the changes that occurred in modern Arabic poetry in order to meet the needs of drama. This is followed by two chapters which trace the impact of tradition on the themes of Arabic verse drama. The first deals with the Sufi tradition as revealed in one of the plays of Salāh 'Abd al-Sabūr, a prominent poet of the new movement of Arabic poetry. The second shows how a traditional historical narrative serves the theme of rebellion in one of the plays of 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sharqāwī, a writer with socialist affiliations.

Finally, Chapter Eight provides a critical assessment of the works studied above, and a discussion of some of

the major problems facing Arabic drama in Egypt today. To this has been added an Appendix containing the resolutions and recommendations of The Arabic Theatre Conference, held in Damascus in 1973, under the auspices of the Organization of Education, Culture and Sciences, of The Arab League.

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INTRODUCTION

As Arabic drama is one of the most recent literary genres, as well as one of Western origin, one would not have expected the Arab-Islamic cultural heritage to have contributed so much to its formation and evolution. But as this study seeks to show, the Arab-Islamic tradition has been a major factor in establishing and enriching drama in Egypt right from the beginning. This development is now considered not only a great achievement in modern Arabic literature, but in the history of Arabic literature as a whole.

What prompted me, in the first place, to choose this topic was the fact that my Masters Degree, which I did at Cairo University, was on ^{Arabic} Andalusian poetry. Studying this and other similar aspects of Arabic cultural tradition since I was an undergraduate, led me to see the wealth, diversity and potential role such tradition would play in modern Arabic literature.

My research has been concerned only with the study of the influence of the formal, classical tradition on modern Arabic drama in Egypt. By the formal tradition I mean all classical works written in Arabic that represent particular literary aspects of the Arab-Islamic heritage. These include, for instance, historical, mystical, literary and religious themes and narratives that form a unifying force in this culture.

By definition, therefore, Alf Layla wa Layla lies beyond the scope of this study even though it has had an important impact on Arabic drama from the very beginning. Moreover, Alf Layla wa Layla is generally considered part of popular tradition, and the influence of popular tradition on Arabic prose drama in Egypt has already been the subject of research in the form of a Ph.D. thesis by Dr. Fā'iq Muṣṭafā Aḥmad (published in Baghdad, 1980).

Another reason for confining my study to the impact of the formal tradition on modern Arabic drama in Egypt, is because existing works which deal with drama in Egypt do not emphasize adequately the importance of this. These include otherwise excellent studies such as Dr. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn al-Ḥajjājī's Al-Ustūra fī al-masrah al-miṣrī al-mu^cāṣir (Myth in Contemporary Egyptian Drama, Cairo 1975), and Dr. Aḥmad Etman's Al-Maṣādir al-Kilāsīkiyya li-masrah al-Ḥakīm (Classical Sources of Ḥakīm's Drama, Cairo 1978).

There are several reasons why contemporary scholars have not paid sufficient attention to studying in depth the influence of the Arab-Islamic tradition on modern Arabic drama. This could be due to their lack of specialization and deep understanding of the classical Arabic tradition. On the other hand, it may have been due to a longstanding misconception of the relation between Arabic tradition and drama. They probably considered that a Western form such as drama could not be reconciled with a tradition from which it was absent.

Furthermore, it should also be pointed out that there are well-known Egyptian playwrights, such as Yūsuf Idrīs and Nu^cmān ^cĀshūr, who have not been influenced by formal tradition in their plays. Their main pre-occupation so far, has been with writing plays and comedies on social and realistic subjects which are commercially successful. In addition, they have adhered to the use of Egyptian colloquial in their plays which conflicts with traditional themes and narratives. By adopting this approach their works have become dated and confined only to the social environment in which they were written. In contrast, those playwrights who have been influenced by and associated themselves with the formal tradition, have produced works that were topical, timeless and more enduring in the history of modern Arabic literature.

Although many dramatic works by ^cA.A. Bākathīr have been greatly influenced by the Arab-Islamic tradition, these have been adequately studied by M.A. Tawfīq in his Ph.D. Thesis entitled ^cAlī Ahmad Bākathīr: a Study of Islamic Commitment in Modern Arabic Literature (Manchester University, 1980). Instead I have focussed my attention on the drama of Tawfīq al-Hakīm as he is not only the most outstanding playwright ever in Arabic drama, but also because of both his acute awareness of the Arab-Islamic tradition and his great knowledge of European drama. Moreover, he is the most influential figure in

the developing and shaping of the various trends in modern Arabic drama through his tremendous creative works.

With regard to the method of study employed in this thesis, I have chosen to concentrate in depth on a few, representative works rather than tackle broadly a larger number. In the plays I have selected, I have traced the influence of the classical tradition in detail and have consulted many classical sources ranging from religious and mystical, to historical and literary. This task has long been neglected and I consider myself fortunate to have made this modest contribution. One of the most exciting parts of my research was investigating the fusion of Arab-Islamic classical traditions on the one hand, and modern Western drama on the other. This fusion is apparent in the integration of classical material with Western dramatic forms. However, I would also like to stress that this process occurred naturally, thus showing the relevance and adaptability of the classical tradition to modern requirements. This may seem unusual given the fact that drama - as we know it now - did not exist in Arabic literature until the mid-nineteenth century.

The plan I have adopted consists of dealing (in the first chapter) with the dramatic elements contained in the Classical tradition, whether formal or popular, in order to show that these elements- namely the maqāmāt and shadow plays - paved the way for the grafting of Western

dramatic forms onto Arabic literature. The chapter also emphasizes that drama is a Western genre which was adopted because existing elements were insufficient on their own, to produce a major literary genre of this nature.

In the second chapter I have given an overall view of modern Arabic literature and the beginning of the revival movement. This covers the revival of modern Arabic poetry led by al-Bārūdī and the publication of classical works which coincided with the appearance of drama. Thus we find that the pioneers of Arabic drama came into direct contact with these classical sources. Furthermore, because of the desire to establish the new genre in an Arab milieu and to win public acceptance, early Arabic drama had to rely on familiar material from Arabic culture. So far as national feeling is concerned, writing historical plays which deal with the heroes of the Islamic past was an answer to the political challenge of the turbulent age.

The third chapter deals with Shawqī as a clear embodiment of this new orientation not only in poetry but also in drama. I have studied thoroughly Majnūn Layla in order to show Shawqī as a dramatist and to assess his contribution to Arabic verse drama. It became clear that, although this trend reflected a superficial relation between Arab playwrights and their classical tradition, the fact remains that their contribution cannot be ignored, as they deepened the following generation's awareness of their own culture, and how they could benefit from it.

With regard to Shawqī it is not surprising that he should have been preoccupied by tradition, as he was himself a talented traditionalist. But what is unusual is that playwrights such as Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, Ṣalāḥ Ḥabīb al-Ṣabūr and Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī should have endeavoured to make full use of tradition in drama. Ḥakīm, in spite of absorption of Western culture, has managed to reconcile Western and Eastern mentalities through the channels of drama. Ṣabūr, in spite of being one of the main leaders of the revolt against Arabic tradition in prosody, and of having been strongly influenced by T.S. Eliot in his works, strengthened his ties with tradition in his poetry and his drama. Finally Sharqāwī, a writer of socialist affiliations who adopted revolutionary ideas in his works, succeeded in linking these ideas with corresponding aspects of Islamic tradition.

In the light of these unusual phenomena, the following chapters investigate the impact of tradition upon the works of these three playwrights.

The fourth chapter is devoted exclusively to a discussion of three works by Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm which represent three distinct themes entirely dependent on the classical Arab-Islamic tradition. His use of such sources in these works reflects the diversity of his reading and his awareness of the potentialities of the Islamic intellectual heritage. In addition, the chapter brings out the fusion of his philosophical concepts with

traditional themes, and also provides a critical analysis of them from a dramatic point of view. The result is a reflection of Ḥakīm's steady development, as well as the major impact he had made on his contemporaries and successors.

Chapter Five concentrates on the efforts made to reform Arabic poetry in order to fulfil the requirements of drama. In this connection the Arabic tradition has been a major source of inspiration for bringing about these changes. Again, Bākathīr's pioneering experiments in Arabic prosody and verse drama were an important factor in directing the new movement of Arabic poetry. The chapter considers this movement as an addition to the poetic tradition of the Arabs rather than as a revolt against it.

Chapters Six and Seven deal with two important verse drams by Ṣalāḥ ḌAbd al-Ṣabūr and ḌAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī. These two works draw upon mystical and historical sources respectively, to show the dilemma and plight of the modern artist. Tradition has provided the dramatic theme for both plays so as to reflect the political preoccupation of the Egyptian people in general, and of the intellectuals in particular. The use of tradition as a mask for launching a political assault against an oppressive regime, and as an expression of dissatisfaction with prevailing political and social circumstances in Egypt, has proved its relevance to

modern needs. The investigation of contemporary verse drama demonstrates that - while being appealing to the general public - it is also up to the standards of high quality theatre. Furthermore, drawing on the Arab-Islamic tradition has given it a new and distinctive dimension both artistically and nationally.

In the above-mentioned chapters I have presented a brief account of each playwright concerned, how his works developed, and his approach to tradition. The conclusion that may be drawn from these accounts is that the writers share a common view regarding the importance and relevance of tradition to the maturity of modern Arabic literature.

The final chapter contains a critical assessment of the artistic use of traditional material in contemporary drama, and its manifold phases of development over the years. The chapter also provides a discussion of the calls for creating a purely Egyptian dramatic form, in contrast to the imported one. This study tries to prove that there is no need to have an entirely local form, so long as the existing one is suitably adapted to meet our literary requirements. Nor is there any contradiction in using a Western form of drama so long as the originality of the Arab-Islamic cultural heritage prevails. I have also considered in this chapter the problems of staging some of these works, and have shown that the reasons for these difficulties were neither inherent in the plays themselves nor in tradition, but

lay in the general circumstances of the theatre world in Egypt.

There is also the controversial question of whether Classical or colloquial Arabic should be used. This has been adequately resolved in the works studied here. By insisting on the use of Classical Arabic in their plays, the writers under discussion have achieved an overall originality. This has been done through treating an original content in an original language, which in this case is sound literary Arabic.

In 1973 a conference was held in Damascus to review the achievements of the Arabic theatre. It put forward plans and recommendations that closely conform with most of the conclusions reached in this study. A copy of these resolutions can be found at the end of my thesis.

I hope my research will contribute, at least in part, to the progress and promotion of Arabic drama. I also hope that it will prove to be a starting point for further personal investigation into the relation between the modern Arab playwright and the Classical tradition.

CHAPTER I

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA IN CLASSICAL TRADITION:

The Role of Maqāmāt and Shadow Plays
in the Heritage of Egyptian Drama

Many scholars have come to the conclusion that classical Arabic literature contains some dramatic elements.⁽¹⁾ These elements can be found in classical works like the maqāmāt of al-Hamadhānī (358-98, 967-1008) and al-Ḥarīrī (446-516, 1054-1122) and in shadow plays.

The significance of the maqāmāt in this respect is that they are based on two main characters from beginning to end. Firstly, there is the hero whose adventures and tricks are due to his eloquence, quick wit, and deceit. These characteristics enable him to free himself from unpleasant situations. Secondly, there is the narrator who follows the hero everywhere in order to reveal his tricks and relate anecdotes about him.

Obviously, entertainment was the main aim in composing the maqāmāt, but the fact remains that they contain a considerable amount of social criticism. Moreover, some of the maqāmāt are skilfully composed in a way which includes "embryonic plays that could have been developed into theatrical performances once acting had been allowed."⁽²⁾

(1) See for example:

^CAlī al-Rā'ī: funūn al-Kūmīdiyā min Khayāl al-Zill ilā Najīb al-Rihānī, Cairo, 1971; passim;

M. Rushdī Hasan: āthār al-maqāmah fi nash'at al-qisṣah al-miṣriyah al-ḥadīthah, Cairo, 1974; passim;

M. Yūsuf Najm: al-qisṣah fi al-adab al-^Carabī al-Ḥadīth, 1870-1914, Beirut, 1966, passim.

(2) al-Rā'ī: op.cit., p.48.

The prohibition of acting on religious grounds could not have been the case because the Arabs have perpetrated things that are entirely forbidden and have openly spoken of them in their poetry. Furthermore there is evidence that the Arabs became acquainted with acting as early as the third century of the Hijra, when the Shiites re-enacted the tragic death of al-Husayn.⁽¹⁾

But since the Arabs lacked any knowledge of Greek drama and showed no dramatic awareness, and since they had been infatuated by lyrical poetry one would not have expected further development. Even when they translated Aristotle's book Poetics, which analyses the function and structural principles of tragedy and comedy, they were misled by the title to the extent that they correlated its contents to Arabic poetry.⁽²⁾ Had they understood the book, as they did other works, it might have radically changed the course of Arabic literature.

In this respect one would agree with T.S. Eliot that the theatre is "a gift which has not been vouchsafed to every race, even of the highest culture. It has been given

(1) For details see:

^cAlī al-Zubaydī: al-masrahiyah al-^carabiyah fi al-Iraq, Cairo, 1967, pp.11-12.

^cUmar al-Dusūqi: al-masrahiyah, 3rd edition, Cairo, n.d., pp.15-16.

(2) ^cAbdul-Rahman Badawī: Aristotālis, fann al-Shi^cr, Cairo, 1953, pp.55-6.

Muhammad S. Sālim: talkhīs kitāb Aristotle fi al-Shi^cr, Cairo, 1971, p. 56, p.73.

to the Hindus, the Japanese, the Greeks, the English, the French, and the Spanish at moments; in less measure to the Teutons and Scandinavians".⁽¹⁾ Indeed it was not given to the Arabs at the height of their culture.

The maqāmāt failed to lead to any dramatic development but this was not because of "religious objection to the portrayal or realistic representation of life or the human form";⁽²⁾ such an explanation has been suggested because of the fact that Poetics stressed that drama was the imitation of human action and not merely a realistic representation of it.

Instead there are two other important reasons behind the absence of dramatic development. Firstly, within the maqāmāt itself, an ornate and elevated style and rhymed prose are essential features. This pompous language casts doubts on the maqāmāt's ability to penetrate deeply in every-day life or to be comprehensible to all. Secondly, the period following the creation of the maqāmāt is marked in Arabic literary history as a period of decline in cultural activities. If it had emerged in the second century of the Hijra for instance, as a critic rightly points out, "it would indeed have made the desired progress

(1) T.S. Eliot: Selected Essays, London, 1976, p.70.

(2) W.J. Prendergast: The Maqāmāt of Badī^c al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, London, 1973, p.15.

given an appropriate environment". (1)

One is inclined to admit here that the maqāmāt, as a new genre, represents a turning point in classical Arabic literature for one reason that the Arabic heritage which had reached it was full of casual tales and stories without any significant technique, "yet they are not lacking in simplicity, realism, and vitality". (2) But it is in the maqāmāt itself that such tales and stories show a higher technique, a technique which adapts some dramatic elements in dealing with a unified subject and in employing a degree of character-analysis through the whole work.

Although imitations of the maqāmāt have been numerous, nevertheless, they have continued in the same way, employing the same method, and using the same high-flown language which was composed to be read by a certain class of society and which held no interest for ordinary people. These points, in addition to the decline in cultural activities, as mentioned above, seem to have made the people seek other means of entertainment. This was particularly so when one bears in mind that the social climate was less restricted than it had been before or at least the time was ripe to

(1) F. Abu'l-Su'ūd: al-qāṣaṣ fī al-adabayn al-ʿarabī wa'l-īnglīzī, al-Risāla, Vol. I, 198, 1937, pp.651-4.

(2) M. Jamīl Sultān: Fann al-qīṣṣah wa'l-maqāmah, Beirut, 1967, p.18. Even in the Qur'ān itself there are many historical events related in story-style, besides the sura called "al-Qaṣaṣ" (The Story).

concede to some kind of foreign influence, as we shall see with the shadow theatre.

The shadow theatre had long been a tradition in the Far East, namely in China and Java. However, in spite of the close links between the West and East of the Muslim world, it is difficult to explain the absence of this art in the Middle East. The Mongols "if not the very first to pass it on from the Far East to the Islamic world were, at any rate, important transmitters".⁽¹⁾

It seems that a good balance had been maintained in Egypt between the religious requirements and the new ideas which occurred in cultural movements. For Egypt was the first to accept the shadow theatre as a practical medium which was acceptable to all modes of thought without upsetting the balance. It was in mediaeval Egypt that the shadow theatre was developed and given a local touch and the flavour of her people's nature. In general, the shadow theatre was known during the Mameluke period and "it had a widespread effect among the people, who took it as a means of entertainment and mockery as well as a satirical way of relieving their worries".⁽²⁾

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- (1) J.M. Landau: 'Shadow Play in The Near East', from EDOTH, Vol. III, no.1-2, Jerusalem, p.172.
- (2) M. Zaghālūl Sallām: al-Adab fī al-^caṣr al-mamlūkī, Cairo, 1971, I, p.291.

Encouraged by these circumstances Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Dānyāl (646-711/ 1248-1311), an Iraqi who lived in Egypt, was the first to approach the field of real drama.

While ibn Dānyāl himself was a great admirer of the maqāmāt in general and al-Ḥarīrī's in particular, he was also a man of considerable artistic sensitivity. He was a poet who devoted most of his ability to depicting the daily life of his time, as it was lived by ordinary people.⁽¹⁾ He intelligently noticed the failure of the maqāmāt to be transposed as live shows and the need felt by the masses for a popular kind of entertainment. Therefore he set himself to write his bābāt or plays.⁽²⁾

Three plays were the outcome of his attempt: the first play "Ṭayf al-Khayāl" is about a penniless soldier called Prince Wiṣāl who wishes to get married since he has become fed up with the outrageous and sinful life he has been leading. So he asks his companion, Ṭayf al-Khayāl, to help him find the right woman through 'Umm Rashīd, the match-maker (and a pander in the meantime). The latter suggests a divorced woman whom she describes as "the brightest sun". Wiṣāl agrees and the ceremony takes place. When he lifts the veil from his bride's face he is

(1) Ibid., II, p.168.

(2) Published by Ibrāhīm Hamādah under the title: Khayāl al-Zill wa-tamthīliyyāt Ibn Dānyāl, Cairo, 1963.

confronted by a monster. Wisāl faints from the unexpected disaster and threatens to take his revenge on the match-maker. But when he learns of her death, he decides to atone for his sins by making the Pilgrimage.

The second play "Ajīb wa-Gharīb" starts in a marketplace with Gharīb, a descendant of a noble Persian family known to the Arabs as Banū Sāsān. Gharīb recalls the good old days of his past family, showing tricks he uses in order to make his living. Other tradesmen also appear to display their exotic wares.

The play reviews quite a number of figures derived from life, representing various types of professions in a way that reminds us of the maqāmāt's heroes. There is no action in this play and the author freely approaches life from a broader perspective.

The third play "al-Mutayyam" deals with the love-affair of the man in the title-role. It is not platonic love as we know in some classical works, but vulgar experiences of illicit love related in erotic songs. Again this play illustrates popular entertainments such as cock-fights and ram-fights, besides the social vices which were prevalent at the time.

To indicate the importance of Ibn Dānyāl's plays, it is necessary to sum up their dramatic features as can be seen from the summary above.

The shadow plays are based entirely on scenes taken from real life in order to be performed before an audience, a fact that is stressed by the author himself in the prologue.⁽¹⁾ To serve this purpose he took "the elaborately pictured life"⁽²⁾ of the market, for instance, as a setting for his second play. What makes Ibn Dānyāl's plays so highly distinguished in classical literature is their ability to communicate easily with the lower classes in society, while other works, such as maqāmāt, were unable to do so. They are, by any account, a product of their time, where we can catch a glimpse of the way of life in mediaeval Egypt just as we can still see some of its reflections in modern Egypt.

In addition to this, there are political undertones and satirical remarks made to protest against the administration of Sultan Baybars (659-76, 1260-77).⁽³⁾ In spite of their excessiveness or, as a scholar puts it, their "uninhibited bawdiness",⁽⁴⁾ the plays, nonetheless, are "very lively and colourful pieces and, for their time, rather daring social and political satire".⁽⁵⁾

In order to perform the plays before an audience, the language must not be as lofty as that of the maqāmāt,

(1) Ibid., p.144.

(2) Landau, op.cit., p.169.

(3) A. Rushdī Salīh: al-Masrah al-^cArabī, Cairo, 1972, p.31.

(4) Farouk Abdel-Wahab: Modern Egyptian Drama, Chicago, 1974, p.16.

(5) Ibid., p.16.

and dialogue should vary from character to character according to his social and cultural status. In this connection Ibn Dānyāl turned skilfully to popular sources so as to bring out their rich expressions and folk-songs, and write his plays in a language compounded of classical and colloquial Arabic.

However, he could not resist the temptation of using rhymed prose which was common in all inherited writings at that time and which must have restricted his ability to tackle the situation deeply or to take full advantage of the popular sources. In the meantime his language had unfortunately declined in many parts connected with erotic and vulgar scenes and these had to be omitted by the publisher.⁽¹⁾

Having established its roots in Egyptian soil, the shadow theatre spread westwards to North Africa and northwards to Syria and Turkey. Sultan Salim I, who incorporated Egypt into the Ottoman empire in 1517, watched a performance of a shadow play representing the hanging of the last Mameluke sultan and took so much delight in the performance that he asked a troupe of players to come to Istanbul, so his son could watch it.⁽²⁾ It was, in fact,

(1) I. Hamādah: op.cit., p.129.

(2) Ibn 'Iyās: badā'i al-Zuhūr, Cairo, 1312 AH, III, p.125; Landau: op.cit., p.164; Metin And: A History of Theatre and Popular Entertainment in Turkey, Ankara, 1964, p.34; Hamādah: op.cit., p.62.

one of many incidents that have been mentioned in historical references about the Egyptian brain-drain to Turkey.

It is not within the scope of this study to trace the way by which the shadow theatre took the form of Karagöz in Turkey.⁽¹⁾ Nor are we able to search for its origin. The Karagöz is simply a Turkish version of the shadow theatre, no more no less.⁽²⁾ However, evidence of mutual cultural exchange would explain the appearance of the Turkish Karagöz in Egypt which later became a completely different Egyptian type of mime known as Arāgūz.

Finally, the shadow theatre has become a part of Arabic culture in general, and of Egyptian consciousness in particular. It can also be considered as a mere link between classical Arabic literature and modern drama. But, however important this link may be, the beginning of modern Egyptian drama, as we know it now, is due to Western influence.

Nevertheless the tradition deeply rooted in the Egyptian consciousness had paved the way for transition to the Western theatre. This may have been what Yūsuf 'Idrīs (1927-), a prominent Egyptian short story writer and playwright, had in mind when he published a series of three articles entitled 'Towards an Egyptian Theatre' in

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- (1) For details see: Metin And, op.cit., p.35; Landau, op.cit., pp.164-161.
 (2) Hamadah, op.cit., pp.62, 77.

the Cairo monthly Al-Kātib⁽¹⁾ and in an introduction to his play Al-Farāfir.⁽²⁾ In these articles,

"he blasted those who recognised only the European forms of drama or who believed that those were the universal forms, and that for an Egyptian or a Kenyan or a Vietnamese to write a play, all he had to do was to take the ready-made moulds fashioned in Europe and pour into them an Egyptian or a Kenyan or a Vietnamese content. All people, he argued, have always had one dramatic form or another, and he called for exploring those forms and experimenting with them in order to arrive at a genuine national theatre. In Egypt, Yusuf Idris called particularly for exploring such popular forms of drama as mimicry, araguz, the shadow play, and dervish dances, which he believed to be the genuine expression of the dramatic impulse of the people."⁽³⁾

Later, we shall discuss the impact of such calls on the creation of local dramatic forms. But it suffices here to point out that since its unexpected introduction to Arabic literature, through translation in 1847, drama has taken a significant and curious course. This shall be the subject of the following chapters.

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- (1) Issues 34, 35, 36, 1964.
(2) Published in Cairo, 1964.
(3) F. Abdel Wahab, op.cit., p.36.

CHAPTER II

A GENERAL VIEW OF MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE
IN EGYPT

Arab literary historians usually speak of Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1838-1904) as the man who started a new phase in modern Arabic poetry. Poetry, for long considered 'the record of the Arabs' and the genre which constitutes the largest portion of their literary heritage, had been in decline for a considerable length of time. Bārūdī, as a poet of outstanding personal qualities, refrained from following the way to which poetry had been diverted, and instead recalled the classical literature in its heyday during the Abbasid era as a means of providing a liberating movement in Arabic poetry. By imitating some of the outstanding poems in classical poetry, and by compiling a vast anthology from it, he drew attention to the importance of the Arabic literary heritage and "Arabic poetry once more brought to bear upon the serious business of life".(1)

These efforts might now seem to us naive and superficial, but they were at the time crucial in initiating the necessary impetus to modern Arabic poetry, setting it on the right path. Furthermore, the growing national feeling, in search of identity and originality, took refuge in the glorious period of the Arab and Islamic past against fierce attempts to alienate the Arab world, as "in such periods of deep dependence and surging hope, all men search

(1) M.M. Badawi: A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry, CUP, London, 1975, p.25.

the past of their people or their religion for inspiration"⁽¹⁾ and this in itself is enough to justify Bārūdī's attempt.

This new presentation of modern Arabic poetry was, in fact, achieved within a comprehensive cultural revival led by Muḥammad ^cAbduh (1845-1905) and his disciples. And once the example was set, the new generations of poets and writers, in returning to the classical Arabic heritage "discovered afresh an Arabic literary style which was simple and direct."⁽²⁾ Moreover, they laid their hands on abundant sources contained in their heritage that could provide them with materials for an entirely new literature. Among these writers, Aḥmad Shawqī (1868-1932) was the dominant figure not only because of his contribution to modern Arabic poetry, but also because of his introduction of poetic drama based on genuine Arabic and historical themes.

If we move to the field of the novel - the emergence of which was one of the results of Western impact - we come to the anonymous publication, in 1914, of the novel Zaynab. Although considered the first novel in the Arabic literature of Egypt, the appearance of this book did not hide the fact that its author, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal

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- (1) J.M. Landau: Studies in the Arab Theatre and Cinema, Philadelphia, 1958, p.115; also Ahmad Haykal: Tatawwur al-adab al-ḥadīth fī Miṣr; Cairo, 1971, p.141.
- (2) H.A.R. Gibb: Studies on the Civilization of Islam, London, 1962, p.26.

(1888-1956) acknowledged the importance of classical Arabic literature, the vigour of which, he said, is to be found in imaginative stories and narrative heroic poems that would only be written by artistic men of letters.⁽¹⁾ Although Haykal did not combine his theory with practice in this respect, we still see the enormous effect of Arabic Islamic history upon Jurjī Zaydān (1861-1914) for instance, in his series (Stories of the History of Islam).⁽²⁾ With the spread of Arab nationalism later on, the historical trend of the Egyptian novel flourished considerably.⁽³⁾ The result of these activities is seen in the large number of historical novels derived either from Arabic and Islamic themes or from themes in national history. It could be argued here that the subject-matter is not sufficient in itself to create a new literary genre, or even to develop a borrowed one, but one should take into consideration the turbulent nature of that period and the good quality of some of these works before making final judgement. Even at the worst, if the Arabs had lacked the Western concept of novel, one is inclined to agree with Maḥmūd Taymūr (1894-1973), a well-known Egyptian novelist, that they "would not have failed to initiate one based on the tradition of the Arabic literature whose rich stores

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- (1) M.H. Haykal: Thawrat al-'adab, Cairo, 1933, pp.80-1.
 (2) Riwāyāt tāriḫ al-islām, published by Dar al-Hilāl, Cairo.
 (3) H. Sakkūt: The Egyptian Novel and its Main Trends, Cairo, 1971, p.47.

of tales and myths could make a path for a new Arabic novel to emerge." (1)

The Beginning of Arabic Drama

In the early phase of Arabic theatre translations and adaptations dominated the scene because of the novelty of this art in Arabic literature on the one hand, and the lack of original playwriting on the other. Translations covered a wide range of European drama including the works of Molière, Corneille, Racine, Victor Hugo and Dumas from French; and Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw from English, (2) a fact which may indicate that these translations did not follow any particular planned course, but that, on the contrary, they were only guided "by the fame of an author or a play provided with an appropriate atmosphere to the Arabic taste." (3) However, in spite of being scrupulously chosen, the performances failed to attract audiences, either because of the shallow knowledge of the audience, or the unfamiliarity of the settings, names and events.

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- (1) M. Taymūr: 'al-qāṣaṣ fī 'adab al-ʿArab', in a collection of essays by different authors, entitled, fī 'l-adab al-ʿArabī 'l-ḥadīth, Beirut, 1957, p.20.
- (2) Saʿd H. Daghmān: al-'uṣūl al-tārīkhiyyah li-nash'at al-drāmā fī al-adab al-ʿArabī, Beirut, 1973, pp.211-47.
- (3) M.Y. Najm: al-masraḥiyyah fī al-adab al-ʿArabī al-ḥadīth, Beirut, 1956, p.195.

The next phase was the adaptation of plays to a more familiar environment by moving the scene from its original setting to, say, an Egyptian one in order to bridge the gap between drama and the public. The adaptors also used colloquial language and colloquial verse (Zajal) to give the adapted works local flavour and please their audiences. There is no doubt that these adaptations gained immensely in popularity by being transferred into the lilting and expressive Egyptian dialect rather than that of the originals. They were in general "well-done, and a tolerably Egyptian atmosphere was often successfully substituted for that of the original."⁽¹⁾ Among the adaptors one who represented an exception in this respect, was the Egyptian Muhammad ^oUthmān Jalāl (1829-98), whose adaptations of French comedies and tragedies were so remarkable that his versions of Molière's Les Femmes Savantes and Tartuffe (titled Shaykh Matlūf), though in Egyptian vernacular, are still intermittently performed on stage.

Although it has been suggested by various authorities that Marūn al-Naqqāsh (1817-55) the pioneer of the Arabic theatre, adapted his play Abū al-Hasan al-mughaffal from Molière's L'Etourdi, there are scholars who think otherwise. J.M. Landau argues that "al-Naqqāsh's comedy employs material from The Arabian Nights and is set in their spirit. Its theme is the jolly story of Abū al-Hasan, who became

(1) Nevill Barbour: 'The Arabic Theatre in Egypt', Bulletin of S.O.S., London, 1935-7, Vol. III, p.992.

caliph-for-a-day by Hārūn al-Rashīd's order and then started a series of misadventures when he was unable to readjust himself to his lowly status. This play should be considered as the first original Arabic drama in modern time."⁽¹⁾ Irrespective of whether al-Naqqāsh derived the subject-matter or merely the material from The Arabian Nights, the fact cannot be denied that we have here an early example of playwriting which takes the classical Arabic heritage into account, embodied, in this case, in the folk-tales. In their attempt to establish the theatre traditions, the pioneers of Arabic drama drew their materials from popular sources apparently for the following reasons. Firstly, other literary works were not available at that time, and even if they had been it might well have been a long time before they were explored and used. Secondly, materials from popular sources were, and still are, easy to handle in a light play and therefore would communicate themselves to the public, whose knowledge of the outline of the content might help in understanding and enjoying the performance. Thirdly, in al-Naqqāsh's case, the fact that he was a Maronite might have deterred him from portraying themes or characters of a sacred and sensitive nature that would upset the majority of his audience.

Unlike al-Naqqāsh, the Syrian Ahmad Abū-Khalīl al-Qabbānī (1842-1903) derived most of his plays from Arabic

(1) Studies in the Arab Theatre, pp.58-9; also Najm, op.cit., p.367.

and Islamic history as well as The Arabian Nights. As a musician he compounded songs and musical interludes with the actions of his plays. Yet he, like his predecessors, built his plays in the same pattern as those of the West, "and the only innovation he made was the creation of the Arabic historical play based on past Arabic and Islamic history as well as the Operetta."⁽¹⁾ It may be worth mentioning here that although he was an educated Sheikh, he nonetheless utilized a language that was a blend of classical and colloquial "in order to gain the acceptance of all social classes and please every taste."⁽²⁾

While translations and adaptations hardly met the public's need, a stream of playwriting began to appear in the arena, thanks to these pioneering efforts. So far as the national feeling is concerned, writing historical plays was the eloquent answer to the issues that had arisen at the beginning of the twentieth century. Equally, the playwright, like the poet, was confronted by a strong cultural and political challenge to his ability to survive, but unlike him he had a means of reaching a wider public. Furthermore, the Egyptian public's interest in their history created an opportunity for the flourishing of historical plays dealing with the heroes of the Islamic past.⁽³⁾ Thus the playwright sought past periods of

(1) Zakī Tulaymāt: 'al-masrah al^carabī fī al-qarn al-
^cishrīn', al-Hilāl, Cairo, Vol. 63, No. 1, p.181.

(2) N. Barbour, op.cit., p.186.

(3) Ibid.

glamour and splendour where tension and nostalgia could fully serve the actions and the plots, and therefore played on the public sentiment stirring up its feeling against any attempts at alienation. For instance, a theme such as Saladin which deals with his struggle to liberate Jerusalem from the Crusades, was favoured by authors and audience alike. A play first written in 1905 by Najīb al-Ḥaddād was performed many times by different theatrical troupes.⁽¹⁾ It was so popular that Farah Antūn wrote another version of it in 1914 entitled Salāḥ al-Dīn wa Mamlakat Ūrshalīm (Saladin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem) which was variously put on stage with leading actors like Salāmah Ḥijāzī and Jūrj Abyad in the title-role. The play aimed at exposing the conflict between the aggressive West and the peaceable East displaying the threatening danger of the West to such an extent that "government censorship forced its author to make alterations in some parts of it."⁽²⁾

Arabic drama, being firmly entrenched in the classical Arabic milieu seems to have already attracted even conservative poets like, for instance, Muḥammad ^cAbd al-Muṭṭalib (1870-1931) who in collaboration with his friend Muḥammad Mar^cī wrote several historical plays. As expected, the purpose of these plays was obviously

(1) ^cAbd-Raḥmān Ṣidqī: "al-masrah al-'arabī", al-Hilāl, Cairo, Vol. 67, No. 4, pp.75-6.

(2) Najm, op.cit., p.329, and the footnote (34).

didactic and aimed at teaching students of preparatory schools the literary history of the Arabs as a part of their curriculum.⁽¹⁾ These plays therefore do not pay any attention to theatrical technique; nor do they make any alterations of the historical content and material used, but only concentrate on the merits of high-flown language interwoven with rhymed prose. However, the fact remains that the artist's awareness of his past was there, and all it needed was a penetrating understanding of the requirements of the dramatic art.

From this introduction we may sum up the main features of Arabic drama in Egypt during its early stage as follows:

Firstly, the past history of the Arabs has been the focus of attention of many playwrights not only because of national interest but also because of the richness and familiarity of the past. This was made possible by the publication of classical works and the movement of poetry which has already been mentioned.

Secondly, since the beginning of dramatic writing the question of which language the play should be written in has raised a problem which as yet has remained unsolved, and with which we shall be dealing in the course of this study.

(1) Najm, op.cit., p.321; also Dusūqī, op.cit., p.29.

Thirdly, due to public demand and taste, the theatre of that period was dominated by a musical element to the extent that, in order to gain success and popularity, the theatrical troupes employed singers and musicians and imposed spurious scenes on plays for the sake of singing. Ironically when, after the departure of the famous Egyptian singer Salāmah Hijāzī, an attempt was made in 1904-5 by Iskandar Farah to rid plays of their musical element and introduce plays purely for their own sake, "the innovation found little favour with the public."⁽¹⁾

(1) N. Barbour, op.cit., p.176.

CHAPTER III
SHAWQĪ AS A DRAMATIST

Many critics believed that Ahmad Shawqī (1868-1932) was not a natural dramatist; it cannot be denied, however, that many of those who have grown up with his poetry, cannot shake off their assumption that he was a great poet. In the opinion of these critics, who consider him a great poet, "the most striking feature of his style is his cunning use of the musical potentialities of the Arabic language... He was, in fact, greatly endowed with what Coleridge called 'the sense of musical delight'."⁽¹⁾ When he came to write verse drama, as the most celebrated Arab poet of his time, and in a language which had not been completely adapted to that kind of writing, he was criticised for being too lyrical and not dramatic enough. Tāhā Husayn was the first to pass this judgement on his ability to write verse drama. He says "Shawqī was undoubtedly an outstanding lyrical poet, who used lyricism in his drama to entertain and cheer the heart. Yet he dramatised nothing because dramatic art is not to be taken on the spur of the moment. It rather demands youth, study and extensive reading. Shawqī had wasted his effort and acute mind before he devoted himself to studying. His reading was insignificant, and therefore his drama was lifeless images, despite the fact that they were favoured by the public because of its wonderful lyricism."⁽²⁾ Much of this criticism is

(1) Badawī, op.cit., p.41; and Shawqī Dayf, Shawqī Shā^cir al-^casr al-^badīth, Cairo, 1952, p.48.

(2) Tāhā Husayn, Hāfiz wa Shawqī, Cairo, 1933, pp.221-2.

undoubtedly true, but only if we want to judge Shawqī's achievement in the light of Western literary standards and to ignore his 'sense of musical delight' and the mood of his audience, let alone the difficulties he had to face in adapting Arabic poetry, with its ancient rules, to a sophisticated genre like drama.

Shawqī had developed his knowledge of dramatic art, whilst studying law in Paris where he had done his utmost to learn about the current French drama which captured his imagination. Some aspects of this drama can be seen in his plays, especially those points connected with the action and the narrative which shall be discussed later on. Having established himself as the most prominent Arab poet of his time, he began to write verse drama which he had already tackled in Paris as early as 1893. He chose to write his plays in his own conventional way of understanding Arabic poetry. We could hardly have expected him to do otherwise, because any attempt to break the ancient rules of this poetry would indeed have angered the majority of his admirers. Furthermore, it was difficult for him to refine his dramatic sense in a relatively short time (he began in 1927 and died in 1932), especially when we take into account that dramatic criticism at that time was far from flourishing.

However, one important aspect of his work from the point of view of this thesis is the adaptation of all his tragedies from national and Arabic history. From the

history of Egypt he derived Maṣra^c Kilūbātra (The Fall of Cleopatra, 1927), Qambīz (Cambyses, 1931) and Alī Bayk al-Kabīr (Ali Bey the Great, 1932, revised version). From Arabic history he derived Majnūn Laylā (1931) and Aantara (1932). All these tragedies are in verse except for the Amīrat al-Andalus (1932) which he wrote in prose. The other element common to these tragedies is the idea of a basic conflict between one's own feelings and one's duty, whether towards country or social values. It was not "the lack of creative imagination and observance" that attracted Shawqī to history "where the playwright would find the elements of his play ready and available"⁽¹⁾ - a criticism which could equally apply to Shakespeare and other great playwrights. But it was the fact that he understood the concept of tragedy in the loose theatrical sense of romantic tragedy. It is worth remembering here that Arabic poetry in Egypt was going through a romantic phase which might have influenced Shawqī. Furthermore, there is evidence that Shawqī had become acquainted with Shakespeare's plays in Paris not only because of his poem on Shakespeare, but also because of his knowledge of the plots and the structures of some of his plays.⁽²⁾ Through this familiarity with the great Elizabethan playwright he must have learnt some conventions of Elizabethan tragedy whose

(1) M. Mandūr, al-masrah, Cairo, 1963, p.74.

(2) A. Hassān, Antūnū wa Kilūbātra, Cairo, 1972, pp.232-3.

"narrative might be historical. The reason was that tragedy would have a more powerful effect if the spectators were convinced that the story was not invented to improve them, but a true example."⁽¹⁾ In addition to this, Shawqī became more clearly aware of nationalist feelings during the last phase of his life. So much so that when he wrote his plays, his primary concern was to introduce more elaborate images taken from national and Arabic history. The kind of familiarity that these images have is not only "dependent on the plausibility of the incidents, but upon the fact that they are woven into the people's very ways of thinking and feeling."⁽²⁾

I have chosen to discuss Majnūn Laylā here, because it is not only the most popular of his plays, but also the most representative of his dramatic technique. Above all its theme is "very famous in Islamic literature; it has afforded inspiration to some of the most distinguished poets and artists of both Persia and India."⁽³⁾ The historical narrative of this play can be found in several classical Arabic works, the best known of which is Abū al-Faraj al-Asfahānī's Kitāb al-Aghānī.⁽⁴⁾

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- (1) M.C. Bradbrook, Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy, London, 1960, p.39.
 (2) Ibid., p.40.
 (3) A.J. Arberry, Preface to his translation of Majnūn Laylā, Cairo, 1933, p.7; on which I shall rely.
 (4) Cairo, 1928, Vol. II, pp.1-96.

The story, as related in this book, is a love romance between Qays of Banū 'Āmēr and his cousin Laylā since their childhood. When they grow up, the girls is kept at home. But Qays becomes impatient and celebrates his love for her in his verse:

"I became attached to Laylā when she was still an innocent maiden, the swelling of whose breasts was not yet apparent to others of her age.

We were two children who took the animals out to pasture; would that we had not grown till today and that those animals had not grown."(1)

According to the Bedouin code of honour this outward expression of love is an act of disgrace as a result of which Qays is forbidden to marry Laylā. In desperation he is said to have lost his sanity, the reason for which he is nicknamed al-majnūn, and chooses to live in the desert "isolated, naked"⁽²⁾ until he dies. In al-Aghani's version, Laylā is said to have been married to a rich man from Thaqīf, but she remains faithful to her first love until she dies.⁽³⁾

There is copious material and detail that constitute a rich source for the legend and which Shawqī was able to draw on for his play. He regarded the conflict created by the antagonism between love and tribal tradition on the one hand, and the life of a poet like himself on the other, as a kind of double fountain-head of inspiration. But instead of blending the two elements together, he was

(1) Ibid., p.11.

(2) Ibid., p.17.

(3) Ibid., p.56.

obviously fascinated by the hero's lyric poetry which he imitated brilliantly at the expense of satisfying the needs of the drama.

The play is in five acts. The action takes place in the Bedouin encampment of Banū 'Āmīr, on the caravan-route between Najd and Yathrib, in the desert, in a Jinn Village, in the Bedouin encampment of Banū Thaqīf, and closes at the burial ground of Banū 'Āmīr. The fact that Shawqī chose to dismiss classical rules relating to the so-called unities of time and place, may indicate his romantic tendency which he had developed in Paris. His admiration of the work of Victor Hugo in particular, who had died two years before his arrival, was so strong that he is said to have memorized Hugo's Les Légendes des Siècles.⁽¹⁾ It is worth mentioning that Hugo was a staunch advocate of romantic tragedy and the absolute freedom of the artist. He regarded the classical unities of time and place as "illogical in themselves, and disastrous in their results. Nothing has done so much to destroy the drama, to rob it of all action and all passion, as their observance."⁽²⁾ Thus Shawqī, having discarded unity of time and place as the romantics demand, had only the unity action to sustain and develop in the play.

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- (1) al-'Awadī al-wakīl, 'Athar al-thaqāfah al-gharbiyyah fī shi'ar Shawqī', al-Hilāl, Vol. 76, 11, p.189.
 (2) C.E. Vaughan, Types of Tragic Drama, London, 1908, p.237.

In the first act the action begins with an evening party held at the encampment of Banū 'Āmir, where we see young men and girls chatting and Laylā introducing Ibn Dharīh as the poet of Hijāz. During the course of conversation we learn that Laylā is suffering because of her love for Qays. She says,

"God knows the yearning hidden in my heart
For Qays. I am not less than Qays in yearning,
And his cup of desire has been my cup.
I am betwixt two fires: do not upbraid me,
But help me. I am jealous for my honour,
And would protect and guard the man I love..."(1)

When the party is over, Qays appears, accompanied by Ziyād his reciter. Qays, showing his desperate affection and craving, delivers one of his lyrical soliloquies, so fine that it was chosen by the famous Egyptian singer 'Abdul-Wahhāb for music:

"How still the night! It stirs within me yearning
And poetry. The desert is all night,
And love, and poetry. God, thou has filled
The heaven and earth with passion in this desert,
And I alone am laden with that passion..."(2)

Qays approaches Laylā's tent calling her name, but al-Madhī her father appears instead. Qays, confused, says that he has come to get light for the fire. When he is left alone with Laylā, they converse intimately until the fire burns his sleeves and he faints.

It must be pointed out that this act serves, to a considerable degree, to introduce the action without

(1) A. Shawqī, Majnūn Laylā, Cairo, n.d., pp.13-14.
(2) Ibid., p.17.

deviation, and to throw light on the characters and their temperament with reasonable economy in the use of digressions or soliloquies. Yet Shawqī's inclination to lyricism is evidently shown from the first appearance of his hero-poet, although he does not pursue it excessively in this act.

The action then moves¹ in the second act, to the desert, showing Qays, accompanied by the reciter of his poetry, wandering about ill and mad. We learn that he has not tasted any proper food for days. He refuses to eat the sheep from which the heart has been removed as prescribed by a diviner, on the basis that his own heart can never be cured "by that which has no heart."⁽¹⁾ It is in this act that we encounter Shawqī at his best as a lyrical poet who can bring out the musical potentialities of Arabic. The lyrical digressions embodied in the singing of the children and the camel-drivers of two caravans, one of which is al-Husayn's "Imam of all the Arabs, son of the Prophet",⁽²⁾ are striking examples. Of course, the nostalgic sentiment arising from this irrelevant incident can be understood for it shows Shawqī's religious feeling, but the unity of the action has also been violated. In fact the whole act does not serve the action at all except in one point when Ibn 'Awf, collector of charity-taxes in Hijāz, agrees to mediate between Qays and Laylā's father.

(1) Ibid., p.33.

(2) Ibid., p.38.

In the third act the action develops rapidly. Ibn 'Awf's mediation creates physical as well as moral tension among the characters involved. Physical tension is seen in the confrontation of the tribe's armed men, waiting to revenge their honour on Qays, and "the tribe at variance over this affair."⁽¹⁾ Shawqī gives too much space to such situations that offer a good opportunity for external description, while he hurries the action when it comes to moral or inner tension. For instance when Laylā is given the chance to choose between marrying Qays or Ward, she, without the slightest hesitation, chooses the latter. Nor is there any sign of conflict which would have been natural in a human predicament like this, and round which the whole drama is centred. The playwright should have provided the movement as well as the words, by which the inner feelings of his heroine could be revealed. It matters little, in this respect, what Laylā says in her soliloquy at the end of this act:

"O God, what have I said?...
 They counselled: would that I had seen more clearly,
 And ruled my reins! A little hour I yielded
 To my temptation, and, in my delirium,
 Have slain two hearts. Some devil worked this in me,
 And led my tongue. I made my little plan,
 And Fate made his: Fate rules the paths of man."⁽²⁾

The fourth act is in two scenes. The first takes place in a village of the Jinn where Qays, wandering about, meets his Ghost al-Amawī. There are a certain amount of

(1) Ibid., p.61.

(2) Ibid., p.73.

songs and happenings which seem to have no bearing whatsoever, either upon characters or the action, and which are included simply and solely for their effect on the imagination. The most famous instance of this, and perhaps the only certain and complete one, is the 'song of the Jinn',⁽¹⁾ and the dialogue between Qays and his Ghost:

"al-'Amwāī: Qays!
 Qays: Qays?
 Amawī: I am not Qays.
 Qays: Who then are you?
 Amawī: I said, I am his spirit.
 Qays: Qays is of Adam: you are not of Adam.
 'Amawī: I am the consciousness of 'Āmir's
 Qays... etc."⁽²⁾

It is obvious that neither action nor character develops here, and it does not need much reflection to show us that the unity of the work has been grievously violated by such a series of digressions. All they can do is convey to our imagination the ancient Arabic custom of believing that every poet had a spirit to inspire him.

Yet again, the second scene introduces an implausible event. Qays, after being guided by his Ghost to Laylā's new home, is received by her husband who, instead of getting angry, takes pity on him and leaves them to engage in passionate talk of their mutual longing. Such a liberal attitude contradicts what is known about the Arabic tradition of protecting honour. It is not the first time that Shawqī presented such timeless events which only

(1) Ibid., p.74.

(2) Ibid., p.74.

reflect modern preoccupations. We came across this in the first act with Laylā receiving and introducing a stranger to her friends at the party. This scene, however, hints at the culmination of real tragedy, upon which Shawqī should have concentrated:

"Laylā: Qays... we were both sacrificed,
Slain by our parents, smitten by the knife
Of habit and suspicion..." (1)

Finally in this act, Shawqī makes Laylā die before Qays, which contradicts historical fact, apparently because Qay's death afterwards would seem more logical or he might have been influenced by the end of 'Romeo and Juliet.'⁽²⁾

Shawqī devoted the last act of his play to the anticipated solution which is Qays's death. But in order to gratify his lyrical inclination he displays his full power as a poet in composing songs deliberately to be sung by al-Gharīd, the Hijāzī famous singer of the time, like the song called 'valley of death',⁽³⁾ or the elegies delivered by Ibn Dharīh and Qays at Laylā's grave:

"Weep now, mine eyes: ye tears, here may ye flow;
For here is Laylā's body, here her ashes,
Here is my last breath yielded to the soil..."⁽⁴⁾

Qays's Ghost appears at the closing moment of the play. Qays blames him for having masterminded the whole tragedy. He prostrates himself on the grave and dies too.

I have summarized the play act by act to stress the weaknesses occurring as a result of the playwright's

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- (1) Ibid., p.97.
 (2) Dusuqī, op.cit., p.427.
 (3) Ibid., p.113.
 (4) Ibid., p.119.

endeavour to make maximum use of the available materials. From this summary we notice that it was very difficult for Shawqī, and perhaps for any playwright, to keep the tension sustained for five acts, or to produce real continuity and development of the action. Thus he had to interrupt both the tension and the action with a series of digressions without which the play would have been better.

Still more noticeable, however, are the details of the old story which, as one critic points out "occupied Shawqī's mind and consequently limited his imagination. Thus, we are deprived of a good portrayal of the characters, or a deep analysis of the conflicting human feelings that would affect us through emotional participation."⁽¹⁾ But on the other hand, Shawqī, as a dramatist, could hardly have fitted all these ingredients into a strictly logical framework of events since they are confused and even contradictory. Furthermore, he was expected to supply so much more than a contemporary playwright, and to incorporate so much non-dramatic material into his play. There had to be songs and musical elements for the public's taste "who were used to seeing those kinds of operatic plays and primarily enjoyed singing and who were lacking the equipped critic, for the movement of criticism was just at the beginning when Shawqī wrote his plays. Had he lived a bit longer he might have changed his attitude."⁽²⁾

(1) M. Mandūr, Masrahiyyāt Shawqī, Cairo, 1971, p.93.

(2) M.H. Shawkat, al-masrahiyyah fī Shi'r Shawqī, Cairo, 1947, p.47.

The significance of Majnūn Laylā lies in the lyrical strain which runs through it and gives the dominant tone to the whole work. There are many episodes that bear witness to the playwright's infatuation with lyricism and music. I have counted at least eight situations in which the hero or his fellow poets appear,⁽¹⁾ and to which the essence of Shāwqī's experience, as a poet, not as a dramatist, has been given. To illustrate this, the following, which was put to music, may be suggestive:

"Hail to thee, hill of Tawbād! May you ever
 Prosper and guard the youth. In thee we fondled
 Affection in its crib, and gave it suck:
 Thou wast its nurse. There we urged on the sun,
 Towards its setting, and outstripped the dawn.
 Upon the slope we lived a time, and tended
 The people's flocks together; this same mound
 Was our youth's playground and our pasturage.
 How oft we built its pebbles into dwellings,
 Then turned away and blotted out the traces;
 In the pure sand we made pictures, but the wind
 Did not preserve them, nor the sand retain them.
 Laylā has ever in my eyes remained
 A child: since yesterday she has not grown
 More than a finger's length. How deaf the rocks,
 That they refuse to hear, when longing stirs me!
 I come to thee, and seek my vanished youth
 Whose days are gone and never will return.
 Life would be empty, but for one brief hour,
 And earth, but for one place."⁽²⁾

Such episodes and soliloquies impede the development of the characters, and sometimes "restrain the action, disrupt the organic unity and the dramatic impulse of the play."⁽³⁾

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- (1) Act I, p.17; II, 43; III, 49; IV, 98; V, 100, 114, 122.
 (2) Ibid., p.114.
 (3) M.G. Hilāl, fī al-naqd al-masrahī, Cairo, 1965, p.55.

Majnūn Laylā transfers lyrical material to a dramatic, basically romantic form, in which "the lyrical element is part and parcel of the dramatic structure; bone of its bone, and flesh of its flesh; in the strictest sense, the most dramatic thing in it; the element which, more than any other reveals the deepest springs of character and embodies the specifically tragic appeal to the imagination."⁽¹⁾ Sometimes it does so even in scenes coloured with glittering lyrical touches, where Shawqī varies poetic metres, or where he uses short ones in various rhymes dividing them among the characters. This in fact serves the function of both dramatic verse and the development of action. Moreover, it gives the play great musical variety and suits the dialogue.⁽²⁾ But unfortunately he could not use this on a large scale throughout the play, apparently for two reasons: firstly, because of his faithful imitation of Qays and secondly, because of the ^cUdhri poets whose spirit and mode can be clearly felt in his poetry as well as their actual lines which are incorporated and parenthesized into his work. Due to placing such restrictions upon himself, the slowness of the action and the loss of flexibility in the language are noticeable throughout the work. Perhaps also he feared making concessions to the requirements of dramatic verse that could have upset his admirers. In not doing so he

(1) Vaughan, op.cit., p.162.

(2) Hilāl, op.cit., p.53; Daif, op.cit., p.258.

maintained those traditions of Arabic poetry related to monorhyme and the unity of the line, which indeed dictate the meaning. However, dramatic poetry should in fact extend the range and power of the author's meaning, because poetry is there "to express and define patterns of thought and feeling otherwise inexpressible and indefinable."⁽¹⁾ If Shawqī had had the courage to brush aside those restraints, he would have turned the legend into "a tremendous human play similar to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet."⁽²⁾

Although Shawqī was capable of rendering immense services to Arabic poetry with regard to drama, he nonetheless lived on the past. The past was his sole resource on which he drew for the poetry and themes of his plays. He remained a traditionalist whose aim was to maintain the old established system of Arabic prosody and rhyme in a sophisticated genre like drama. In spite of the extended history of Arabic poetry, this system had never been tried before in dramatic writing. Thus, the fact that he was advancing in an unexplored field, relying only on his instinct as a poet, may give an idea of some of the hardships he had to bear. His plays, moreover, need to be seen in relation to their historical background, the artistic standards, the theatre of the time, and above all, the audience, because "in a social and historical context, the audience - any audience - is as important as

(1) J.L. Styan, The Elements of Drama, London, 1976, p.32.

(2) Mandūr, Masrahiyyat Shawqī, p.91.

the playwright however great."⁽¹⁾ And certainly the lyrical mood of Shawqī's audience played an indispensable role in forming his theatre, a reason that won it many admirers at the time.

As for the themes of his drama, his approach to some aspects of Arabic culture, of which he was well aware, was quite intentional. Not only did he sense the effect they would have on the sentiment of the public, but he also pointed the way to new uses of materials contained in this culture which had already begun to attract writers and readers alike.

In a meeting of the Committee formed by The Egyptian Ministry of Education to enhance the theatre's activities, Shawqī was the representative of the Council of Elders. He, as 'Aqqād the representative of the Lower House recalls, stated his views, giving special attention to the theme of a play before anything else, and favouring historical and social themes to other themes.⁽²⁾

But Shawqī seems to have been shackled to spheres surrounding the themes of his plays as though he were writing for an age other than his own, or as if his return to the past were merely to express it in some kind of new form. In no way do we mean to criticise the past whose rich sources were the fountains of inspiration for him and others,

(1) J.L. Styan, Drama, Stage and Audience, London, CUP, 1975, p.6.

(2) 'Aqqād: Dīn wa-fann wa-falsafah, Cairo, n.d., p.351.

but rather Shawqī himself, who could not make the most of it when he had the means to do so.

For more than ten years after Shawqī's death, the field of verse drama remained almost vacant until the appearance of 'Azīz Abāza (1898-1973), another traditionalist. If Shawqī was dominated by the past, to which he was equal, 'Azīz Abāza was entirely obsessed by Shawqī. His theatre, in particular, is deeply indebted to Shawqī's without which it could hardly have been conceived. This fact was explicitly admitted by Abāza himself in an interview. When he was asked whether there were any great contemporary Arab poets, he retorted "Shawqī was and died." (1)

Abāza should have benefited from the criticism that was directed against Shawqī's theatre, as would be expected in the history of literatures. But unfortunately his admiration and unflagging imitation of Shawqī led him to tackle historical themes parallel to that of his predecessor. So much so that when Abāza dedicated the preface of his play Shajarat al-Dur (1951) to Shawqī "as a touch of his guidance and a breath of his dictation...", a critic ridiculed it saying "he could have put the same label on all his previous plays as being a touch of Shawqī's guidance..." (2)

In the final analysis, neither of them could fully understand the nature of dramatic poetry in which the voice

(1) Fu'ād Dawwārah, 'Asharat Udabā' yatahaddathūn, Cairo, 1965, p.164.

(2) Mandūr, al-masrah, op.cit., p.94.

of the poet falls silent behind that of the personages. As lyrical poets, they tend to be verbally indulgent writing long descriptive passages, or, at best, dramatic poems rather than drama. But again, as has been mentioned before, this phenomenon must be seen in relation to the nature of their audiences, because after all, this very nature is "for the dramatist the most important convention within which he must work."⁽¹⁾ From the artistic point of view, however, it remains emphatically clear that the obsession with lyrical poetry affects characterization and action which are considered in drama the strongest immediate appeal to the general public. The characters in their drama are made to live at the surface of language, and are shown in a manner which marks a transition from allegory to drama, whereas the action, on the other hand, is one of successive ornamentations rather than direct progress. And for all their emotion and commitment to lyrical poetry, Shawqī and Abāza remain naive and immature dramatists.

However, one must hasten to add that this is not an attempt to belittle the endeavour of both poets, particularly Shawqī's, as the earliest dramatists of Arabic poetic drama. On the contrary it was due to Shawqī's high standing as a poet, that verse drama was made possible for the next generation of poets. Nor does one deny their remarkable accomplishment of drawing upon scenes from Arabic

(1) W.S. Maugham, The Summing Up, London, 1938, p.134.

and Islamic culture for this new art and thereby bringing it to life in people's consciousness. By linking the people to their cultural heritage through the channels of theatre, no matter how superficially, the newly Arabic dramatic art has made great strides towards achieving recognition and acceptance all over the Arab world.

CHAPTER IV
TRADITION IN TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM'S DRAMA

A Playwright in the Making

Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898/-) began his career as a popular playwright, engaging himself in the activities of the contemporary theatre in Egypt, particularly the 'Ukashah' Company, a troupe with some national stature because of its observance of the public taste, and whose productions aimed at entertaining by giving music and song a prominent place. But he did not emerge as a potentially intellectual playwright until he had returned from Paris in 1928, a return which marked the borderline between "the vaudeville and operetta that had dominated the Egyptian theatre and the intellectual drama as a worthy literary and artistic genre which can be read as literature."⁽¹⁾ Never before him had the Arabic prose theatre in Egypt been in accord with the traditions of the world stage. It was, as we have already seen above, either dependent on translation and adaptation of foreign plays or merely inclined to commercialism and entertainment. Not only did he win respect for the still despised art of drama by writing sufficiently good plays, but he also "attempted to render the crisis of the human race as did Pirandello, Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, Cocteau and Anouilh."⁽²⁾

(1) A. al-Rā'ī, Tawfiq al-Hakim (Cairo 1969), p.31.

(2) N. Tomiche, "Un Dramaturge Égyptien, Tawfiq al-Hakim et L'Avant Garde," Revue de la littérature comparée, Paris 1971, p.542.

With Hakīm we have an artist who throughout his life has been striving to find new means of expression, but whenever he causes a mild stir he suddenly turns away in pursuit of a yet newer idea.

In his introduction to al-Masrah al-Munawwa' (1956), he makes a statement which throws an interesting light on the dilemma he had to suffer:

"Any contemporary playwright, belonging to any European literature, has two thousand years of deeply-rooted traditions to work on. But as far as drama is concerned, the traditions of Arabic language and literature are insufficient and limited. It has been a relatively short time since Arabic literature embraced drama as a literary form... and since we began to translate from world drama, old and new, into Arabic. Arab contemporary playwrights, hence, had to advance from a void or, at best, from insignificant traditions which had not yet been established in his language. He has to bridge an enormous gap which should have been bridged by the efforts of many preceding generations. That is why I plunge into every direction."(1)

The outcome of this active life of playwriting was two big volumes of short plays, Plays of Social Life (1950) and Variety in Theatre (1956), each containing 21 plays, as well as over 25 plays published intermittently over the past four decades, which deal with various social and philosophical problems. The philosophical trend covers about half of these plays, a fact which indicates the intellectual nature of Hakīm and which was a result

(1) Cairo, 1956, pp. 3-5

of his inclination to retreat from society. Even in some of his social plays he treats every-day issues in such a way that one cannot help wondering whether he has ever been in contact with the public at large. He states categorically, "I set up my theatre inside my mind, and I make the actors' thoughts moving freely amidst ideas, wearing the costumes of symbols. In fact, I still retain the spirit of the coup de théâtre, but the dramatic surprises are no longer in the plot so much as in the thought."⁽¹⁾ While this shows how far Hakīm was prepared to go, it must be emphasised here that the invasion of the cinema was quite a blow to the growing theatre in Egypt which caused many to flee and join the thriving art of motion pictures, as indeed happened in twentieth-century Europe when many felt that the future belonged to the cinema "which in many respects could carry out the aims of certain types of dramatic performance much more fully than the theatre."⁽²⁾ It therefore enhanced his determination to make his drama more readable by "furnishing his theatre at once between the two covers of a book."⁽³⁾

Hakīm acquired the western forms of drama, especially those of Pirandello, Ibsen and Shaw from his frequent visits to the live stage in Paris. But in

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- (1) Introduction to Pygmalion; Cairo n-d, p.10.
 (2) Eric Bentley, The Playwright as Thinker, New York, 1967, p.9.
 (3) T. Hakīm, Preface to King Oedipus, Cairo n-d, p.39.

order to render these forms to his own conception of man and the universe, as a Muslim from the East, he was challenged by a dilemma that must, one can imagine, have deeply troubled his mind. This dilemma dominated Arabic thought in Egypt throughout the 1920's and the 1930's, a dilemma resulting from the growing national feeling after the war and 1919 uprising. The traditionalists sought the past as the only refuge, arguing their case out of xenophobia against the tide of history and in the face of the new changes. At the other extreme, the modernists, seizing the opportunity of the expected changes, submitted totally to the European way of life, rejecting the Arabic and Islamic tradition out of ignorance or hostility. Amid the two camps a number of gifted writers with a European education (French or English as the case might be), but solidly grounded in traditional culture, shared to some extent a general attitude to this acute problem: Tāhā Husṣayn, ʿAbbās Maḥmūd al-ʿAqqād, Muḥammad Husṣayn Haykal, to mention but a few. They neither rejected nor submitted to one culture, arguing that the revival of the literary soul of Egypt should be raised on three solid foundations: the purely Egyptian one inherited from ancient Egypt throughout history; the Arabic and Islamic one represented by its language, religion and civilization, and the foreign one arisen from the contact with the civilized nations.⁽¹⁾

(1) Tāhā Husṣayn: Fuṣūl fi al-Adab wa al-Naqd, Cairo, 1969, pp.99-100.

From this moderate stand Hakīm emerged as fully equipped an artist as he could be, but not without a struggle to reconcile the forms with Eastern thought, so the European reader would feel that "he has before him a soul different from his and a personality different from his own even if its attire is not strange to him."⁽¹⁾ He has not only maintained the balance between the two cultures but also endeavoured to persuade the reader of the compatibility of both mentalities. His concept of al-Ta^ḥāduliyyah (equilibrium) is nothing but a mere manifestation of this philosophy which "stems from the orientation of Eastern society in general and of Islamic society in particular and from which he derives his deeply rooted belief in the supernatural."⁽²⁾ What should really interest us is the application of this concept to literature and art in general. Here the equilibrium should be sustained between what he calls "the power of expression and the power of interpretation" or between "form", on the one hand, and the conveyed message on the other. The creation of a literary work, he argues, "cannot be completed and its message cannot be communicated unless there is a balance between the expressive power and the interpretative one."⁽³⁾ In other words, the ultimate aim of art is to grant delight as well as

(1) T. Hakīm: Taḥt Shams al-Fikr, Cairo, n-d, p.125.

(2) A.M. Ismail: Drama and Society in Contemporary Egypt, Cairo, 1967, p.57.

(3) T. Hakīm: al-Ta^ḥāduliyya, Cairo, n-d, pp.70-84.

guidance for mankind through maintaining an all-round equilibrium. With this philosophical grasp, Hakīm has been able to present ideas, whether infiltrated from Greek culture or other sources, that throw a searching light onto the problems of the human race.

Having acquired the forms of the lively art of drama, he was faced by a series of choices: to work within the boundaries of Greek and Western drama with all its obscurity and even contradiction to the Arabic mind and therefore abandon his equilibrium, or to examine fresh grounds in Arab and Islamic culture that, when given these forms, could rehabilitate the still unsettled art in modern Arabic literature. One must bear in mind here that Hakīm had witnessed the reshaping of modern French theatre with playwrights like André Gide and Jean Cocteau formulating and practising their individual interpretations of Greek mythology in both drama and narrative with influential results.⁽¹⁾ And it is evident that he has been influenced consciously by these activities and his extensive reading of the French translation of Greek legends. We can see the immediate result of this influence in his plays: Práksa (1939), Pygmalion (1942) and The King Oedipus (1949). Furthermore, he may have been inspired unconsciously by Greek literature in some minor details and undercurrent ideas dispersed here and

(1) Hugh Dickinson: Myth on the Modern Stage, University of Illinois Press, 1969, p.31.

there in other plays, but one has only to look, however, at the bulk of his work to realise an important fact: that there is a recognizable element of traditional material which forms the content of numerous works. I shall be dealing with some of these works in the course of my study, but it would be useful to put them in chronological order together with a quick introductory report on each one:

The Cavemen (written 1928 and published 1933), a play which shows the impact of Islamic culture on Ḥakīm immediately after his return from Paris.

Shahrazad (1934), a play derived from The Arabian Nights.

Muhammad (1936), a narrative in dialogue form in 95 brief scenes about the life of the Prophet drawn from reliable biographies such as Ibn Ishāq's and Ibn Hisham's and other historical sources. There is no attempt on the author's part to alter the traditional account, or to force any particular thesis, and if there is a main line to hold it together, it is certainly the author's constant emphasis on the humanity of Muḥammad.

Ash'ab (1938), a scenario which portrays the life of medieval Arab society through this famous character whose droll stories of avarice are related in classical Arabic sources.

Solomon the Wise (1943), a play which shows how the author has been inspired by various traditions: The Quran, The Old Testament and The Arabian Nights.

The Sultan's Dilemma (1960), whose idea may have been inspired by the Greek allegory about the choice of Heracles, who is said to have met Virtue and Vice in the form of two women in different appearance and attire.⁽¹⁾ But it is nevertheless an intellectual play set in an historical framework during Mamluk Egypt to broach an everlasting question about the choice of the government between law and force.

Shams an-nahār (1965), derived from the spheres of The Arabian Nights to stress some social preoccupation of modern women such as the right to be independent and the value of having to work. It is therefore a thesis-play which bears witness to the equilibrium of its author.

The point of departure in these works is more or less philosophical because it seeks to explore some abstract idea that forms the relation between mankind and the universe. But in order to convey the thesis loudly and clearly to an Eastern audience, the playwright sought to present these ideas through the elaborate medium of tradition, or to use Hakīm's words, through a balanced power of expression. In doing so, he tacitly admits the validity of this tradition to express modern values and to provide familiar materials for new experiences as long as it is used in the right way; and furthermore, to point a direction in which the new art should follow if it

(1) Ahmad Etman: al-Maṣādir al-Kilāsīkiyyah li-masrah al-Hakīm, Cairo, 1978, p.185.

wishes to attract attention and recognition. It is no coincidence that Shawqī and Ḥakīm plunged practically into the same pursuit, each in his own way, because after all the period was full of exuberant feelings and promises that brought forth fruit in the following years. Not only did this tendency occur in drama but it also expanded vigorously and with true conviction to other fields of writing. And it is not surprising that the nearer the work is to the Arabic and Islamic tradition the more elaborate and successful the writer is in establishing a firm ground between his art and its recipients.

'Ahl al-Kahf (The Cavemen)

After his return from Paris, Ḥakīm aimed at introducing the element of tragedy to an Arab-Islamic subject in an unprecedented way. His purpose, he says "was not merely to extract a story from the Quran and cast it in a dramatic form, but rather to look at our Islamic mythology with the eye of Greek tragedy and bring about a fusion of the two mentalities and the two literatures."⁽¹⁾ But before we advance to discuss the content of the play we must have a brief account of the story as mentioned in both Christian and Islamic traditions.

(1) Preface to King Oedipus, Cairo, n-d, p.39.

In Christian tradition, the legend of the Seven Sleepers is one of the most widespread and pleasing of hagiographical legends. It occurs in numerous Oriental and Western texts, showing the close intellectual relations between the East and the West, but it is not always easy to arrange the texts in definite groups and to determine exactly their interdependence.⁽¹⁾ The elements of the story common to the earliest texts are briefly as follows:

"The emperor Decius comes to Ephesus and there revives the worship of idols, commanding that all, and especially the Christians, should offer sacrifices to them; some Christians abjure the faith, others remain steadfast and suffer tortures. Seven youths (or, according to some texts, eight) who live in the imperial palace and whose names are variously given, are accused of being secretly Christians, and when brought before Decius, refuse to sacrifice to the idols. In the hope that they may waver in their resolution, Decius grants them a respite and leaves Ephesus. The youths leave the city and hide in a cave in the neighbouring Mount Anchilus. One of them, Diomedes (or Iamblichus), disguised in rags, goes down into the city to enquire about what was happening in it and to buy food. Decius, returning after a short time to Ephesus, orders the youths to be conducted to his presence. Diomedes informs his companions of the order; sadly they take food, and then they all fall by divine Providence into a deep, long sleep. When Decius cannot find the youths in Ephesus, he summons their parents, who try to excuse themselves for the flight of their sons, and say that they are hidden in a cave on Mount Anchilus. Decius orders the entrance of the cave to be blocked with large stones, so that the youths may be buried alive.

(1) Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. XI, London, 2nd Imp., 1934.

Two Christians, Theodore and Rufinus, write the story of the young martyrs on metal plates, which they place under the stones closing the cave. After 307 years, in the reign of the emperor Theodosius II, a heresy breaks out, led by a bishop Theodore, denying the resurrection of the dead, and the emperor is greatly perturbed. Then God suggests to Adolius, the proprietor of the field where the cave is, to build a sheepfold for his flocks; for this purpose the workmen use the stones which close the entrance of the cave and thus the cave is re-opened. God awakens the youths, who think that they have slept only one night, and exhort each other in turn to suffer martyrdom at the hands of Decius, if need be. Diomedes goes down to Ephesus as usual, and is so surprised to see the cross over the gates of the city that he asks a passer-by if it is really Ephesus. He is anxious to return to his companions with the news, but first he buys food, paying for it with money he had about him, which was of the time of Decius. The vendor and the market-people seeing the ancient money, think that the youth has found a hidden treasure and wish to share it with him; they drag him with threats through the city; many people assemble, and the youth looks in vain among them for someone of his acquaintance. The bishop and the governor question Diomedes, who narrates the whole story, and invites them to come to the cave and see his companions alive and shining in appearance. Theodosius is informed of what has happened and comes to Ephesus to the cave. One of the youths, Maximilian (or Achilles or others) tells him that, in order to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection, God had caused them to fall asleep and then resuscitated them before the Judgement Day: after this the youths fall asleep in death. A basilica was erected on this spot.

The Story in Islamic Tradition

The story of The Cavemen is mentioned in The Qur'an⁽¹⁾ in response to one of the questions which the Jewish rabbis had instructed the Meccans to ask Muhammad as a test of his Prophethood.⁽²⁾ It was revealed to him through verses which show the unique Qur'anic composition, and which cannot be truly evoked by any translation. But we shall however, quote these verses in order to be able to see the extent of the traditional impact on the playwright:

"Or deemest thou that the people of the Cave and Inscription are a wonder among Our portents?

When the young men fled for refuge to the Cave and said: Our Lord! Give us mercy from Thy presence, and shape for right conduct in our plight.

Then We sealed up their hearing in the Cave for a number of years. And afterwards We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties would best calculate the time that they had tarried.

We narrate unto thee their story with truth. Lo! they were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance. And We made firm their hearts when they stood forth and said: Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We cry unto no god beside Him, for then should we utter an enormity.

These our people, have chosen gods beside Him though they bring no clear warrant to them. And who doth greater wrong than he who inventeth a lie concerning Allah?

And when ye withdraw from them and that which they worship except Allah, then seek refuge in the cave; your Lord will spread

(1) Sura XVIII, Verses 9-26.

(2) Tafsir al-Nasafi, Cairo, 1908, Vol. III, p.8.

for you of His mercy and will prepare for you a pillow in your plight.

And thou mightest have seen the sun when it rose move away from their cave to the right, and when it set go past them on the left, and they were in the cleft thereof. That was (one) of the portents of Allah. He whom Allah guideth, he indeed is led aright, and he whom He sendeth astray, for thou wilt not find a guiding friend.

And thou wouldst have deemed them waking though they were asleep, and we caused them to turn over to the right and the left, and their dog stretching out his paws on the threshold. If thou hadst observed them closely thou hadst assuredly turned away in flight, and hadst been filled with awe of them.

And in like manner We awakened them that they might question one another. A speaker from among them said: How long have ye tarried? They said: We have tarried a day or some part of a day, (others) said: Your Lord best knoweth what ye have tarried. Now send one of you with this your silver coin unto the city, and let him see what food is purest there and bring you a supply thereof. Let him be courteous and let no man know of you.

For they, if they should come to know of you, will stone you or turn you back to their religion; then ye will never prosper.

And in like manner We disclosed them (to the people of the city) that they might know that the promise of Allah is true and that, as for the Hour, there is no doubt concerning it. When (the people of the city) disputed of their case among themselves, they said: Build over them a building; their Lord knoweth best concerning them. Those who won their point said: We verily shall build a place of worship over them.

(Some) will say: they were three, their dog the fourth, and (some) say: Five, their dog the sixth, guessing at random; and (some) say: Seven, and their dog the eighth. Say: (O Muhammad): My Lord is best aware of their number. None knoweth them save few. So contend not concerning them except with an outward contending, and ask not of any of them to pronounce concerning them.

And say not of anything: Lo! I shall do that tomorrow;

Except if Allah will. And remember thy Lord when thou forgettest, and say: It may be that my Lord guideth me unto a nearer way of truth than this.

And (it is said) they tarried in their cave three hundred years and add nine. Say: Allah is best aware how long they tarried. His is the invisible of the heavens and the earth. How clear of sight is He and keen of hearing! They have no protecting friend beside him, and he maketh none to share in His government.(1)

It is noticeable that the episodes recounted in these verses make use of a dramatic device whereby the dialogue is presented through the repetition of the verb 'qāla' (said) and its derivatives, and that, when the verb is discarded, results in a well-constructed dramatic situation like this:

First Character (stretching himself): How long have ye tarried?

Second Character: We have tarried a day or some part of a day.

3rd Character (calmly): Your Lord best knoweth what ye have tarried.

1st Character (impatiently): Send one of you with this your silver coin unto the city.

2nd Character: Let him see what food is purest there and bring you a supply thereof.

(1) Trans. by M.M. Pickthall; Karachi, 1975.

3rd Character (warning): Let him be courteous and let no man know of you.

1st Character (thoughtfully): For they, if they should come to know of you, will stone you or turn you back to their religion; then ye will never prosper.

One must be reminded that Ḥakīm, fascinated as it were, by the dialogue, must have been impressed by these dramatic potentialities in the Qurānic style, and that the hidden dialogue must have prompted him to write the play when he first listened to the sura being recited in the mosque on Fridays. (1)

The Qurānic message is moral rather than historical: the relativity of Time, the steadfastness of believers against religious persecutions, and the truth of Resurrection are the focal points in the Qurānic story of which the details were given later by many commentators. But I shall have to rely mostly on al-Qurṭubī's, (2) not only because of the orderly copious material it contains, but also because of the fact that Ḥakīm had read it thoroughly and thereafter published an anthology from it in 1978.

The parallels between the story as related in Qurṭubī's and the Christian version are striking.

(1) Ḥakīm: Zahrat al-'Umr, Cairo, n-d, p.178.

(2) al-Qurṭubī: al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qurān, Cairo, 1967,

Apart from the main outline of the story, which is almost identical, there are points of agreement on important issues: the setting of the story is the city Tarsus "which was Ephesus in the pre-Islamic era";⁽¹⁾ the youths' names as quoted from at-Ṭabarī, the name of the youth who was sent to the city to buy food is given as Yamlikhā (Iamblichus).⁽²⁾ In addition, there are minor, though significant, incidents confined only to the Islamic account as far as I can judge, and upon which Ḥakīm was able to draw in his play such as the incident of the shepherd and his dog Qiṭmīr, who followed the fugitives to the cave and remained with them.⁽³⁾

The central theme in the Christian account of the story does stress, perhaps more than anything else, the religious miracle of Resurrection as a counter-proof against any attempt to deny it. As such the theme is almost a universal issue shared by various ancient civilizations, among which is the ancient Egyptian one. Its beliefs in Resurrection and the immortality of the dead are referred to throughout the Book of the Dead. Certain chapters of this book do not only speak of Osiris and the efficacy of funerary offerings, but they describe the rituals in the "Chapter of those who come forth" and the "Chapter of those who rise up."⁽⁴⁾ The playwright,

(1) Ibid., p.375. There is some doubt about the name in the Christian account. See above.

(2)(3) Ibid., p.360.

(4) E.A. Wallis Budge: Book of the Dead, Egyptian Texts, 2nd ed., London, 1909, passim.

aware of this fact, states the influence of ancient Egyptian beliefs on the choice of his subject: "the basis of Egyptian tragedy, as I conceive it, is the terrible struggle between Man and Time. Read the Book of the Dead and you will immediately come to this conclusion." (1) But despite this elaborate, though arrogant, theorising, one can hardly find anything specifically Egyptian about the play itself, except in one fleeting and rather spurious reference to Egypt, when the disillusioned Marnūsh reflects on the hopelessness of Man's struggle against time:

"No use in battling with time. Egypt has tried this before by perpetuating everything, that there was no single statue representing old age and senility as an army commander returning from Egypt told me... But time killed Egypt when she was young..."(2)

Again, the essence of the Egyptian tradition symbolizes a religious act as hitherto does the Christian while the play deals with a philosophical theme which both traditions do not emphasise. Hakīm himself seems to emphasise the universality of his theme by introducing the parallel Japanese legend of Urāshīma⁽³⁾ in the play, an insertion for which there is little or no dramatic justification.⁽⁴⁾

The theme however, is to be found in two of the Quranic verses: "Then we sealed up their hearing in the

(1) Taht Shams al-Fikr, p.105.

(2) The Cavemen, Cairo n-d, p.154.

(3) Ibid., p.176.

(4) Paul Starkey: "Philosophical Themes in Tawfiq al-Hakīm's Drama": Journal of Arabic Literature, VIII, pp.137-8.

cave for a number of years. And afterward We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties would best calculate the time that they had tarried."

On the basis of this intellectual concept the playwright was able to transform the cavemen into symbols of human destiny in man's struggle with time and thus break entirely with the Egyptian drama of that period. Moreover, the play frequently employs the powerful composition of the Quranic dialogue, and the playwright accepts the respect of the sun and the dog, which has been impudently denied by Gibbon.⁽¹⁾ It cites too what has been said in the Quranic commentaries concerning the period of time, the setting, the men's names and previous occupations, and the shepherd. All these indicia enforce our assumption that the play is firmly established in an Islamic environment more than anything else.

The Cavemen, then, is a play built on the idea of man's struggle against time or what is known as a drama of ideas where theme, not character, is all-important and where in fact the characters are more inclined to become spokesmen for the plot. Thus, whereas the characters do not come before us as individuals, but become martyrs to the author's philosophical conception of time and sense of history, the play admirably succeeds

(1) Edward Gibbon: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; London, 1854; Vol. IV, p.190, The Play, pp.9-37.

in its intensive exposition of theme and the forcefulness of its writing. To illustrate the primacy of the theme, Ḥakīm chose only three main characters from the Islamic literature: Mishlīn yā and Marnūsh the viziers in Decius' court and Yamlikhā the shepherd who is said to have followed them with his dog Qiṭmīr to their destiny. By curtailing the legendary characters to three, he was able to concentrate on the theme and, furthermore, to involve them in shaping a restricted course of action. The construction of the play proves this to be right in view of the fact that the opening scene in the play shows the awakening of the cavemen in the darkness of the cave at ar-Raqīm (the name given by many commentators) after their centuries-long slumber of which they are unaware. In the second and third acts the past is confronted by the present, but soon we discover that the cavemen are made symbols of man's misfortune and weakness in the face of time with which there is no compromise.

The inevitability of the playwright's conception causes them in the fourth act to withdraw and return one after another to where they belong, in the darkness of the cave, to fall asleep in death.

One of the important aspects of intellectual drama is the analytical dialogue and perhaps it is the same particularity that attracted Ḥakīm to this story, "my aim is to make dialogue more important than being a

'transposition artistique' of a Quranic sura."⁽¹⁾ The conflict is carried through thoughts, never through histrionics, and it is in the first act that the characters recall past events happening "a day or some part of a day" ago, as Marnūsh alleges.⁽²⁾ During the course of the dialogue we are enlightened about the people, the reason for their predicament and the circumstances surrounding their previous life. Mishlīnyā who defies Decius' tyranny by committing himself to Christianity, has converted the emperress's daughter Priska, loved her, and now wants to meet her as they had planned.⁽³⁾ Marnūsh, a more realistic person, remembers that his wife and son are awaiting news from him. Yamlikhā the simple-minded shepherd has no connection with the outside world except his sheep, thinking "they are grazing safely, and nobody knows they belong to a Christian."⁽⁴⁾ As they are unaware of the passing of time, these past bearings are significant, because they do not only throw light on the characters, but they also point to the culmination of the tragedy in store for them. The action moves to a positive conflict when Yamlikhā goes to buy food and returns to his companions with the news that they might have slept for a long period of time, probably a month, and that

(1) Zahrat al-^cUmr, p.178.

(2) The Cavemen, p.10.

(3) Ibid., p.27.

(4) Ibid., p.12.

he has seen the sun avoiding the cave in a miraculous fashion. (1)

When the action advances in the second and third acts, where the past is brought forward to the present, the plight of the cavemen comes to the fore in a series of miscomprehensions between them and the palace's people. The latter see them as merely saints resurrected in order to convince the heretics, and Ghalias the tutor mentions the Japanese legend of Urāshimā who had vanished for 400 years, reappeared but shortly vanished again; (2) whereas the cavemen still find it somehow puzzling. Gradually the awkwardness of reality begins to unfold, and again it is Yamlikhā, the simplest of all, who first discovers the truth. Having gone to look for his sheep and having seen the changes in the city life, the attitude of the people towards him and even the attitude of the other dogs towards his, he rushes with the news to his companions:

"Yam: This world is not our world.
 Mar: What do you mean?
 Yam: Do you know how long we have tarried
 in the cave?
 Mar: A week?
 (Yam. laughs hysterically)
 Mar: A month according to your fabulous
 calculations?

 Yam: 300 years. Imagine that; for 300 years
 we have been in the cave!
 Mar: Poor young man!
 Yam: This young man is some 300 years old..." (3)

(1) Ibid., pp.36-7.

(2) Ibid., p.51.

(3) Ibid., p.68.

And despairing of his friends' ridicule and indifference, he decides to return to the cave, arguing that "it is the only place we own in this universe. The cave is our link with our lost world."⁽¹⁾

Marnūsh comes to terms with reality when he finds out that his son died as a martyr at the age of 60 and nothing links him now to this world. He refuses Mīshlīnyā's suggestion to start a new life, saying "It is useless... Life by itself, stripped of the past, of every link and motive, is less than non-existence,"⁽²⁾ and he, too, returns to the cave.

Due to Mīshlīnyā's love for Priska and the fact that the present king's daughter was named after her predecessor, inherited her looks and even the cross which had been given to her by Mīshlīnyā, he remains unconvinced of the reality of time. The princess sympathizes with him but turns away his offer to share his passionate love. And only by the end of the third act does he feel the gigantic wall of history separating them, "Our time is up, we now belong to history. We wanted to re-enter time, but history has taken its vengeance."⁽³⁾ He joins his friends in the cave. It must be said here that this innovation has been sought for its dramatic effect on the philosophical message of the play as well as

(1) Ibid., p.70.
 (2) Ibid., p.100.
 (3) Ibid., p.137.

strengthening the traditional story by combining the philosophical element with human feelings.

In the last act the cavemen and the dog, already exhausted and emaciated, relapse into slumber not knowing whether their experience has been real, or whether they have been dreaming all along. Their illusion gets them to the point that they may have been dreaming of a dream. They are uncertain even whether they have returned to the cave to die or merely to resume their sleep.

"Mish: If we were not dreaming then we are now.
 Mar: Yes... why should we not be dreaming now?
 Yam: O Lord! What is the boundary between
 fantasy and reality? I have gone insane!

 Mish: Thank God it was a dream, otherwise I
 would have lost Priska forever.
 Mar: How happy I am...
 Yam: My sheep are still grazing there...
 I am happy..."(1)

"Mish: I feel hungry.. why should we not send
 someone to buy us food?
 Mar: Yes... Yes... And to seek information,
 Yamlikha! You go...
 Yam: I swear by God and Christ that I am
 dying not knowing whether my life has
 been a dream or real."(2)

And so in the confusion between fantasy and reality, they die. Priska goes to the cave to die united with Mishlinya in response to a dream that she would die as a saint. The entrance is sealed and the site is converted into a place of worship.

(1) Ibid., pp.146-7.
 (2) Ibid., pp.149-150.

I have already mentioned that one of the features of intellectual drama is the analytical dialogue, a feature that is reflected in the play. It would be natural to expect that a playwright, who had begun his career as a prosecuting attorney, could not easily throw off the influence of his argumentative mind. In this respect Hakīm does not cease employing the method of spoken words, rather than histrionics, to develop the action. The dialogue he uses therefore, has virility, clarity and colour unmatched by any Arab dramatist so far. The characters of his drama, educated or not, all know what they want, and are never at a loss for words with which to express themselves. They are, of course, not only the creations but the reflections of an exceptionally lively mind, brimming with intelligent fun. Although the dialogue of the Cavemen is exuberant and acutely responsive, this very articulateness tends to make the characters sound somewhat alike; and sometimes fall victim to the playwright's eloquence and humour. Consequently the dialogue has been in some places marred with over-long monotonous monologues without dramatic justification.⁽¹⁾ And since the audience prefers short snappy entertaining dialogue it is likely that this is the reason that the play has not been much of a success on the stage. This grievous defect, one is inclined to agree with Tāhā Husayn, would only make the play suitable for reading but not for acting."⁽²⁾

(1) Ibid., pp. 21, 51, 167-71.

(2) Fuṣūl..., p.89.

As the theme of the play is ample and philosophically stimulating, it has been given various interpretations. It can be taken politically as an obvious reference to the re-awakening of Egypt under the British occupation. With regard to this "the cave stands for her past and the foray and retreat of Yamlikhā, Marnūsh and Mishlīnyā for her awakening, after the long Ottoman night she has fled to find the strange and anachronistic British holding sway over her and her decision that accommodation with them is impossible."⁽¹⁾ Equally it can be applied to traumatic conditions in the cultural environment which divided the choices of the intellectuals, and which left its marks on the literary production of that period. Ḥakīm seems to have hinted at this interpretation in a recent interview: "Many of my works have sprung from prevalent social and political circumstances, whether consciously or unconsciously. The Cavemen, for instance, sprang from the stand of traditionalists who wanted to live in the past, because they were unable to readjust to present society. As a result, they were rejected and forced to the darkness of the past."⁽²⁾ What the playwright asks us to consider, lest we be in

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- (1) See for example:
 R. Long; Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, Playwright of Egypt, Ithaca Press, London, 1979, p.165.
 L. ḤAwad; Al-Ahram, Cairo, Nov. 6, 1970.
 P. Starkey, op.cit., p.139.
- (2) Interview with Fu'ād Maṭar, Al-Nahār, Beirut, No. X, Jul. 9, 1977.

danger of passing too rigid a judgement, is to look at the play in a context of the mood of dismay that dominated Egyptian society in general and the intellectuals in particular throughout the twenties and the thirties. Therefore it would be wrong to assume, as some critics dubiously suggest,⁽¹⁾ that the end of the play is presenting a negative and defeatist tendency.

Yet whatever interpretation may be relevant to the play, the fact remains that The Cavemen stands as conclusive evidence of what healthy tradition can provide to a playwright working against a background of modern European drama, especially that of Pirandello and Shaw, when "the intellect has become its everlasting hero."⁽²⁾ In doing so the playwright has not only set Arabic drama on the right course, but proved that art is not a unique achievement, but a controlled exploitation of tradition by the individual talent.

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- (1) See: M. Anīs, M. al-^cAlīm, Fī al-Thaqāfa al-miṣriyya, A. al-Qitt: Fī al-adab al-miṣrī al-mu^cāsir, Cairo, 1955, pp.73-4.
- (2) E. Bentley, op.cit., p.67.

Sulaymān al-Hakīm (Solomon the Wise)

The subject of this play as conceived by the author is the equilibrium that should exist between man's power and his wisdom,

"In modern times man has possessed a hugely destructive physical power that could wipe him out at any time unless he is able to control it with his wisdom. But because he cannot always guarantee his wisdom, his well-being and existence will be in jeopardy."(1)

And while the short preface to the play tells of the influence of three major traditional sources: The Quran, The Torah and The Arabian Nights, upon projecting an image in the playwright's mind; the appendix to the second edition (1948) in the wake of post-war world explains rightly the philosophically human vision of the author,

"It appears to me that Solomon the Wise has become a symbol of the current conflict in world affairs... Indeed the power is so blind and tempting that it can be used and misused by whoever has it. The crisis of Mankind now, and in every time, is that his means of power supercedes his means of reasoning."(2)

To achieve this idea, the playwright based his play on the story of Solomon the younger son of David and the third King of Israel. The story is one of the most spectacular pages in the history of religious literature, and possibly the most sensational one. Its sensation is chiefly attributable to his mighty rule over a vast

(1) al-Ta'āduliyya, pp. 19-20.

(2) Solomon the Wise, Cairo, n.d., p.9, pp.158-9.

kingdom as much to his accumulated wealth which made his reign proverbial for splendour. Three major religions have the story in their Scriptures with various degrees of emphasis and detail. Yet they all agree that Solomon was a king of power and authority to whose command God subjugated all men, jinnes, birds and beasts, and that he surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.⁽¹⁾

In the Qur'ān, the story occurs in two suras⁽²⁾ containing eventful elements upon which the play has been drawn. As the account in the first sura is too lengthy to quote, I shall give a brief narrative of it.

When Solomon's armies are marching, he hears an ant urging the others to enter their dwellings lest they be crushed. Solomon, parading his army of birds, notices the absence of the hoopoe and threatens he will punish it severely. Soon after the hoopoe reappears and informs Solomon of what it has just seen in Sheba: A queen rules over her people from a mighty throne, but they worship the sun. Solomon dispatches the hoopoe with a letter to her to summon her to his presence. She consults her advisers, who are at variance, but finally decide to send an envoy with a present. Solomon returns the present threatening that he will invade them with hosts that they

(1) al-Qurtubī, XIII, pp.164-7; O.T. I Kings 2-5;

II Chronicles 8-9.

(2) XXVII, verses 15-44; XXXIV, 12-13.

cannot resist. She has finally made up her mind to come, and Solomon orders her throne to be fetched and disguised. And when she sees the throne and smooth glass hall, as signs of Solomon's might, she surrenders unto his God.

There is also the account of sura XXXIV which does not only emphasise the idea of power possessed by Solomon, but narrates the manner of his death which was as spectacular as his life had been:

"And unto Solomon (We gave) the wind, whereof the morning course was a month's journey and the evening course a month's journey, and We caused the fount of copper to gush forth for him, and certain of the jinn to work before him by permission of his Lord. And such of them as deviated from Our command, them We caused to taste the punishment of flaming fire. They made for him what he willed: synagogues and statues, basins like wells and boilers built into the ground. Give thanks, O House of David! Few of My bondmen are thankful. And when We decreed death for him, nothing showed his death to them (jinn) save a creeping creature of the earth, which gnawed away his staff. And when he fell the jinn saw clearly how, if they had known the unseen, they would not have continued in humbling toil."

Although this account is sufficient by itself from a dramatic point of view, Ḥakīm derived some specifically fascinating scenes from commentaries such as the function of the hoopoe in Solomon's army, and its conduct and discourse with its master.⁽¹⁾ He also derived the names of Balqīs, the queen of Sheba, and Āsif ibn Barkhiyā Solomon's vizier among other minor details from Qurtubī.

(1) Qurtubī's, XIII, p.177; pp.212-3; The Play, pp.22, 26.

All these elements have been used in shaping the main course of the action that would be violated at any attempt to separate them from it. Furthermore the impact of this Quranic account, apart from projecting an image in the playwright's mind, can be seen in his employment of the Quranic style throughout the dialogue, and in adopting the dramatic end of Solomon which corresponds to that of the Qur'an,

Other materials were inspired by the Old Testament, especially those connected with Solomon's choice of wisdom. Two examples can be sought in the play; one in which Solomon shows his wise judgement in the two women's dispute over a child;⁽¹⁾ and the other is more striking because it is a straightforward quotation:

"Solomon: ... This reminds me of what my Lord has said to me in a dream by night, 'Ask what I shall give thee'.
 Sādūq: You have answered Him, 'Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge the people, that I may discern between good and bad...'
 Solomon: Yes... Yes, I said that, and the speech pleased my Lord, so He has said unto me, 'Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment... I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart...' (2)

(1) I Kings, 3; The Play 29-30.

(2) I Kings, 4; The Play, p. 64.

Even the reference to Solomon's love for strange women is expressed in the same biblical order of wording without quotation marks;

"... Women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edmonites, Zidonians and Hittites..."(1)

Yet the most visible feature of the biblical impact on the play is neither epic nor dramatic, but it is the poetic strain which runs through the entire dialogue. Poetical books in the Old Testament such as Proverbs and The Song of Songs have their lyrics which must have so thrilled Hakīm with their passion that he quotes whole paragraphs from The Song of Solomon to reflect not Solomon's love for Shulamite but for Balqīs.(2) Balqīs on the other hand utters her passion towards her beloved Mundhir the Arab captive, using lyrical episodes from the same song.

"Balqīs: /—As if dreaming of a far-off person
she knows T, -
My beloved is white and ruddy,
The chiefest among ten thousand.
His head is as the most fine gold,
His locks are bushy and black as a raven.
His eyes are as the eyes of doves by
the rivers of waters,
Washed with milk, and fitly set.
His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as
sweet flowers:
His lips like lilies, dropping sweet
smelling myrrh.
His hands are as gold rings set with
the beryl:
His belly is as bright ivory overlaid
with sapphires.
His legs are as pillars of marble, set
upon sockets of fine gold:

(1) I Kings, II; The Play, p.55.

(2) The Play, pp.96-9.

His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent
 as the cedars.
 His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is
 altogether lovely.
 This is my beloved and this is my
 friend..."(1)

Indeed the effect of such paragraphs is not in their dramatic characteristics, for they probably have very little or none at all, so much as in their poetic charm which suits the exotic setting of the play.

The connection between the story of Solomon, as related in the above-mentioned sources, and The Arabian Nights lies in the fact that both enjoy a fairy-tale-like atmosphere. Against this background fantastic incidents from it have been employed to serve the action of the play. Magical happenings related only in The Arabian Nights, such as turning a person into a stone statue amid a marble basin and bringing him back to life by filling the basin with the beloved's tears, and travelling aboard the magic carpet, are elaborate glints to the already marvellous story. Besides, the popular sphere of this famous collection, as expected, embraces the action of the play in many situations, lending desirable flavour to the playwright's philosophical theme.

It must be noted, however, that it was not the first time that Hakim was inspired by The Arabian Nights for the one reason that some of his early works bear witness to a deep experience of it. In 1926 he contributed an

(1) The Song of Solomon, 5; The Play, pp.98-9.

operatic comedy 'Alī Baba of which we have no published version, to the Azbakiyya Theatre, and wrote Shahrazad (1934). Moreover, it offered inspiration to the pioneers of Arabic drama as early as Marūn an-Naqqāsh.⁽¹⁾ All these show how distinct the influence of The Arabian Nights has been in aiding the Arab playwright over the years.

With technical skill Hakīm was able to unite all these elements into a dramatic work. This collaboration of traditional elements facilitates numerous dramatically effective transitions and contrasts. Especially striking is the first act, where the action begins in the sphere of The Arabian Nights, gradually breaks through them to more elaborate Quranic and Biblical elements, and resumes the popular one.

The play opens on a sea-coast in Ṣan'ā "at which Solomon stopped to rest during his journey to Sheba."⁽²⁾ Then employs dramatically the story of the fishermen mentioned in the 558th night,

"One of the fishermen had cast his net in the sea to catch fish, but when he drew it up he found a bottle of brass stopped with lead, which was sealed with the signet of Solomon son of David... The fishermen broke it; whereupon there proceeded from it a blue smoke, which reached the clouds in the sky; and a horrible voice, saying: 'Repentance! repentance! O, Prophet of God'... And it was one of the jinn whom Solomon had imprisoned in these bottles when he was incensed against them."⁽³⁾

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- (1) See p. above.
 (2) Qurtubī, XIII, p.182.
 (3) Alf Layla wa Layla; Cairo 1969, p.859.

It is the outbursting jinni that the playwright seeks to exploit as a symbol of the huge destructive power at man's disposal. For despite being discovered and rescued by the fishermen, the jinni Dāhish invites the poor man to choose the manner of his death, but rapidly moderates his threats when Solomon's ship comes into view. The appearance of Solomon and his notables brings the action to more authentic material from the Quran in order to refrain from what might have distorted the prophet's image in the minds of Muslim recipients who have high regard for him. Solomon shows his mastery of the ant's language when speaking to his high Priest Ṣādūq.

"Solomon: Listen to this ant... It is saying,
'O ants! Enter your dwellings lest
Solomon and his armies crush you
unperceiving.' (1)

Ṣādūq: You have mastered the language of ants
and birds, and you rule over jinn and
men.

Solomon: This is my Lord's favour.

Ṣādūq: He has put power in your hand and wisdom
in your head.

Solomon: Oh! wisdom! I wish it would last long
in my head; because for it I dread an
enemy I don't know yet."(2)

Solomon's vizier Āṣif ibn Barkhiyā, a name given in commentaries as well as The Arabian Nights,⁽³⁾ inquires about the hoopoe, which they think, has gone to search for the locality of underground water "as the hoopoe could spot water at depth under the earth's surface."⁽⁴⁾ The

(1) Q. XXVII, 18.

(2) The Play, pp.24/5.

(3) Qurtubī, XIII, p.204; Alf Layla, p.866.

(4) Qurtubī, XIII, p.177.

hoopoe reappears and is despatched with an invitation to Balqīs. Again the action resumes the popular element as soon as the fisherman approaches the scene holding his finding. He asks Solomon to settle the dispute between him and the jinni to which Solomon agrees in the knowledge that the fisherman will be held accountable for the misdoings of the jinni; and both enter Solomon's employ.

The scene changes to Sheba where Balqīs is consulting her advisers about Solomon's message. The meeting is interrupted by the messenger's return from Jerusalem with the queen's unacceptable present, and Solomon's threat. At this she agrees to respond positively to Solomon's request. She seems to be far more intelligent than those surrounding her; but she is in love with her Arab captive Prince Mundhir who loves Shahbā her Arab lady-in-waiting. Ḥakīm introduces this romance, as he did in *The Cavemen*, as a double-purposed innovation, to stress the irony. The queen, for all her beauty and intelligence, cannot win her Captive's heart, and later Solomon, for all his riches and authority, will not be able to win hers. Balqīs asks Mundhir to accompany her to Jerusalem, and he agrees to it after some hesitation.

In the third scene as in the remaining four, the action takes place in Jerusalem. Solomon and his notables surrounded by all the manifestations of prosperity, are waiting for Balqīs' procession. He orders her throne to be fetched, and the jinni Dāhish, to the fisherman's alarm, volunteers for the job. The playwright cites here Solomon's

wisdom from the Old Testmant in somewhat contingent digression, linking this to the main action with what appears to be flagging junction. Solomon comments on the fisherman's statement of satisfaction to be trustworthy by saying "This reminds me of what my Lord has said unto me..."⁽¹⁾ Balqīs arrives and Solomon shows affection for her from the beginning in a passionate way reminiscent of his famous song,

"Let me see the plane of your face attentively.
Thou, whose sweet perfume I have inhaled across
sea of sand, and whom I have called despite the
remote distance."⁽²⁾

But Balqīs' heart is engaged by another, and therefore she belittles Solomon's offer of friendship, an act which renders the mighty man utterly dejected. Seeing him in this state the jinni and the fisherman hurry to offer him consolation; and the sphere of The Arabian Nights is again recalled when Solomon asks the fisherman whether he has ever been in love. The fisherman recalls his love story with a slave girl he manumitted immediately after he had bought her with the price of a precious pearl found in a big fish.⁽³⁾ Now, he does not know where or with whom she lives, but the jinni does. In fact she is one of Solomon's thousand women, as we learn in the following scenes. Stories of fishermen landing water nymphs and other fairies, and sometimes falling in love or even living

(1) p.64.
(2) p.69.
(3) pp.75-7.

with them, are widely dispersed in The Arabian Nights. But the one that can be identified with this particular story is perhaps the story of Khalīfa the fisherman with Hārūn ar-Rashīd's favourite slave girl Qūt ul-Qulūb.⁽¹⁾

As a tool symbolizing the power of destruction, the jinni again volunteers to conduct the business of both Solomon and the fisherman concerning this matter.

"The jinni: Depend on me.
 Solomon: Tell what should be done.
 The jinni: First of all you must overwhelm her.
 Solomon: What then?
 The jinni: Then you must display the weaknesses of your adversary to her.
 Solomon: You have not come up with a new idea.
 The jinni: Love itself is not a new thing."⁽²⁾

Neither the marvellous glass hall and the magic carpet, nor wooing her with the magnificent verses of the Song can swing Balqīs' heart. So Solomon gives a signal for the second part of the jinni's plan to proceed, which is to petrify Mundhir and place him amid a marble basin, and let Balqīs fill it with tears if she wants him back. When the basin is within a few tears of being full, Solomon distracts Balqīs from shedding them so Shahbā, at the jinni's persuasion, completes the task. The statue gains vitality and Mundhir throws himself in her arms as being the first person he set his eyes on; their love is reinforced. And in spite of the humiliation and scoffing she has been subjected to by Solomon during her ordeal,

(1) Alf Layla, pp.1263-88.

(2) pp.80-1.

Balqīs never escalates the relationship to more than friendship. On the other hand, the fisherman, who possesses nothing but his wisdom, controls his feelings and refuses even to meet his sweetheart because she is now his master's wife despite the jinnī's assurance. His wisdom surmounts his feelings, and his loyalty is never in doubt, so he remains upright and deserves Solomon's praise,

"You have listened to the voice of your wisdom and your conscience before you step to sin, while I have pursued it many steps."(1)

The jinni is held accountable for masterminding the tragedy and is imprisoned yet again in a container.

The irony which the playwright strives to convey to us is that love cannot be purchased, but must be earned by consideration and reciprocal love. It is summed up by Solomon and Balqīs as they depart,

"Balqīs: Man's heart is certainly the greatest wonder.
 Solomon: True, Balqīs.
 Balqīs: The wonder which is firmly locked before power.
 Solomon: And before wisdom too.
 Balqīs: Yes.
 Solomon: But how can it be unlocked?
 Balqīs: I have no idea.
 Solomon: There must be something to which the Lord only has the key.
 Balqīs: I am surprised that you have forgotten that Solomon.
 Solomon: It is a power which makes us blind to recognizing our impotence and wisdom. It entices us to carry on a hopeless struggle... I do not know what your reaction will be like when Solomon's wisdom is mentioned before you.

(1) pp.134-5.

Balqīs: Do not worry. I understand your ordeal.
 Solomon: Oh! Balqīs, we ought to fear nothing for wisdom except destructive power."(1)

At this point the play could have ended whereby the playwright's conception of power versus wisdom had been fully served. He wanted to prove that it is not the lack of wisdom, nor the inadequate use of it that lead to Solomon's tragedy. What really causes it is the fact that those who are endowed with wisdom and power would blunder if their wisdom failed to enlighten them about the limits of using power.

Hakīm, however, chose the King's death as a "magnificent climax to a memorable play".(2) The final scene is devoted to the dramatisation of the already spectacular Quranic scene of Solomon's death.(3) Solomon has retired to his retreat for a long time. The priest, vizier and the fisherman do not know whatever has come over him. He has been dead for sometime and they only discover that when his staff, eaten away by armies of termites, could no longer support his body. He falls from his chair to the ground. But the confrontation between

(1) pp. 138-9.

(2) R. Long: op.cit., p.55.

(3) The Quran, XXXIV, 13. In Qurtubī the account dramatically runs thus: "The jinn alleged to man that they foreknew the invisible. To prove them wrong Solomon dressed in his winding sheet embalmed, and entered the mihrab. He died while praying and remained dead in his chair for one year without them knowing until a creeping creature had gnawed away his staff. And by that time the jinn had completed the Temple." (Vol. XIV, pp.278-9).

the jinni, who is free from the container, and the fisherman, who is Solomon's disciple, or in other words between power and wisdom, is not yet over; it is an everlasting struggle. This last notion throws some light on the predicament of mankind which occupies the dramatist's mind, and therefore widens the scope of the play.

Hakīm cannot claim that Solomon the Wise has been designed to be armchair theatre, because his dramatic technique seems to have considerably developed with an eye to the stage requirements. In this play, unlike The Cavemen, the dialogue is poetic and theatrical at the same time which leaves no room for overlong monologues. Even in what Long criticises as being "overdone knockabout duologues between the fisherman and the jinni,"⁽¹⁾ it is noticeable that they are witty and humorous. Furthermore, the dialogue, while managing to keep the poetic nature of the subject, still flows effortlessly, due in large part to the constantly shifting conflicts within the scenes. As a result it tends to resemble ordinary conversation in the parts that reflect the popular atmosphere of The Arabian Nights; and it is heightened when exploiting the powerful Quranic narrative or quoting the poetic verses of The Old Testament. On both levels it is never boring and it can be spoken tolerably well.

(1) Op.cit., p.55.

The playwright has certainly sought dramatic effects by making maximum use of the highly imaginative material provided by various sources of tradition. His task was not only to select conformable elements from these sources, but also to fuse them as naturally as possible in order to embrace the philosophical theme of the play. Indeed the play is full of significant stimuli, verbal and visual, which are determined by their dramatic context. We only have to think of the discourse of birds and ants, the breathtaking scenes of the jinni, the throne, the magic carpet, the petrification of a person and the basin of tears, the dying king and the armies of termites swarming around his crushed stick, the unsuccessful romance of the two protagonists, the reunion of two desperate lovers and the sub-plot introducing the parallel romance of the fisherman - all these stimuli are there to embody and communicate the intellectual message of the play to an ordinary audience.

Any future performance must take these elements into consideration, because, sadly, the play has not been performed by any Egyptian troupe, nor given enough attention by critics, perhaps partly, as Long observes, on account of inhibition about its Jewishness.⁽¹⁾ But in fact the play is too long and for all its artistic potentialities, would require a costly financial and technical stage production, one of the tormenting realities

(1) Long, op.cit., p.56.

that we have to put up with in the theatre business in Egypt. The play, however, would make a magnificent opera or a "memorable film".⁽¹⁾

al-Sultān al-Hā'ir, (The Sultan's Dilemma):

This play was written in the autumn of 1959 during Hakīm's spell in Paris as a delegate to UNESCO where he had the opportunity to witness the problems facing today's world. One of them, he tells us in the preface, is crucial: should the world seek a solution to its conflict in the application of law or force?⁽²⁾ The central theme is the idea of Choice, an aspect meaningfully emphasised in the title of the French version, J'ai choisi.⁽³⁾ This idea has its antecedents in Greek literature and mythology as in "Hesiod's description of the two ways of life and the myth of the choice and judgement of Paris in Sophocles' satyr-play Crisis."⁽⁴⁾ There is also the allegory of the Choice of Heracles, who is said to have been met by Virtue and Vice in the form of two women of different appearance and attire, which is considered by a scholar to be the main

(1) Op.cit., p.56.

(2) The Play, Cairo, 1976, p.9. An English translation by Denys Johnson-Davis among other plays entitled Fate of a Cockroach and Other Plays, was published by Heineman, London, 1973; and on which I shall rely.

(3) Nouvelles Editions Latines, Paris, 1960.

(4) Albin Lesky: A History of Greek Literature, New York, 1966, p.348.

inspiration for Ḥakīm's play.⁽¹⁾ But we shall see, however, that it may well have been conceived under the inspiration of sporadic incidents in the history of medieval Egypt. We are not only guided by instinct but by actually similar events. Moreover, the idea, in a truly dramatic work as this one, is not all that important; but it is rather the main action which is here the selling of a sultan in public auction, and the atmosphere embracing it.

Although the play draws its characters and action, stripped of immediate names and issues, on a background of the past, it is not an historical play; but rather an attempt to create historical illusion around a contemporary theme. It takes us back to a time rich in associations for the legitimacy of the government and the status of the ruler.

The author chose as a setting for his play an inconspicuous phase in the history of Egypt under the rule of the Mamluks, who were slaves of foreign origin brought as boys from conquered territories to be trained as military bodyguards for the sultans. Al-Ṣāliḥ Najm ad-Dīn Ayyūb, the seventh Ayyubid ruler 636-647AH (= 1240-9), exceeded all his predecessors in multiplying the mamluks to the extent that they cramped Cairo, looted the goods, and annoyed the inhabitants, causing the Sultan to confine them in a castle built especially on the island of Rawḍa,

(1) A. Etman, op.cit., pp.186-198.

opposite Fustāt, on the Nile.⁽¹⁾ Henceforth, they were known as Bahrī mamluks, or fluvial slaves, to become later an invaluable fighting force. Their amīrs, or leaders, were taken from their own ranks, freed; and those freed mamluks became in turn the masters and owners of other mamluks. By the end of the Ayyubid dynasty, one of Ṣāliḥ's freed mamluks, al-Mu'izz Aybek married his master's widow queen Shajarat ad-Durr and became the first mamluk sultan 648-55 (= 1250-7), "the slave of today, the sovereign of tomorrow."⁽²⁾ The succession of the Bahrī mamluks to the throne of Egypt lasted for about 133 years and "the annals of mamluk dominion are full of instances of a great lord reducing the authority of the reigning sultan to a shadow, and then stepping over his murdered body to the throne."⁽³⁾

One of the most dramatic incidents in mamluk history is the account given by Arab historians of the easy way by which Captain Beybars seized the sultanate. According to them, Beybars, because of a personal feud, slew his sultan Qutuz while returning from Damascus in 658 (= 1260) in the eastern province of Egypt. When the plotters came in to the palace hall in Ṣāliḥiyyah, Aqṭāy the Commander-in-Chief asked them 'Which one of you killed him?'

(1) Ibn Iyās, op.cit., Vol. 1, p.83.

(2) W.E. Muir: The Mameluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt, Lon. 1896, p.215.

(3) S. Lane-Poole: A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages, Lon. 1901, p.244.

"I did' said Beybars proudly.
 'O Khawand (amir), take the Sultan's seat'
 retorted Aqtāy.
 In this manner, Beybars took the Sultanate
 forcibly."(1)

Although Beybars was "a great venerable sultan,
 brave and generous, a model of just rulers who fulfilled
 the Sultanate in every sense and abode by the laws of
 Islam", (2) his illegal seizure of the throne remains,
 nonetheless, as controversial as it is dramatic. His
 "heroic qualities have outlived his faults and pettinesses,
 and to the present century the audiences in the coffee-
 shops of Cairo have delighted in the story-tellers'
 recital of the daring exploits and princely generosity
 of a king who has impressed the imagination of the
 Egyptians more than any other, scarcely excepting
 Alexander and Saladin."(3)

As such, Beybars represented the rule of force,
 in whose face stood the rule of law represented by an
 extraordinary Muslim judge (qādī). A learned man and
 supreme judge 'Izz-ad-Dīn ibn 'Abd as-Salām (d.666AH =
 1268) contrived to restore justice and fight corruption
 even in the highest places in the government, fearing

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- (1) al-Maqrīzī: Kitāb al-Sulūk, Cairo, 1934, Vol. I,
 p.436; ibn Iyās, op.cit., p.97.
 (2) Maqrīzī, ibid., p.638; ibn Iyās, ibid., pp.100-1.
 (3) Lane-Poole, ibid., p.275.

nobody, however great.⁽¹⁾ It appears that his personality was so dominant that when he died, Beybars sighed a sigh of relief and said "my authority has never been well established until now."⁽²⁾

Still more corresponding to and fitting in this play is a very significant historical incident related to the qādī and recounted in historical accounts of medieval Egypt as follows:

"As soon as Shaykh ʿIzz ad-Din assumed the office of judge, he undertook to put the State's mamluk amīrs to a compulsory sale by auction on the ground that, to him, they were not proved to be free, and therefore remained slaves belonging to the Treasury of the Muslim people. When the judge's outspoken views reached them, they became grievously concerned, particularly the Viceroy, who was one of them. The judge was so adamant that he refused to sanction their affairs of buying, selling and weddings, bringing thus their activities to a halt. They gathered together and sent for him, but he told them 'We shall hold an auction for you, and your price shall go to the Treasury of the Muslim people. Therefore you shall be freed in a legal way.' Then, they appealed to the Sultan, who failed to convince the judge that he should change his mind. The Viceroy tried to be amicable to him, but the judge ignored him; thereupon the Viceroy lost his temper and threatened him in these words, 'How could this old man sell us in an auction as we are kings of the world? I swear by Allah I shall strike him with my sword'. He rode with the sword unsheathed, surrounded by his Mamluks, to the Judge's house. There

(1) ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Rafʿ al-iṣr ʿan quḍāt miṣr; Cairo, 1961, Vol. II, pp. 350-3.

(2) al-Suyūṭī, Husn al-muḥādara, Cairo, 1909, Vol. II, p. 66.

he was met by the judge's son, who hurried inside, terrified, to tell his father. The old man, unmoved by this hustle and bustle, calmed his son and said, 'Son, your father is too insignificant to be killed in the Cause of Allah.' And came out to face them. When the Viceroy saw him, his hand withered and dropped the sword, his joints trembled and weeping he begged the old man's forgiveness.

'My lord what are you going to do with us?' he asked.

'I am going to put you to an auction and sell you', the judge replied.

'How would you expend our cost,' the Viceroy asked.

'For the Muslims' interests'.

'Who will collect the money?'

'I will'.

The judge had the amirs auctioned, one by one, demanding a very high price, and did not sell them except for an exceedingly high price. He then received the money and spent it in the cause of charity."(1)

Clearly it is not a major historical event, but rather minor incidents which can be altered, as it were, in an artistic work. So much so that they, outside their inherent aspects such as the names and immediate issues, can be timeless, and afford therefore inspiration as well as different interpretations. Furthermore, the subject, had it been treated as a matter of history, would not indeed have aroused intense enthusiasm, because such subjects no longer occupy contemporary thinking.

The historical background, with all its associations, is taken then as a symbolic setting for the play to

(1) al-Suyūṭī, ibid., II, p.98.

express not only the playwright's philosophical theme, but also to expose the political choices facing Egypt in her post-revolutionary development. "Was the country to remain under a semi-military government, with dictatorial emergency powers, so that what had been gained by the revolution should be protected and kept under control by the leader? Or should the path of Constitutional rule be followed?"⁽¹⁾ As a man of law, Ḥakīm prefers the latter path, because it is legal and less perilous, but in the meantime cautions against the nominal trials and the abuse of the law in order to secure the continuation of a particular leader. His insight is later justifiably given in the form of some documents describing the humiliation of good citizens who dared to utter their opposition or even to express the need for democracy.⁽²⁾

Such explanation may clear up a misunderstanding resulting from taking the first performance of the play too historically by some admirers of the Qādī 'Izz ad-Dīn;⁽³⁾ because after all the playwright had not intended to treat a particular judge, nor a particular Sultan, but rather to question a political system, a state of affairs. All

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- (1) A. Ismail, op.cit., p.67.
 (2) Ḥakīm, 'Awdat al-Wa'iq; and Wathā'iq fi tarīq 'Awdat al-wa'iq, Beirut, 1974, 1975 respectively, passim.
 (3) Amīn al-Khūlī, al-Sulṭan al-Ha'ir bayn al-fann wa't-tārīkh, al-Majallah, Cairo 1962, Vol. XXXXXXII, pp. 60-3.

Hakīm had to do, as Mandūr rightly puts it, was "to keep the occupations of these characters, omitting the names. By doing so he had a free hand in drawing them symbolically outside history, according to the intellectual concept at which he was aiming."⁽¹⁾

The play treads the Constitutional path in a rather symbolic manner. The ultimate 'dawn' has been powerfully and intensively employed as a deadline for two sharply contrasting situations. The first is the execution of an ex-slave-trader for no apparent reason except that he has let it be publicly known that the reigning Sultan had not been freed by the previous Sultan. Throughout the dialogue between him and the Executioner, the excessive use of 'dawn' is quite deliberate and reminiscent of the dawn arrests of innocent people by the secret police known sarcastically in Egypt as 'The Dawn Visitors'.

"Condemned Man: (to the Executioner) Tell me truly when it is to be? When?
 Executioner: At dawn. I've told you this more than ten times. At dawn I'll carry the sentence on you...
 Condemned Man: Dawn? It's still far off, isn't it, Executioner?
 Executioner: When the Muezzin gives the call to the dawn prayer...
 Executioner: At dawn, in furtherance of the Sultan's orders."⁽²⁾

.....
 Executioner: You will remain fettered with chains till dawn.
 Condemned Man: ... What if I were to promise you that before the call to dawn prayer I would be back again in my chains.⁽³⁾

(1) Masrah T. al-Hakīm, Cairo, n.d., p.155.

(2) pp. 11-2.

(3) p.16.

Condemned Man: Until dawn breaks.
 Executioner: Don't worry about the dawn now -
 it is still far off.(1)

While the dawn here stands realistically for oppression and disturbing the tranquillity of the innocent; it does the opposite in the second situation. It is the deadline for setting the Sultan free after he has legally been auctioned and bought by a woman. It is also, one might add, the dawn of democracy and the rule of law that everyone awaits.

"Sultan: Until dawn breaks?
 Lady: Think not of the dawn now. The dawn is still far off.
 Sultan: I shall do all you demand until dawn breaks."(2)

Lady: ... What is it that causes you to be so pleasant to me? Is it personal? Or is it the decision you await from me at daybreak?(3)

The action of the play is triggered off by juxtaposing certain traditional elements which have served as a pretext for an assault on a political system, contemporary or timeless, national or universal. It takes a course of 24 hours from the time just before dawn to the same time on the following day; the unity of place has almost been observed too; something that may symbolize the whole struggle of mankind for freedom. It is centred around a Sultan who discovers that he has not been manumitted by his predecessor, and therefore he "is still a slave and

(1) p.19; also pp. 128-30.
 (2) p.133.
 (3) p.141; also pp. 149; 153-62.

that a person bearing such a stigma is not entitled to rule a free people."⁽¹⁾

Until we reach such a point, the action has been cleverly and skilfully concealed through the means of suspense enveloped in witty and humorous dialogue. In an open space the Executioner and a Condemned Man await the Muezzin's call to the dawn prayer, so the execution will be carried out. Alarmed at this thought, the Condemned Man complains that he has not been properly tried before a judge, but the Executioner silences him,

"Shut your mouth - I have been ordered to cut off your head right away if you utter a word about your crime."⁽²⁾

And he proposes to the man instead to entertain him with a glass of wine so that the beheading would be tidy,

"...When I drink I'm very precise in my work, but, if I haven't drunk, my work goes all to hell. By way of example I'll tell you what happened the other day. I was charged with the job of executing someone, and I hadn't drunk a thing all that day. Do you know what I did? I gave that poor fellow's neck such a blow that his head flew off into the air and landed far away - not in this basket of mine, but in another basket over there, the basket belonging to the Shoemaker next door to the tavern. God alone knows the trouble we had getting the missing head out of the heaps of shoes and soles."⁽³⁾

To further the irony, it is the Executioner, who asks the Condemned Man for entertainment in order to overcome

(1) pp. 49-50.
(2) p.13
(3) pp.17-8.

the boredom of waiting;

"...Remove my depression. Overwhelm me with joy! Let me enjoy the strains of ballads and songs!..."(1)

Of course the Condemned Man is in no mood to sing, so the Executioner forces him to listen to a song the Executioner had composed in a sleepless night,

"And am I capable of doing anything else? You have left my ears free - no doubt for that purpose."(2)

The Executioner, drunk, makes a good deal of noise which provokes a lady living nearby, and commonly but ~~wrongly~~ known as a prostitute. She emerges from her house and engages in conversation with both of them. What she says to the Condemned Man indicates that she is no ordinary character;

"Lady: What are you saying? Weren't you given a trial?

Condemned Man: I wasn't taken to court. I sent a petition to the Sultan asking that I be given the right to appear before the Chief Cadi, the most just of those who judge by conscience, the most scrupulous adherent to the canonical law, and the most loyal defender of the sanctity of the law. But - here dawn approaches and the Executioner has had his orders to cut off my head when the call to dawn prayers is given.

.....
Lady: Whose orders? The Sultan's?

Executioner: Roughly.

Condemned Man: (Shouting): Roughly? Is it not then the Sultan?

Executioner: The Vizier - the orders of the Vizier are the orders of the Sultan.

Condemned Man: Then I am irretrievably lost."(3)

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- (1) p.22.
(2) p.24.
(3) pp.35-6.

Afterwards she hinders the muezzin from calling, because she instinctively knows that patent injustice is about to take place. All this does not only prove vital in directing the course of the action, but will enable us to explain the implications of this character.

Soon after dawn, the Vizier, followed by the Sultan and the Judge, arrives at the square, and the man's 'crime' gradually unfolds. The Sultan and the Judge are enlightened for the first time about the whole matter, and the man's 'crime' which has so far been concealed, is not in any sense a crime but the plain truth. During the interrogation, the Vizier demonstrates that he is the crude force and the exponent of corruption in the executive power. After having sent an innocent man to the Executioner without the knowledge of the ruler and the representative of the judicial power, he now tries to kill the man before their eyes, on the grounds that,

"If this man's head were cut off and hung up in the square before the people, no tongue would thenceforth dare to utter."(1)

While the Sultan objects mildly, the judge strongly draws their attention to the fact that the Sultan will nevertheless still be

"ruling without having been manumitted, and that a slave is at the head of a free people."(2)

which provokes the Vizier to recall a historical sequence as a pretext for his wrong doing:

(1) p.55.
(2) p.56.

"It is not necessary for the person ruling to be carrying around documents and proofs. We have the strongest and most striking example of this in the Fatimid dynasty. Every one of us remembers what al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allah al-Fātimī did. One day he came along claiming he was descended from the Prophet, and thereupon he had the right to rule Egypt. When the people did not believe him, he went at them with drawn sword and opened up his coffers of gold, saying 'These are my forebears, these my ancestors'. The people kept silent and he reigned and his children reigned after him quietly and peaceably for centuries long."(1)

But the judge's opposition grows more and more strong in the face of the Vizier's humbug. The case as he sees it is both clear and simple,

"For the solution of this problem we have before us two alternatives, that of the sword and that of the law. As for the sword, that is none of my concern; as for the law, that is what it behoves me to recommend and on which I can give a legal opinion. The law says: it is only his master, the possessor of the power of life and death over him, who has the right to manumit a slave. In this instance, the master, the possessor of the power of life and death, died without leaving an heir and the ownership of the slave has reverted to the Exchequer. The Exchequer may not manumit him without compensation in that no one has the right to dispose gratis of property or chattels belonging to the State. It is, however, permitted for the Exchequer to make a disposition by sale, and the selling of the property of the State is not valid by law other than by an auction carried out publicly. The legal solution, therefore, is that we should put up His Majesty the Sultan for sale by public auction and the person to whom he is knocked down thereafter manumits him. In this manner the Exchequer is not harmed or defrauded in respect of its property and the Sultan gains his manumission and release through the law."(2)

(1) pp.56-7.
 (2) pp.65-6.

Naturally, the Sultan regards the whole business as a disgrace and ridiculous, so that he almost inclines towards the Vizier's opinion, but the judge reminds him of the fact that,

"...the Sword gives right to the Strongest, and who knows who will be the Strongest tomorrow? There may appear some strong person who tilts the balance of power against you. As for the law, it protects your rights from every aggression, because it does not recognize the Strongest - it recognizes right. And now there's nothing for you to do, Your Majesty, but choose: between the sword which imposes and yet exposes you, and between the law which threatens and yet protects you."(1)

And after some hesitation the Sultan opts for the legal course.

Before we go any further, one must point out the Sultan's choice is not, as a critic understands it,⁽²⁾ The ultimate climax of the play, otherwise the rest of the play would be discarded as redundant. In fairness, this misunderstanding has arisen from treating the play only in the context of the original incident, failing to relate its content to contemporary concepts.

Indeed, the remainder of the play is devoted to working out the consequences of the Sultan's choice. Again the implications dispersed in the second act are far from that of the original incident despite the fact that they are logically sprung from it. The auction is set up in

(1) pp.71-2.

(2) A. al-Qiṭṭ, Min Funūn al-adab; al-Masraḥiyyah, Beirut, 1978, p.184.

the same square as though to demonstrate the irony of the whole situation. Still more ironic is the placing of the last-night-condemned man in charge of today's auction. The irony doesn't escape the Executioner, who comments,

"How extraordinary! Here he is selling the same Sultan twice: once as a child, again now when he's grown up."(1)

The judge explains the conditions of sale, stressing that the purchase of the Sultan must be followed immediately by his manumission, whereas the Vizier speaks to the people about the patriotic nature of the proceedings, in a fashion reminiscent of contemporary politicians' hollow speeches,

"... You are today present at a great and unique occasion, one of the most important in our history: a glorious Sultan asks for his freedom and has recourse to his people instead of to his sword - that sharp and mighty sword by which he was victorious in battles against the Mongols and with which he could also have been victorious in gaining his freedom and liberating himself from slavery. But our just and triumphant Sultan has chosen to submit to the law like the lowliest individual amongst his subjects. Here he is seeking his freedom by the method laid down by law. Whoever of you wishes to redeem the freedom of his beloved Sultan, let him come forward to this auction, and whoever of you pays the highest price will have done a goodly act for his homeland and will be remembered for time immemorial."(2)

After some lively biddings, the bid is knocked down to an unknown person, acting on behalf of the lady. He refuses to sign the manumission contract, or to name his

(1) p.86.

(2) p.88, also, p.89.

mandator. As the Vizier is about to send the stranger to be tortured, the lady rushes out declaring herself as the mandator.

Here the importance of this misjudged woman becomes evident. While she announces her readiness to yield to the law, she refuses to bow down to the Vizier's threats or the judge's sophistry and therefore proves to be far more intelligent and honest than the representatives of both powers: executive and judicial. She says to the judge;

"You make manumission a condition of possession, that is to say that in order validly to possess the thing sold, the purchaser must yield up that very thing... In other words, in order to possess something you must yield it up... Or, if you like, in order to possess you must not possess... In order to buy you must manumit; in order for me to possess I must not possess. Do you find this reasonable?"(1)

The judge is stunned by the woman's eloquent argument, but the Vizier, never short of finding other vicious alternatives, incites the people against her. The Sultan, admiring the lady, is now determined more than ever before to go all the legal way, and accepts her only condition to spend the night in her company, and then be released at dawn.

The lady, as we find out, is not a common prostitute, nor, for that matter, an ordinary character. She is a respectable widow, who has a taste for art and has preserved her freedom to enjoy the intellectual company

(1) p.106.

of men in her semi-salon. In this respect, she stands as "symbol of the majority of the people, who have their say in bestowing the legal nature upon the ruler, and with a word they can remove him. This majority consist usually of the low classes in society, of whom we tend to think badly, whereas in fact they have unmistakable ability to distinguish between right and wrong."(1)

Throughout the night, the people are awaiting the dawn to see whether the lady will honour her promise to release their beloved Sultan, and the Vizier is engaged in fabricating an accusation against the lady should she change her mind,

"...There must be some terrible and serious crime which she will not be able to justify or defend herself against - a crime that will earn her the universal opprobrium of the whole people. We could for instance say she is a spy... working for the Mongols. Then the people in their entirety will rise up and demand her head."(2)

With the encouragement of the Executioner, he is confident of finding witnesses against her if need be.

Thus the implication that the enemies, being the Mongols here, are in fact in the East (for it can also be applicable to Israel) gives the impression of contemporary bearings on the action. Moreover it throws searching light on the reigning corruption of the executive power in "its preparedness to set up mock trials and ready-made accusations in order to silence

(1) Fu'ād Dawwāra, fi'n-Naqd al-masraḥī, Cairo, 1965, p.27.

(2) p.131.

those who oppose it, and deceive the masses with such semi-legal proceedings."(1)

What the dramatist seems to be implying throughout the narrative content, is echoed in a more explicit statement of his eye-witness account of the period where, as he claims, the temptation of power made the beneficiaries mislead the ruler into taking extravagant measures to secure his and their positions.(2)

However, there is another type of corruption, which can be far more damaging than that: not the absence of law but the abuse of the existing one; and catastrophe would be imminent if those, who are supposed to apply the law, distort it. The playwright launches his assault on the judge, for it is he, so pompous about the law, who instructed the Muezzin to call the dawn prayer at midnight in order to speed up the Sultan's release. When the lady objects to this, the Sultan agrees with her, lecturing the judge;

"... 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 occur to me that 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?"(3)

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- (1) Dawwāra, *ibid.*, p.29.
 (2) *‘Awdat al-Wa‘i*, pp.60-1.
 (3) p.164.

But the lady, showing her admiration probably love for the Sultan, signs the manumission documents amid words of praise. In recognition of her nobility, the Sultan presents her with a peerless ruby as a memento of that unforgettable night, ordering the Vizier to announce in the City that the people must respect her. In doing so the importance and pride of this character have been reaffirmed; the meaning now becomes clear. It is she, symbolizing the people, who is able to bring happiness and security to the Sultan, something he has always failed to get from his direct aids, the Vizier and the judge.

Thus, the play ends on a serious note, consistent with Hakīm's concept of equilibrium. It is "observable of words resulting from the double meaning of the word 'Sultan' which signifies not only 'the ruler' but also 'the power' and is obvious that there can be no balance unless the weight of authority and that of power are found in exact correspondence in the opposite scale of the balance."⁽¹⁾ Further, it has been reached at by the technical means of using symbols to embody the conflicting authorities within a particular society. As we have already seen, the balance can only be achieved through the reconciliation of the three powers, on the basis of mutual respect for each other and observation of the law.

(1) Ismail, op.cit., p.73.

Despite the seriousness and the obscurity of the subject, the dramatist has treated it so successfully that its far-reaching implications can be grasped even at the realistic level of the ordinary audience. In this play as in Solomon the Wise, Hakīm observes the theatrical devices that any performance would require. He uses the technique of dramatic suspense brilliantly which enables him to conceal and develop the action through various but harmonious crises, and in the meantime heighten the tension of the principal crisis. The atmosphere and some popular characters borrowed from The Arabian Nights, add humour and light touches to the intellectual issues occurring throughout the play. Characters such as the slave-trader, the Executioner, the Shoemaker, the Wine-Merchant and the Muezzin contribute a great deal to the charming popular atmosphere. They, as Long points out, "parallel in function those of many a Shakespeare comedy. The delightful array of jolly minor incidents also enhances the impression."⁽¹⁾

The short, snappy, dialogue is full of expressive wit. At last Hakīm has given drama the kind of intellectual talk that people would sit and enjoy listening to. I have deliberately chosen certain passages to demonstrate this phenomenon: however the following instance between the Shoemaker and the Wine-Merchant on the morning of the auction day, may be indicative:

(1) Op.cit., p.82.

- "Shoemaker: ...Here am I, showing off finest shoes today. (He points to the shoes hanging up at the door of his shop.)
- Wine-Merchant: My dear Shoemaker, those who come to buy today have come to buy the Sultan, not your shoes.
- Shoemaker: Why not? Maybe there are some among the people who are in greater need of my shoes." etc...(1)

When all has been said, Hakīm's greatest accomplishment in this play remains his unique and talented use of the finest spots in Arabic literature. Although the traditional story is the cornerstone without which the play can never be understood nor accepted, yet it has been completely dissolved throughout the work, and if it had not been for its rich associations it would not have even been recognized as a separate incident. It has undoubtedly given the work three artistic dimensions: the symbolic setting which accommodates the action, the lively reflection of contemporary issues not only in Egypt but possibly in other Arab countries, and the philosophical dimension which appeals to the whole understanding of the general public. In this respect, it has brought back to the theatre a willing audience that welcomed it in both Cairo and Paris in the year following its composition.

With works such as this, Hakīm reaches the summit of his struggle to reconcile the tradition of Western drama with that of Arabic literature. His enormous success has stimulated the enthusiasm of the present generation of playwrights, who can now confidently march on a paved path without inhibition or fear of accusation.

CHAPTER V
MODERN ARABIC POETRY AND DRAMA

Poetry was the conventional form of early drama and continued to be so for tragedy long after prose had intruded into comic scenes of Shakespeare. Then, in the 18th Century with the rise of a middle-class audience and the realistic flair of the novel that demanded the more frequent treatment of contemporary themes, prose became the fashion for all plays. But although the growing commercialism of the theatre and the appearance of great prose playwrights limited the use of verse on the stage, drama has never lost its leaning towards poetry. Prose drama, Eliot argues, "is merely a slight by-product of verse drama. The human soul, in intense emotion, strives to express itself in verse... The tendency, at any rate, of prose drama is to emphasise the ephemeral and superficial; if we want to get at the permanent and universal we tend to express ourselves in verse."⁽¹⁾ There are of course great prose dramatists such as Ibsen and Chekhov who, says Francis Fergusson, "have at times done things of which I would not otherwise have supposed prose to be capable, but who seem to me, in spite of their success to have been hampered in expression by writing in prose. This peculiar range of sensibility can be expressed by dramatic poetry, at its moments of greatest intensity."⁽²⁾

However, from what has been happening in the last decades, the verse drama, as an old genre, appears to be

(1) Selected Essays, p.46.

(2) The Human Image in Dramatic Literature, Doubleday Anchor Book, New York, 1957; p.103.

regaining a great deal of its previous status. The 20th century has produced fine poets who are capable of breaking away from the traditional verse drama, laying down new foundations for poetic drama with free verse. With them verse drama appears most likely to recapture some of its lost territory in connection with history and myths, as the modern poet or artist has become acutely ill at ease in our present life-world. His vision has been blurred by scientism, and "yet only in these fantastic forms can man reveal certain of his fears, his desires, and his tentative apprehension of the real world of his own nature. What he discloses about himself in myth can be expressed in no other way, for the expository language of rational thought cannot contain it".⁽¹⁾ This inevitable return to history and myth must surely produce a paradoxically rich language which can only be secured by the rhythmic flow of poetry. And taking into consideration the open boundaries between world cultures, the movement should not be confined to Western literature but, as we shall see, should be received with all the responsive consciousness of modern Arabic literature.

Through the study of Shawqī's Majnūn Laylā in a previous chapter, we have seen that the great poet entered the field of drama as a lyrical poet but not as a dramatist;

(1) Lillian Feder, Ancient Myth in Modern Poetry, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1971, p.28.

and that in spite of his unquestionable talent, he did not attempt to challenge the ancient rules of Arabic versification or even to alter the traditional system of the Arabic poem. Hence the answer to the need for a truly dramatic poetry had been delayed for nearly three decades after his death. It seems that the last five years, in which he wrote all his dramas, was not enough to turn him into a fully matured dramatist, especially when we bear in mind that he had inherited nothing worthy of being called Arabic verse drama. The result was that his plays were merely a product of direct imitation and of a burning desire to fill a yawning gap in Arabic literature, rather than of a slow process of assimilation. The dramatic form, which he was so keen to introduce, could have been an excuse for him to contribute such changes; and furthermore could have allowed him to depart from the historical nature of his dramatic themes in order to bear upon modern preoccupations. This may be due to the fact that Shawqī did not completely understand the function of dramatic poetry or the difference between the poet-playwright and the historian when tackling the same historical events, which Aristotle, the father of dramatic criticism states as follows,

"The historian and the poet differ from one another not by virtue of the fact that one is writing prose and the other verse; it would be possible to produce a metrical version of Herodotus, but the result would still be a species of history. Where the historian really differs from the poet is in his describing what has happened, while the other describes the kind of thing that

might happen. Poetry therefore is more philosophic and of greater significance than history, for its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are particulars."(1)

Whatever Shawqī's drama may be criticised for, there is no doubt that it represents the first pioneering step towards creating an Arabic verse drama based on a genuine belief in and an impressive knowledge of the Arabic heritage. If it had not been for Shawqī's status as the greatest Arab poet of his time, we might have been struggling now to take that drastic step.

One of the many grievous vacuums that Shawqī had to put up with was the absence of a constructive movement in literary criticism, which would have benefitted the newly-born genre. The critics of the time seemed either to have little knowledge of the new genre or none at all; and those treated it as some kind of Shawquian innovation in the world of poetry to the extent that a critic called The Death of Cleopatra "a precious and glorious poem".(2) While in their periodical Apollo,(3) the patrons of the romantic movement in Arabic poetry wholly dismissed Shawqī's drama as being unprofitable to poetry or literature;(4) the poets of the Dīwān's Group, led by their staunch protagonist ḤAqqād, concentrated a spirited

(1) Poetics, trans. by John Warrington, London, Dent 1963, p.17.

(2) Nasīm Mejallī ḤNaqd al-masrah al-ShiḤrī fī al-majallāt al-adabiyah', al-Thaqāfah, Sep. 1975, p.63.

(3) In an issue devoted to Shawqī, Dec. 1932.

(4) Mejallī, ibid., pp.63-4.

and rather prejudicial attack on a number of points, the most important of which being the absence of organic unity in Shawqī's poems. (1)

Although these literary movements, particularly the Dīwān's Group, have contributed a great deal to the conception of Arabic poetry, where they insist on subjective poetry generated by the poet's direct experience with life, the traditional structure of the Arabic poem remained mainly unscathed. All they could do was to divide the formal pattern into quintains or quatrains in order to ease the monotony of the metre and the rhyme, something Shawqī had already tried in some parts of his plays. However what needs to be taken into account is the fact that this group "succeeded to a large extent in preparing the reading public, especially the younger generation, for the acceptance of a new type of poetry, different from the 'neoclassical'." (2)

In fact the first serious attempt to break the traditional system of Arabic prosody came four years after Shawqī's death. It was in response to a provocative allegation made by an English lecturer that Arabic poetry was not qualified for embracing verse drama and that English was the only language which could ^{accommodate} afford it because of its blank verse. A.A. Bākathīr, who was a

(1) For details see: Badawī, op.cit., pp.88-92.

(2) Badawī, op.cit., p.89.

student in the class at the time, answered the challenge of his teacher by translating an act of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet in Arabic blank verse.⁽¹⁾ Then he pursued the attempt further by composing Akhnātūn wa Nefertītī, a play based on the religious reformation carried out by Akhnatun in ancient Egypt. The play is written in the blank verse of the al-mutadārak metre, which consists of the repetition of one foot determined by the dramatic context and not by the traditional line. Thus, in order to reach a smoothly dramatic flow the unity of the line and monorhyme had to be sacrificed, something Shawqī had agonizingly refrained from doing. For this reason Bākathīr's experiment should be considered a corner-stone not only in contemporary Arabic drama but also in Arabic poetry.

In poetry the result was of immense importance. As far as the metres were concerned, the transition from one traditional metre to another in one poem, or the combination of a traditional metre and a free form of verse, were very common. The former is best illustrated in Jibran Khalil Jibran's poem al-Mawākib (The Processions) in which the poet employs two metres to express two levels of emotion concerning his rejection of the corruption and complexities of the civilized world in favour of an

(1) 'A.A. Bākathīr, Fann al-masraḥiyyah min Khilāl tajāribī al-Shakḥsiyyah, Cairo, 1958, pp.4-5.

innocent and simple one. As for the latter Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's poem Port Said (1956) is a brilliant example which has widely been admired by many contemporary poets. (1)

Yet the rebellion against traditional prosody led to another development in connection with the language and with images in which the poet expresses his own feelings. And if the Dīwān Group had prepared the reading public for this forthcoming change without giving away too many concessions, the new generation of poets had to adopt what a prominent poet terms "a linguistic boldness". (2) Explaining this he goes on to say,

"We must master the language through frequent reading of the Arabic literary heritage, not to imitate it, but to capture glimpses of the abundant richness of Arabic. Then we must proceed to accept the new words and incorporate them into our poetic usages." (3)

One cannot deny that these views have been inspired by T.S. Eliot's critical essays concerning his practical interests as a poet. The Egyptian poet shows his admiration as well as approval of Eliot's strivings to grasp an everyday-language by citing a passage from part III of The Waste Land (1922) where Eliot portrays life as if it were composed of a jumbled debris of distasteful objects,

(1) For details on this point see Alī A. Zāyid, °An binā' al-qaṣīdah al-°arabiyyah al-ḥadīthah, Cairo 1978, pp.185; 200-4.

(2) Ṣalāḥ °Abd al-Ṣabūr, Ḥayātī fī al-Shi°r, Beirut, 1969, p.92.

(3) Ibid., p.97

"At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles and stays."(1)

He applauds both Eliot's language and vision admitting the impact Eliot had on his early poems.(2)

By breaking away from the traditional metres and by bringing the language of poetry down to the level of prose, the mood of the lyrics had to be shifted to a dramatic structure so that it would ensure the reader's participation in the poet's own experience. For this reason dramatic devices such as dialogue, monologue, exposition and even stage-directions have been applied to the structure of the lyrics; and Arabic poetry has come closer than ever before to a true form of drama.

The attempt to retain an accepted structure goes with Ṣalāh ʿAbd al-Ṣabūr's(3) early experiments in lyric verse, with his determined use of this remarkable and flexible technique, which is demonstrated, for instance, in one of his lyrics entitled Riḥla fī al-layl (A Journey

- (1) The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot, Faber & Faber 1975, p.68.
 (2) Op.cit., pp.90-1.
 (3) Born 1931, graduated from Cairo University in 1951. Since his graduation he has worked in teaching, the press and in publishing. He has written several collections of poetry, poetic dramas, and critical essays. His plays have been produced by the Egyptian National Theatre and in other Arab capitals. Some of his works have been translated into English, including his state prize winner Ma'sāt al-Hallāj (1964) which shall be the subject of this study.

It is also noticeable that although the subject is extremely individual and the mood is that of loneliness and boredom, there is always an attempt to communicate it through the competent means of drama. What makes the poem technically convincing from an Arabic point of view, is in fact the use of such dramatic effects. The seeming disjointedness which is apparent in the abrupt breaking-off of images, is related intimately to the poet's own plight, to his sense of futility. Again the essential vision of the poet is Eliot's, a vision of despair and horror.

Since it was a matter of form as well as content, the new movement in Arabic poetry needed only to look at traditional material in a new way and for a new reason. The modern Arab poet felt the need to re-examine his well-established tradition in the light of what had been acclaimed and achieved in world literature in general and Western in particular. In the West the problem was this:

"a choice between the raw, unqualified present, and the dead past. The poets who have been able to avoid the dilemma have succeeded in avoiding it because they could weld past with present. Indeed, every past is dead which is unconnected with present - the past of the literary vacuum. Conversely, a present which is nothing but the immediate present of sensation - the present unrelated to history - is not even the present. It is apt to be merely a collection of sensations, or at best, unrelated images."(1)

(1) Cleanth Brooks, Modern Poetry and The Tradition, The University of North Carolina Press, USA, 1967, p.75.

Similar was the problem facing the Arab poet. In the past three decades he has resigned himself to the fact that he cannot reject his own tradition merely because it belongs to another age. On the contrary he has found it lively and potentially full of elements that could be apt for his purpose. Nor can he deal with it as detached from other traditions, because the world no longer adheres to the existence of any boundaries between its culture,⁽¹⁾ and that, as Eliot advocates, "no poet, no artist of any art has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."⁽²⁾

By returning to the tradition, the poet's intention was not to escape the present but to enrich it. It was an attempt, as Ṣabūr puts it, to give "more depth to the poem than the visible one, to transfer the poet's experience from its subjective level to a substantially human one as to engrave the poem in history. The poet, therefore, should not use myths only, but all available historical material whether religious or popular, or real events that have been so influential in the history of mankind."⁽³⁾

Ṣalāh ᶜAbd al-Ṣabūr's poetry is a reflection of all these changes, especially in the application of traditional

(1) Ṣabūr, op.cit., p.109.

(2) Eliot's Selected Essays, p.15.

(3) Op.cit., p.100.

He came to split open the belly of the dog-man
 To squeeze the marrow of the fox-man
 -'My Shaykh Bassām al-Dīn,
 Tell me: where is the man... the man?'
 -'Be patient... He will come
 One day his procession will appear'.
 -'My good Shaykh,
 Do you know in what days we live?
 Do you know?
 This infected day is the eighth,
 Of the fifth week,
 Of the thirteenth month.
 Man, the real man passed,
 Years ago.
 He left unrecognized by anyone;
 He dug the shale; slept,
 And made suffering his cover'."(1)

Indeed the familiar background to the poet's experience here makes it easy for the recipient to participate in and identify himself with it too. Although this in itself may refute any uncertainty about the loyalty of the new movement to the tradition, it remains to be said that the socio-political atmosphere must have prompted the Arab artist to employ such traditional elements in order to transmit political messages that cannot be expressed otherwise. As we have already seen, the trick has actually been used by Hakīm in The Sultan's Dilemma for the same reason. It is worth noting in this context that Ṣabūr considers Hakīm "the greatest Arab artist in modern times, because he represents the middle way between Eastern and Western cultures."(2)

(1) Riḥlā fī al-layl, pp.54-66.

(2) Ṣabūr, Mādhā Yabqā minhum li'l-tārīkh, Cairo 1968, pp.81-4.

CHAPTER VI
SUFİ TRADITION AND THE INTELLECTUAL'S DILEMMA

Ma'sāt al-Hallāj (The Tragedy of al-Hallāj, 1965)⁽¹⁾

In the light of all that has been said in the previous chapter, it is not surprising that ^cAbd al-Ṣabūr should have turned to playwriting, that his theme should be freedom of expression, or that he should choose for his play a myth-like figure from Islamic Sufi literature.

According to the account given in the Islamic sources, al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Hallāj (the wool-carder) who lived between 244-309 H/858-922AD "was an enamoured and intoxicated votary of Sufism".⁽²⁾ At the age of sixteen he entered upon the ascetic and mystical life as a pupil of the eminent Sufis, Sahl al-Tustarī, ^cAmr al-Makkī and completed his training in Baghdad under al-Junayd, the greatest mystic of the time. Ḥallāj made the pilgrimage to Mecca several times. Having broken with his Shaykhs, he went out into the world to preach asceticism and mysticism. The fact that he was banned from the circles of his Sufi teachers was probably due to their dislike of the extreme pantheism to which he had by this time committed himself; although Hujwīrī states that this was due "not to any attack on religion and doctrine, but to his conduct and behaviour."⁽³⁾

(1) Translated into English with an introduction, under the title Murder in Baghdad, by Khalil I. Semaan, Leiden 1972.

(2) ^cAlī b. ^cUthmān al-Hujwīrī, Kashf al-mahjūb, trans. by R.A. Nicholson, London, Luzac & Co. 1936, p.150.

(3) Ibid., p.151.

Whatever the case might be, Hallāj endeavoured to describe his sufi vision, an act which angered many of his most loyal friends like al-Shiblī, who says "Hallāj and I are of one belief, but my madness saved me, while his intelligence destroyed him."⁽¹⁾ The sufi covenant necessitates the absolute silence of the sufi and in no circumstances "should he divulge the secret of God among those who are concealed from it."⁽²⁾ Hallāj went on to express his experience in words which were obscure and repugnant to the minds and imaginations of those who heard them. The meaning implied in the famous formula "Anā al-ḥaqq - I am the Real" was seen by his critics as that of an infidel and a heretic to the extent that "some orthodox theologians reject him on the ground that his sayings are pantheistic, but the offence lies solely in the expression, not in the meaning."⁽³⁾

To illustrate the point and to shed some searching light on the play, I have sought two examples of these sayings in which Hallāj speaks about his vision. In his book The Ṭawasīn Hallāj has this to say,

"...The perception of reality is difficult to acquire, so how much more difficult is the perception of the reality of the Reality..."

(1) Ibid., p.15.

(2) ^cAbd al-Wahhāb al-Sha^crānī, al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā, Cairo n.d., Vol. I, p.10.

(3) Hujwīrī, op.cit., p.152.

The moth flies about the flame until morning, then he returns to his fellows and tells them of his spiritual state with the most eloquent expression. Then he mixes with the coquetry of the flame in his desire to reach perfect union. The light of the flame is the knowledge of reality, its heat is the reality of reality, and Union with it is the Truth of the reality.

He was not satisfied with its light nor with its heat, so he leapt into it completely. Meanwhile, his fellows were awaiting his coming so that he could tell them of his actual vision since he had not been satisfied with hearsay. But at that moment, he was being utterly consumed, reduced and dispersed into fragments, and he remained without form or body or distinguishing mark. Then in what sense can he return to his fellows? And in what state now that he has obtained? He who had arrived at the vision became able to dispense with reports. He who arrives at the object of his vision is no longer concerned with the vision."(1)

The other passage is from a speech delivered by Hallāj, amid weeping and crying, in a market in Baghdad,

"Oh people! Hide me from God. Hide me from God. Hide me from God. He took me from myself and has not given me back; and I cannot perform the service I should do in His Presence for my fear of His leaving me alone again. He will leave me deserted, abandoned, and woe for the man who knows himself outcast after that Presence... For me in this moment there is no Veil between me and Him, so I cannot rest. My humanity has died into His Deity and my body has faded into the fire of His power, that I no longer have a face or an end to trace."(2)

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- (1) The Ṭawāsīn, Trans. by Aisha Abd al-Rahman al-Tarjumana, Islamic Book Foundation, Lahore 1978, pp.24-5.
- (2) Akhbār al-Hallāj, published by L. Massignon and Paul Kraus; Larose, Paris 1936, pp.25-6.

This public discourse raised an outcry against him and led to his being arrested and brought to trial at Baghdad and ultimately to his tragic execution. The accusation brought forward by Hāmid ibn al-^cAbbās the vizier of al-Muqtadir, was a skilfully chosen combination of theological and political matters. It is alleged that the authorities asked a group of theologians to examine his books "where they found in one of them that if a Muslim would want to make pilgrimage to Mecca but cannot, let him set apart a room in his house, clean and perfume it, and when the time comes let him make his circuit round it and perform all the same ceremonies as he would do at Mecca."⁽¹⁾ Other theologians hesitated to condemn him outright and took refuge in an attitude of neutrality. They were represented by Abū al-^cAbbās ibn Surayj the great Shāfi^cī theologian who said "this is a man whose state is concealed from my knowledge, so I cannot condemn him."⁽²⁾

The political nature of the accusation is understood to be based upon the assumption that Hallāj had held a secret correspondence with the Carmathians who took up arms and terrorized the empire, and that Hallāj had attracted some dissidents.⁽³⁾ Hujwīrī, writing in the middle of the 5th century (11AD) says "I have seen at Baghdad and in the

(1) Tabaqāt al-Sha^crānī, Vol. I, pp.14-15.

(2) ibn Khillikān, Wafayāt al-a^cyān, Cairo, 1310 H., Vol. 1; p.147; Also Akhbār al-Hallāj, pp.106-7.

(3) Ibid., Vol. 1, p.148.

adjoining districts a number of heretics who pretend to be the followers of al-Hallāj and make his sayings an argument for their heresy and call themselves Hallājīs. They spoke of him in the same terms of exaggeration as the Rāfidīs apply to ^cAlī."(1)

To Ṣalāh ^cAbd al-Ṣabūr, Hallāj was not only a receptive mystic but also a committed artist embodying the hopes and the suffering of all free men. The playwright explains why he chose this character for his play as follows,

"The play sheds light on my own salvation. I was disgusted by many problems of our time, and I was so confused that I came to ask myself the same question that had confronted Hallāj: what should I do?... Hallāj's choice was to speak and face death because, in my opinion, he was not only a mystic but a poet as well. Indeed the sufi experience and the artistic experience spring from one source and meet at one point, that is to bring back the universe to its state of purity and harmony. Hence Hallāj's suffering is a symbol for all the suffering of the intellectuals in most modern countries, a symbol for their dilemma: to fear the 'sword' or to utter the 'word'... The play is an expression of my genuine belief in the free word."(2)

It is obvious that the playwright identifies his role here with that of Hallāj and, therefore, we must expect the play to have some contemporary preoccupational bearings. For much of the action, he retains the story of Hallāj, if only in its barest outlines - his defiance of authority and to the dominant method of the other sufis,

(1) Op.cit., p.152.

(2) Hayātī fī al-Shi^cr, pp.119-120.

his trial and execution. Yet the real contribution of the playwright lies mainly in his bold interpretation of these historical incidents to correspond exactly to the above-mentioned preoccupations. He has sought most of the characters, particularly Hallāj, to describe dramatically what he had endeavoured to express in his lyrics. In this respect, the sufi tradition of Islam proved to be indispensable as well as an appropriate means for transmitting the playwright's endeavour as it did with his lyrics.

Ma'sāt al-Hallāj then is an outcry of a hopeless intellectual who has nothing to offer but to sacrifice himself in the cause of what he believes to be just. It consists of two vast acts; the first is entitled 'The Word' (or the Utterance), and the second 'The Death', as though to say that Hallāj's life, the symbol of all suffering intellectuals, exists only between those two chapters.

The first act comes in three scenes, and opens on a square in medieval Baghdad, where an old man hangs on a tree branch and three passers-by, a merchant, a peasant and a preacher, wondering who the man could be. This brilliant device lands us immediately at the culmination of the tragedy where our emotion is most intense as to the identification of the hanged man and the motivation behind the hanging. Eventually a crowd gathers, forming two choric groups, the first of which represents a group of ordinary poor people. Through their leader they admit

having killed the man with their "words":

"They lined us up, row upon row.
The tallest, loudest one
Was put in front;
... ..
They gave us each a pure gold dinar
Shiny, never touched before.
They said, 'Shout: Heretic! Heretic'.
We shouted, 'Heretic! Heretic!'
They said, 'Shout: Let him be killed, his blood be
upon our heads!'
We shouted, 'Let him be killed, his blood be upon
our heads!'
Then they said, 'Go' and we went."(1)

The second chorus represents a group of poor sufis
who also claim having committed the murder,

"We loved his words
More than we loved him,
So we let him die so that his words might live."(2)

But they attribute their default in helping Hallāj in his
ordeal to the fact that he had always sought to die as a
martyr,

"He wished for death, he longed to return to heaven,
As though he were a heavenly child who was lost,
A child who had strayed from his Father in the
dark of night,
He used to say:
'He who kills me fulfils my wish
And that of God.
For he who kills me would fashion the dust of a
dead man
A story with a moral, and an ideal'
... ..
His wish was fulfilled.
Should the world be deprived of a martyre?..."(3)

Historically this corresponds to what might be considered
Hallāj's passion for death or, more appropriately, for

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- (1) Ma'sāt al-Hallāj, Beirut, 2nd imp., 1969, pp.15-6.
(2) Ibid., p.18.
(3) Ibid., pp.21-2.

martyrdom as in the story telling us that he went one day into the Mosque of Mansūr and cried at an assembled crowd:

"You ought to know that God has made me your outlaw. So kill me." People in the crowd began to weep; but 'Abd al-Wadūd ibn Sa'īd the sufi pressed nearer to him and asked: 'Shaykh, how could we kill a man who prays and fasts and recites the Quran?'
 "The motive that really stays you from shedding my blood has nothing to do with all these. So why not kill me? You will have your reward for it, and I shall come to my peace. For you it will be your holy war; for me it will be my martyrdom."(1)

For the merchant, the peasant and the preacher, indeed for us too, the mystery is still unfolded in spite of this emotional involvement. The sufis exit and Shiblī steps out from behind the tree addressing his hanged companion,

"... ..
 If I had only had such faith as you,
 I would now be crucified next to you.
 But when I faced the inquisition, I wanted
 to stay alive,
 And I uttered vague words
 When they brought you before the judges.
 I am the one who killed you.
 I am the one who killed you."(2)

Now, putting together the last passage and Shiblī's opinion of Hallāj quoted earlier, "... my madness saved me while his intelligence destroyed him", we might be able to understand the implications of these two characters in modern terms. The playwright has deliberately sought

(1) Akhbār al-Hallāj, pp.75-6, also pp.14-5.

(2) The Play, p.27.

Shiblī, of all sufis, in order to demonstrate the division of two kinds of intellectuals facing authority; those who seek safety by remaining silent and those who entirely commit themselves to the cause by being active. The conflict here lies not only within Hallāj, his conviction as a sufi and his commitment as an artist; but also between his approach and Shiblī's towards the social diseases of the time.

Scene two is a flash-back to the roots of these conflicting methods, where we see Hallāj at home arguing the matter with Shiblī. Hallāj has come to believe that the only way to curb evil is certainly not by avoiding the world, but by taking a more positive part in worldly affairs. That means renouncing the sufi garment the sign of abstinence from the world. But Shiblī asks him,

"Evil?

What do you mean by evil?

H: The poverty of the poor
The hunger of the hungry,
When their looks glow with words
Which I do not understand.

... ..

Men and women enchained, forgetting the freedom
which they lost.

Gods, besides God, look upon them as though
at scornful slaves.

Listen, Shiblī!

Evil has conquered God's world.

Tell me. How can I close my eyes to the world,
And not wrong my own heart?

... ..

Sh: Evil is old in this world.

Evil is meant for those who are in this world,
So that the Lord can know who shall be saved
and who shall perish.

Each must find the road to his own salvation;
So if by chance you find the road, then take it.
But keep it a secret; do not disclose your secret."(1)

(1) Ibid., pp.35-41.

his revelation of what, according to the tradition, should not have been revealed; but beyond that lies the message of a suffering artist who could no longer stand idle.

The second act comes in two scenes, the first of which takes place in a prison where Hallāj is awaiting trial. It is in the prison that Hallāj's belief in "reviving souls with words"⁽¹⁾ begins to rub off when he encounters one of the inmates. To the prisoner nothing ever comes of words, and life has taught him that evil should be met with the sword. Hallāj's confrontation with the evil authority has so far been verbal; and it is up to him now to decide whether to confine himself to mere words or to back them up with the blade of the sword;

"I do not fear carrying one,
But I fear walking with one at my side;
For a sword in blind hands becomes the instrument
of blind death".⁽²⁾

The dilemma here is reminiscent of the one facing Hakīm's Sultan; yet it is a predicament of a sufi who always looks for guidance from God;

"Is the Lord punishing me in my soul and in my faith,
Concealing His light from my eyes?
Or have vague ideas
And the clouds of vague utterances hidden His light
from my eyes?
Or is He calling me to make my own choice?
Suppose I do make my own choice; what would I choose?
To raise my voice,
Or to raise my sword?
What would I choose?
What would I choose?"⁽³⁾

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- (1) p.122.
(2) p.133.
(3) p.136.

Amid this confusion and dilemma, Ḥallāj is summoned by the prison officer to appear before the State's judges and he is more than relieved;

"This is the best thing God has given me. God has chosen. God has chosen."(1)

Perhaps the inability of Ḥallāj to decide for himself may be considered his fatal weakness, but it can be interpreted in the light of his views about the Will of God. A passage in Ṭawāsīn, in which Ḥallāj manifests his vision of God's command to Iblīs to bow down before Adam, may be indicative,

"Allah, may He be praised, said to Iblīs: 'The choice is mine not yours'. He said: 'All choices and my choice itself are Yours, because You had already chosen for me, Oh Creator. If You prevented me from prostrating before him You were the cause of the prevention... If You had willed that I prostrate before him, I would have been obedient. I do not know anyone among the wise who knows You better than I do'."(2)

Finally we come to the scene of the trial. The playwright has picked two judges from the historical references in order to display the two faces of the Judiciary. One when the law becomes a plaything and a blind tool in the hands of the dictator. The striking example to this attitude is Abū ʿUmar al-Ḥammādī "the Mālikī Judge who was known for his partiality in favour of the ruling party."(3) His procedure will remind us

(1) p.141.

(2) English Trans., p.48.

(3) L. Massignon 'Etude sur une courbe personnelle de vie: le ca de Ḥallāj, martyr mystique de l'Islam 'Arabic trans. by 'A. Badawī in Shakhsīyyāt qalīqah fī al-Islam, Kuwait, 1978, p.76, p.80.

of the total ordeal we have already encountered in The Sultan's Dilemma. The other face is the lawful and just one which is represented by an impartial judge called ibn Surayj the Shāfi^cI theologian. It has been reported that he protested against the grotesque nature of the accusation on the ground that a Hallāj is merely a man who knows the Quran by heart and whose knowledge of it and of The Tradition is unquestionable. He is a God-fearing man who fasts all day, prays all night, preaches, and utters things I do not understand; therefore I cannot charge him of heresy."⁽¹⁾ His legal opinion in the first trial is still approved-of by the Shāfi^cites up to the present day.⁽²⁾ Although he was never called upon to judge in the second trial, the playwright nonetheless has employed him to show the discrepancy in the legal course.

Before the trial everything has been devised in accordance with the Grand Vizier Hamid ibn al-^cAbbās as to bring Hallāj down. 'Abu ^cUmar orders the Bailiff to go and see if the soldiers "have arrived with the culprit". But ibn Surayj reminds him of his duties as a judge, saying:

"Look into your conscience and tell me -
Doesn't your description of Hallāj
As 'culprit' and 'enemy of God'
Mean that judgement has already been passed.
Even before his case comes before us?
Is there really any need for us to hold this session?"

(1),(2) Ibid., p.85, and Akhbār al-Hallāj, pp.106-7.

To which the corrupt judge answers:

"This man was turned over to us by the Sultan,
Accused of rebellion.
Therefore it is our duty to prescribe a just
punishment for the crime.

... ..
What we can do is to make a gibbet-rope
from the fibres of the law;
The hangman is the one who will pull it."(1)

Yet, having one foot in the past, the situation touches
on some timeless preoccupations; so much so that the issue
of power and justice, which had occupied Ḥakīm's mind,
is tucked away in a brilliant piece of dialogue between

The Chief Judge and Ḥallāj:

"Abu^cUmar: ... God most high
Has put in the hands of our righteous
Caliph (may God preserve him)
The scales of Justice, and her sword.
Ḥallāj: These cannot be held in one and the
same hand."(2)

The attitude of the judges angers ibn Surayj that he
again reminds them of the fact they are judges in God's
name, not in the Sultan's. He also proposes that they
ought to hear from the accused and let their consciences
be arbiters.

When at last Ḥallāj is allowed to speak his mind,
he agrees to do so not to prove his innocence but to
convince the judges that his 'path' is the right one.
As he explains in a lengthy monologue, his search for
the path of knowledge had taken many years of fearful
perplexity until his Beloved favoured him with the

(1) pp.145-7.

(2) pp.155-6.

Amid confusion and disagreement in the court-room, a messenger enters with a dispatch from the Palace, instructing the judges to clear Hallāj from all allegations of rebellion, and urging them to investigate only "other things inspired by the devil such as his sinful visions and heresy."⁽¹⁾ Upon this ibn Surayj can hardly go a stage further, and become part of the obvious conspiracy to murder an innocent believer, so he angrily resigns.

The motivation of killing the man has now become clear; for the plotters have dropped the intended charges in order to strip Hallāj of the one honourable quality that would have made him a martyr in the eyes of the people. By sticking to a false religious accusation, they would arouse the anger of simple minded masses against him on the one hand, and gain their blessing and support for having ridden them of a heretic, on the other. The masses, represented significantly by the chorus of the poor, are so deceived by this ruse that when all witnesses have testified, the Chief Judge turns and asks them,

"What is your opinion, O Muslims,
Of a man who says that God reveals Himself
to him, or that God manifests
Himself in him?"

Crowd: Heretic! Heretic!
Abu^CUmar: How do you punish him?
Crowd: Death! Death!
Abu^CUmar: His blood is upon you?
Crowd: His blood is upon us.
Abu^CUmar: Go now into the streets
Go tell the people:
The people judged Hallāj..."⁽²⁾

(1) p.191.

(2) pp.202-4.

Such an end would surely give rise to the question of to what extent Ma'sāt al-Hallāj has been influenced by Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral. The action in both plays is concentrated on dramatizing contrasted states of consciousness within the protagonist rather than behaviour. Hallāj's mind was torn by agonies of conflict before he possessed the ideological framework to explain or the symbolic dress in which to clothe it; and his utterance is the expression quite as much of a temperament as of an era. This is evident in the emotional and intellectual turbulence which made him the theatre of an endless struggle. His state has been precisely summed up by Shiblī in a few words "Hallāj and I are of one belief, but my madness saved me, while his intelligence destroyed him."⁽¹⁾ The playwright has endeavoured to dramatize these abstract states as living situations, because after all Hallāj's situation, with his tormenting passions, is real. In order to achieve this, he selects only those incidents, those moments in Hallāj's life which can lend the abstract scheme of the play dramatic vitality. The historical account, previously mentioned, must have aided him to arrive at the central issue of the play which is Hallāj's longing for martyrdom. It is illuminated by the playwright through the Sūfīs' Leader when he confronts the hanging body:

(1) Hujwīrī, op.cit., p.151.

"never an accident... A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr."(1)

Also towards the end, Thomas implies his willingness to go to death because

"This is the sign of the Church always,
The sign of blood. Blood for blood."(2)

The crucial point in both plays is not the action, but rather the reasons which lie behind it.

"Becket's martyrdom cannot be self-sought, for this would be a sin according to the teachings of Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism; yet this is Becket's most dangerous temptation, the one which rises from his own desires. In Sabūr's play, martyrdom has been explicitly and freely sought by Ḥallāj, who loves God so much that he sacrifices himself to Him. But as the play unfolds, the question is raised: Is it, after all, Ḥallāj's longing for his Beloved which inevitably results in his martyrdom, or is his death rather a punishment for the sin he has committed by divulging his relationship with God? Does indiscretion bring martyrdom upon Ḥallāj? The conclusion is left ambiguous."(3)

However, Eliot's influence on the Arab playwright can obviously be seen in two significant features in

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- (1) The Complete... op.cit., p.261.
 (2) Ibid., p.274.
 (3) Khalīl, I.H. Semaan, op.cit., p.485.

connection with the theme and structure. Thematically, both playwrights have aimed at concealing the motivation of the action in order to subordinate the relatively limited material to broader implications and double the effect herewith. The Knights in Eliot's play "are not individuals, but an expression of a prototype force. They become a symbol of no specified authority, rather of a general tyranny of the material over the spiritual."⁽¹⁾ Similarly, Hallāj's Judges are merely an instrument in the Caliph's hands. This 'prototype force' can be found everywhere and at anytime. Indeed the Christian tradition has Pilate's judgement of Jesus to which both judgements are parallels;

"When Pilate saw he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children."⁽²⁾

The concealment of the motivation in this manner and through a universal symbol adds to the sense of human suffering in general and the suffering of the intellectuals in particular.

Structurally, both plays are in free verse which is different from that of their respective traditions, but which is consistent with authors' experiments in lyrical

(1) Styan, The Elements of Drama, pp.139/40.

(2) Matthew 27:24-5, also 26:3-4, and Mark 15:12-4.

verse. The concrete and vivid images of the poetry in both plays give the idea, which is mainly abstract, a dramatic life. In Murder in the Cathedral, the inner conflict of Thomas is poetically depicted in the form of four Tempters "who come to dissuade Becket, offer not only the usual rewards of material power, but also the false glory - the intellectual pride - of wanting to be a martyr."⁽¹⁾ By using this device, Eliot's great achievement is to put the stress on the predicament of his dramatic personae rather than on his own plight, and thus producing the dramatic voice.

But although Ṣabūr's play achieves great vividness, rhythm and imaginative richness of expression, it is not free from the lyrical tendency as a result of the poet's - not the playwright's - constant identification with his hero. The most striking evidence of this tendency occurs in two long monologues which do not only bear the poet's own preoccupations but also incorporate fragments of his early lyrics.⁽²⁾ In a recent interview the playwright, while acknowledging his debts to Eliot, admits that he had used several of his early lyrics in the course of his dramatic dialogue, as being a product of the same experience and the same period.⁽³⁾

(1) Raymond Williams, Drama from Ibsen to Brecht, Pelican, London, 1978, p.203.

(2) The Play, pp.71-8 compared with his poem Aqūlu la Kum, Beirut 1972, p.72; also The Play pp.171-8 with his poem A Diary of Bishr the Mystic.

(3) Mājid al-Sāmurrā'ī, ^cMuqābalah ma^c Ṣalāḥ ^cAbd al-Ṣabūr' al-Āadāb, Beirut 1978, issues 7-8, p.11.

Moreover the introduction of the Chorus, in the Greek fashion, but in the guise of common people is also an important factor in the structure. In a talk broadcast in the year after the first production of Murder in the Cathedral, Eliot remarked that:

"in making use of the chorus we do not aim to copy the Greek drama. There is a good deal about the Greek theatre that we do not know, and never shall know. But we know that some of its conventions cannot be ours. The characters frequently talk too long; the chorus has too much to say and holds up the action; usually not enough happens; and the Greek notion of climax is not ours. But the chorus has always fundamentally the same use. It mediates between the action and the audience; it intensifies the action by projecting its emotional consequences, so that we as the audience see it doubly, by seeing its effect on other people."(1)

This definition of the chorus is echoed by Şabūr to the extent that he believes that:

"the Greek chorus is a dramatic convention which should always be defended; it is an essential part of every drama. The tendency to regard the play as based on a story given entirely through dialogue has eroded the role of the chorus. Realism, not to say naturalism, may have spelt the end of the chorus, though a good play may not be based on a good story - or may not contain any story at all. A play need not tell a story, otherwise Greek drama would have been stillborn."(2)

As well as acting, the Chorus provides the action with that sense of foreboding and tension, and expresses the

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- (1) 'The Need for Poetic Drama', The Listener, 25 Nov. 1936, p.995.
 (2) S. Şabūr, Postscript to his comedy Night Traveller, Eng: trans. by M.M. Enani, Cairo 1980, p.61.

suffering of the hero which results from the imminent peril surrounding him. Accordingly some choral situations in Ṣabūr's play can be attributable in their meaning to Eliot's. The following examples are but a few:

"Chorus: Some presage of an act
Which our eyes are compelled to witness,
has forced our feet
Towards the Cathedral - We are forced to
bear witness."

The same Chorus utter their tribulation after Thomas' murder,

"We acknowledge our trespass, our weakness,
our fault; we acknowledge
That the sin of the world is upon our heads;
that the blood of the martyrs and the agony
of the saints
Is upon our heads..."

In Ṣabūr's the Crowd, facing Hallāj's hanged body, confess their collusion in murdering him,

"They lined us up, row upon row
... ..
They said, 'Shout, 'Heretic! Heretic!'"
We shouted, 'Heretic! Heretic!'
They said, "Shout 'Let him be killed, his
blood be on our heads.'"
We shouted, 'Let him be killed, his blood
be on our heads.'
They said: 'Go'. And we went."

The Ṣūfīs too announce the murder of Hallāj,

"We are the killers
... ..
We loved his words
More than we loved him,
So we let him die so that his words might live."

It has been mentioned earlier that the effect of vers libre was to loosen the tightly organized traditional forms of the Arabic Ode, and make them less formal, less regular. Bākathīr's experiments in the poetic metre al-mutadārak revealed the prosaic possibilities of this

metre for dramatic verse. The metre has been widely adopted by Ṣabūr as a normal form for his verse drama. It consists, when sound, of eight feet — ○ — فاعلن. But the traditional irregularities of this metre allow the poet liberty as a means of securing variety. Thus the traditional foot — ○ — فاعلن could become — — فعلن , or ○ ○ — فعِلن which in turn could be curtailed to — فع . The number of feet is not, however, determined by the line but by a meaningful dramatic sentence, whether taking a verse line or more; and the rhyme occurs casually. Such variety would convey the informal, speech-like quality of poetry which is particularly relevant to verse drama.

An illustration of this is given in a speech by the Crowd standing in bewilderment before Hallāj's hanged body,

صقونا صقنا صقنا

— — — — —
فعلن فعلن فعلن فع

الاجهر صوتا والأطول

— — — — —
فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن

وصغوه فى الصف الأول

— — — — ○ ○ —
فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن

ذو الصوت الخافت والمتوانى

— — 00 — 00 — — — —
 فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلاتن

وصغوه فى الصفّ الثانى

— — — — 00 — 00
 فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن

أعطوا كلا متّ ديناراً من ذهب قانى

— — — — 00 — — — — — — — —
 فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن

برّاقاً لم تلمسه كفاً من قبل

0 — — 00 — — — — — — — —
 فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن فعلن

In this instance the confession has been compressed within the irregular limits of al-mutadārak metre. The number of feet, the sudden abruptness in the first line and the rhythm of the words are part of the Crowd's experience; they have the grave feeling of the march of doom. When we reach the fourth line the end foot becomes so slow and relaxed as to express the hesitating feelings of some of the Crowd. Through rhythm the whole situation has been given the dramatic power of actuality and the too-late-feeling of guilt.

To express variety of moods and thoughts the play employs, though to a lesser extent, a range of metres which could present a remarkably wide choice of rhythmical

patterns. In Ṣabūr's best dramatic situations the rhythm is absolutely right for the feeling and mood he wishes to communicate. For example the scene in the Court-Room has the Judge expressing the great urgency of bringing Hallāj down, the mood hence is run in the Khabab metre,

" ... من أنت وما خطبك ؟ "

— — ● ○ — —
فعلن فعلن فعلن

whereas Hallāj's answer comes in the mutaqārib metre which allows him scope to reflect upon his childhood and manhood with an intimate personal voice, far removed from declamatory and rhetorical effects, and in a tone that reveals both his sadness and despair,

" أنا رجل من غمار الموالى فقير الأرومة والمننبت

فلا حسبي بينتمى للسماء ولا رفعتنى لها ثروتى ... "

The variety of metres has given the playwright another advantage in connection with the language. The play has accordingly various linguistic levels arising naturally from the dramatic situation and the stature of the character. In other words, the playwright aims at producing in the recipient a sense of linguistic realism without causing him to lose sight of the poetic mood. When Hallāj and Shiblī speak they speak as sufis; their utterance reflects both the intensity and obscurity of the mystic experience. Their language should therefore be elevated and full of metaphoric expressions matched only

best that "each utterance seems to be called out by its predecessor in what is in one sense a kind of conflict (tension between characters) and in another a collaboration (clarifying the nature of the situation)."(1)

Besides the continuous attempt of the playwright to draw upon the language of Hallāj's Ṭawāsīn, referred to during the study of the play, there is also the Quranic impact on his language. It is evident in the direct Quranic quotations that are capable of lending their rich implications and associations to the dramatic situation. Shiblī addresses his crucified comrade by saying,

"My companion, my beloved:
'Have We not forbidden thee all beings'
You did not heed..."(2)

And when Hallāj fails to communicate his sufi experience to the Law Officer because of the latter's unwillingness to understand, he recalls the Quranic verse,

"'Or is it that there are locks upon their hearts'"(3)

The linguistic realism is further achieved by restoring the literary quality to colloquial expressions and incorporating them into the course of dialogue. Expressions such as حكك له أنفي (literally means: rubbed my nose to him) is dramatically powerful in that it is

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- (1) S.W. Dawson: Drama and the Dramatic, London, Methuen & Co., 1970, p.22.
(2) p.25, Q., XV:70.
(3) p.79, Q. XLVII:24.

accompanied by a gesture of contempt and malicious joy. It has been skilfully integrated with the Judge's statement to indicate his lack of gravity and self-respect,.

"Abū^cUmar:
 Our conceited Judge Harawī
 Did not understand my exquisite words
 So I turned my nose up at him
 And walked away." (p.150)

On the whole, the dialogue is flexible enough to meet the requirements of workhorse prose and intensely sophisticated poetry. It may suffice here to give one example of how the language of the play manages to convey a chatty conversation without losing its poetic quality. The following dialogue is between three laymen,

Merchant: Let's go
 I left my son keeping the shop,
 And he is such a fool that
 If a beautiful girl should come along,
 He would give her five pounds' worth
 For the price of three or four.

Peasant: I sold my wheat in the market today.
 I'd better get home with the money before
 before nightfall.
 If I drag my feet, they'll lead me straight
 To a tavern and I'd lose it
 On wine, or on some whore.

Preacher: May God reward you; what you just said
 Has given me inspiration for next week's
 sermon.
 What a beautiful sermon!
 I will build it around a farmer
 Who has sold his wheat in the market
 The devil tempts him,
 He commits fornication with the money,
 And must return home to face his hungry
 children,
 So he cries, and..., and...
 Well, God will inspire the rest.
 I'll end it with the moral.
 'Beware of the wiles of women'."(pp.72-4)

Whatever the question of Eliot's influence on the Arab playwright may be, the fact remains that modern Arabic poetry has proved its flexibility for accepting revolutionary changes. The most prominent of these changes, as far as verse drama is concerned, is developing the classic Arabic prosody to the requirements of dramatic art. Ṣabūr's work examined in this study should demonstrate the accuracy of this judgement. Ma'sāt al-Hallāj employs four traditional metres: al-Mutadārak, al-Mutaqārab, al-Wāfir and al-Rajaz with their permitted alterations. There is no doubt that these metres, if skilfully applied, can offer the kind of dramatic language and musical pattern which, while speaking to our time and appealing to our taste, would indeed promote Arabic verse drama without hindrance. Furthermore the contact of the new movement in modern Arabic poetry with the wider European tradition, particularly in the dramatic form, has restored the possibility of new and more mature directions, with stylization of quite different kinds. What makes it more significant is that it has always relied on Arabic and Islamic history for its themes and actions which, while historically belonging to the past, still can serve to act out the present.

CHAPTER VII

TRADITION AS A MEANS OF REBELLION IN THE DRAMA
OF 'ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-SHARQAWI

Sharqāwī, born in 1920, is a staunch representative of an important trend in modern Arabic literature which swings heavily towards socialist realism. The interest in socialist realism had been apparent in Egypt in the 1940s, but it was positively encouraged by the 1952 revolution and the overthrow of the monarchy. Sharqāwī initially chose prose writings, especially the novel, to express the problems facing Egypt before and after the revolution. The outcome of this spell was a body of works which sprang directly from his own experience as an intellectual villager and his commitment as a socialist revolutionary.

His literary life is that of a consistent writer whose "writings have the advantage of sincerity, of issuing from a desire to communicate some real message."⁽¹⁾ What must concern us here is the fact that in the 1940s he started his writing career as a poet closely associated with the free verse movement, composing rhetoric and highly sentimental poems the best known of which is entitled 'A Message From an Egyptian Father to President Truman' (1951). This start should, therefore, mark the direction which Sharqāwī was to adopt later on in the verse drama. It should also be pointed out that the scheme of his verse play The Tragedy of Husayn (1969) which shall be examined here, had been a ripened idea since 1953 during which time he had visited

(1) Hilary Kilpatrick, The Modern Egyptian Novel, Ithaca Press, London 1974, p.127.

Karbalā' twice.⁽¹⁾ But it was in the Sixties that Sharqāwī made his actual entry into the field of drama, producing so far seven verse plays:

Ma'sāt Jamīlah, 1962 (The Tragedy of Jamīla), a play written amidst the Algerian struggle against the French. It portrays, through the legendary heroine Jamīla, the sacrifices and sufferings of the Algerian people made in order to gain their independence.

al-Fatā Mahrān, 1966 (Mahrān the Youngman) is based on a revolutionary folk-hero, who leads his fellow peasants in a revolt against the tyranny and exploitation of the Mamlūks. Although the play draws upon an historical parallel, it, nevertheless, embarks on contemporary issues reminiscent of that in his novels.

Tha'r Allah, 1969 (God's Vengeance) in two volumes:

I. al-Husayn Thā'iran(as a Revolutionary).

II. al-Husayn Shahīdan(as a Martyr).⁽²⁾

Waṭanī ^cAkkā, 1970 (Acre is my Homeland) is a direct reaction to Egypt's defeat in 1967 and a spirited assault on the disgraceful attitude of the Arab leaders.

Salāh al-Dīn, 1976, draws upon this familiar historical theme in order to show the conflict between politics and ideals with many references to current events.

(1) Sharqāwī in an interview with Nabīl Faraj, published in the Cairo monthly al-Masrah, Nov. 1969, p.48.

(2) I shall be referring to these two volumes as I and II in the course of my study. The play is published by Dār al-Kātib al-^cArabī, Cairo 1969.

ʿUrābī, Zaʿīm al-Fallāḥīn, 1981⁽¹⁾ (ʿUrābī a Leader of the Peasants) tackles the hero's uprising against the Khedive of Egypt.

To understand why Sharqāwī turned his attention to the dramatic art, one should look at the condition of the Arabic theatre in Egypt after the revolution which made possible such a change of direction. It had a reasonable potential repertoire of plays which made clear contribution to the policy of replacing the pre-revolutionary ideology with a socialist one and, in this context, the presentation of plays that took on a didactic nature as a direct assault on the monarchy. The approach was to explore the dialectical relationship between the historical situation motivating the play and the movement of society from feudalism to socialism and from monarchy to revolution. Thus, the Egyptian theatre included in its repertoire a new generation of playwrights whose plays can be said to have been "a direct echo of the event rather than being an artistic assimilation of it."⁽²⁾ On the other hand, the theatre saw, perhaps for the first time in its history, the presentation of plays carefully chosen from world drama "to serve the new socialist ideology such as Lorca's, Brecht's and Gorky's."⁽³⁾

(1) During the writing of this chapter, the Cairo daily al-Ahram, 5 Aug. 1981 started a weekly serialization of the play.

(2) Zakī Tulaymāt, Fann al-mumathil al-ʿarabī, Cairo 1971, p.151.

(3) Ibid., p.152.

At the same time, a few Egyptian dramatists, despite their deep concern with the problems of the age, were able to stand aloof in the face of the big event before having their say. The form they took to express their critical disenchantment with excessive dictatorial power of the revolutionary regime, was through the disguise of history. They drew upon Arabic tradition for wider themes producing works of some quality as Hakīm's The Sultan's Dilemma. By means of exploring similar experiences in tradition not only were they able to express these problems, but also to penetrate beyond the topical and temporary.

Moreover, the reading public, in spite of rapid progress in the field of education, was still a minority; and this in itself must have prompted Sharqāwī to communicate his message in a more popular form than that of the poem and the novel. His attention was directed, as he puts it, "to a medium of expression which combines both the poem with its intensity, concentricity and impulse; and the novel with its panoramic view that embraces vast expanses of life and its capability of penetrating to the depth of human experience."⁽¹⁾ Whether Sharqāwī exploits the dramatic form for that or for the purpose of communicating a message as a revolutionary intellectual is an open question which the study of his play Tha'r Allah shall answer.

The play is Sharqāwī's first to be based entirely upon an important as well as grievous episode of Islamic history.

(1) Interview, Op.Cit., p.48.

Its action is centred upon a great man whose ideals and excellent calibre exactly correspond to that of whom Egypt and, indeed, the playwright, was seeking at the time of its composition. What makes it the more revealing is the fact that the country had been shocked to its foundations by the swift defeat of 1967 and the injury inflicted on its pride by an oppressive regime. The playwright must have chosen this particular period of Muslim history because it bears similarities in many ways to the history of post-revolution Egypt. We must learn from history, he remarks,

"What happened in the past can easily happen in the future. History has inspiring moments that help to visualize the present and give one the power to foresee the future as well as the confidence to demolish the corrupt present and build it anew."(1)

The historical episode from which Sharqāwī derives a parallel and draws a lesson is the Umayyad period, where Islam decayed as a religion but grew as a power. The Umayyads were little concerned about religious life either in their own conduct or in that of their subjects. The court, with the single exception of ^CUmar II, was quite irreligious, and its members were surrounded by men hungry for authority and wealth, thirsty for avenging old feuds. Mu^Cāwiya, the first Umayyad caliph instituted the Caliphate as an hereditary office by obtaining homage for his son Yazīd while he still lived. In doing so, he had to suppress his opposition to the extent that he is said to have

(1) Op.cit., p.48.

"poisoned al-Hasan ibn ^CAlī and Sa^Cd ibn abī Waqqās."⁽¹⁾
 This act was, of course, a total deviation from the norm
 that the Prophet and the Orthodox Caliphs had laid down.

Following the account given by many historians for
 the straightforward story of the martyrdom of al-Husayn ibn
^CAlī, we read that at M^Cāwiya's death the people of Kufa
 sent to Husayn and professed their desire to pay homage
 to him that "God may rally us behind you in the true cause."⁽²⁾
 Their letters to him at Medina were so many that they
 "filled no less than two sacks."⁽³⁾ Husayn himself had not
 as yet paid homage to Yazīd and had managed to go from
 Medina to Mecca amidst harassment of the Umayyad agents.
 From there he sent his cousin Muslim ibn ^CAqīl to test
 public opinion in Kufa saying to him "if what they have
 written to me is the truth, let me know and I will catch
 you up."⁽⁴⁾ Having initially sent back an encouraging
 report, Muslim was savagely killed by the State troops after
 a long and dramatic pursuit.⁽⁵⁾

Husayn, knowing nothing of Muslim's fate, was ready
 to comply with the people's request. His sympathisers
 tried to dissuade him, arguing that he would go to a

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- (1) Asfahānī, Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn, Dar al-Ma^Crifa,
 Bēirut n.d p.73.
 (2) Bulādhurī, Ansāb al-Ashrāf, Bierut 1977, Vol. III, p.158.
 (3) Ibid., 170.
 (4) Mas^Cūdī, Murūj al-Dahab, Bierut, 1978, Vol. III, p.54.
 (5) Maqātil, op.cit., pp.101-7, Murūj, op.cit., pp.57-60.

country "whost people are faithless and whose Emirs have the treasures..."⁽¹⁾ Among those sympathisers were close relatives such as his half brother Muḥammad and ibn ^CAbbās, who had the final answer from Husayn,

"If indeed I die on the battlefield fighting this tyrant (Yazīd), that will be better than to live a dishonourable life in Mecca."⁽²⁾

With such defiance and determination, Husayn left Mecca and, with his family and relations, set out on his way to Kufa. Those who had formally paid homage to him vanished under ibn Ziyād's threat, leaving Husayn and his small party to face 4,000 Umayyad troops led by ^CUmar ibn Sa^Cd on the plain of Karbalā'. Here we read that Husayn's companions did not cease killing and being killed until there remained only the people of his immediate household. When they saw that they could not defend themselves or their master, they competed to die fighting before him.⁽³⁾ Tortured by thirst and surrounded by the painful scene of the dead bodies of his kinsmen and supporters, Husayn was hurled and struck with a lance. His blood mingled with the soil. His head was cut off and carried to Yazīd in Damascus.

The best way to appreciate the significance of this tragedy is to look at the suffering of Husayn and his

(1) Murūj, op.cit., p.54.

(2) Murūj, op.cit., p.55.

(3) Ansāb... op.cit., p.197.

followers which has been described at length by Muslim historians. It has made Husayn a tragic figure whose tragedy still evokes the deepest emotion and the most frantic grief. Yearly on the 10th of Muharram, the anniversary of the martyrdom at Karbalā', the tragedy is rehearsed in the form of a passion play wherever a Shi^Cite community exists. Count Gobineau, who had witnessed a Persian national drama arisen on the basis of this story was "bold enough to rank (it) with the Greek drama as a great and serious affair, engaging the heart and life of the people who have given birth to it; while the Latin, English, French, and German drama is, he says, in comparison a mere past-time or amusement, more or less intellectual and elegant."⁽¹⁾

From a dramatic point of view, the potentialities of the story make it one of the most tragic in human history. It is an actual representation of personal suffering and heroism which may be unintelligible to the Western tradition. Here at the centre of the story exists a solemn hero whose purpose runs against the forces of oppression and becomes a martyr. He awakens admiration primarily because he has in rich abundance qualities which other men have to a much lesser extent. In Sharqāwī's view, the values and qualities of Husayn are still needed and will still be

(1) Matthew Arnold's Essays in Criticism, First Series, published by H. Wolf, New York 1968, p.141.

sought, for as long as those in power undermine justice and as long as men are powerless against the forces of oppression, the struggle against injustice will go on. Because of these outstanding morals and the familiarity of theme, the playwright has adhered to the historical facts of the story, concealing in its folds many of his preoccupations.

The struggle of Husayn to restore justice by way of an electoral Caliphate until his martyrdom at Karbalā' is, in fact, the stock-in-trade from which the play springs and grows. But as a committed intellectual, Sharqāwī has a political message which he must have felt could be laid open before the people of his country. A committed writer would point out the fact that,

"the political crisis is the most acute expression of the general crisis of our time. Our moral and ideological conflicts all have a political background and there are hardly any aspects of our private lives which are not tangled with the political battle, in one way or another."(1)

The political circumstances in Egypt which produced this drama culminated in the country's defeat in 1967. It created a state of dismay and uncertainty amongst the Egyptian intelligentsia. Many writers felt the need for changing the political values which the country hitherto had adopted, and which had led to its defeat. (2) Silence

(1) Max Adereth, 'What is Litterature Engagee?' in Marxists on Literature, An Anthology; Pelican Book, London, 1975 p.447.

(2) Ghālī Shukrī, Thagāfatunā bayn na^cam wa lā, Bierut, 1972, p.70.

and negativism were no longer the country's attitude towards corruption; and time was ripe to express opposition and call for self-discovery. The period needed a hero capable of such action who, on the basis of moral responsibility, is willing to suffer for justice and freedom. Yet when Sharqāwī, hitherto a socialist, wanted to communicate this didactic message, he found the religious tradition of the people most convincing for his purpose. It suggests that Islam's real thrust is against tyrants of any sort, especially those who betray the true Islam of equality and justice. But perhaps more important, from this study's point of view, is the fact that the Islamic tradition has proved once more its qualification for embracing any sincere attempt to wed it to modern artistic requirements.

Although Sharqāwī has strictly adhered to the historical facts occurring in the story of Husayn, his massive drama deals only with the last six months or so of Husayn's life. It is in this short span of time that Husayn began his struggle as a revolutionary and ended it as a martyr, hence inspiring the playwright with the titles for the tragedy. The play, however, cannot be thought entirely historical since it portrays aspects of the playwright's time as well as that of the hero, and since it implies more than its historical scope. This fusion between past and present events which also, in Sharqāwī's interpretation, implies the future marks such dramatic work as timeless.

"A multitude of opinions would lead to unrest.
 Shūrā leads to evil consequences.
 So be a dictator.
 Killing the weak would surely earn us the
 respect of the strong."(1)

Islam, and indeed Husayn, is also against turning the seat of power into personal gains. Those who have accumulated wealth under the protection of a corrupt government are the true enemies of Husayn and the revolution. They will crush any attempt to deprive them of wealth and power. (2)

Another important issue emphasised by the playwright is the relation between the ruler and his subjects, an issue which has been touched upon by other playwrights like Ḥakīm and Ṣabūr. When the ruler sends his spies to detect and punish for the slightest opposition, (3) fear and hypocrisy shall take hold of his subjects. The tyrannical atmosphere breeds hypocrites that do not wish the good of the community as much as their own safety and well-being. Here we have the Iraqis forsaking Husayn and leaving him to fight their oppressor ibn Ziyād while awaiting the outcome. But whatever the outcome is,

"They will be dining at all banquets
 They will be riding the new current
 And in quiet humiliation, they will be seeking
 happiness..."(4)

In connexion with this, the playwright throws light on an extremely crucial situation which plagued Egypt in the

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- (1) Ibid., pp.24-5.
 (2) Ibid., p.82.
 (3) Ibid., p.159.
 (4) Ibid., p.156.

1960s and led to her defeat as it did the Muslim empire. The reference is to leaders giving prior attention to quelling internal opposition rather than preparing the country to face an external threat. All that occupies ibn Ziyād is how to kill ibn ^CAqīl, Husayn's messenger, and to prepare the army in order to pursue his followers in Kufa at a time when the Daylams in the East have declared war against the central government and slain their Umayyad ruler. And when a conscientious commander objects by saying,

"Sir, why don't you scare the Daylams?
al-Mukhtār (one of Husayn's followers) is not
a threat.
The Daylams are the real threat."(1)

ibn Ziyād orders him to be tortured for his sincere bluntness. Again the political parallel is evident since the main concern of Egypt's leaders in the 1960s should have been devoted to her eastern borders where Israel posed a real threat rather than casting an iron fist on the people's liberty. It is worth noting in this respect that Sharqāwī has tackled this issue more elaborately in his earlier drama al-Fatā Maḥrān (1966). Yet the significance of returning to it, if somewhat casually, lies in the whole significance of the theme and the playwright's commitment to Egypt's problems.

There is also the temptation of power and wealth that allures men like ^CUmar ibn Sa^Cd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, in spite

(1) Ibid., 204.

the fight although he has headed the Umayyad troops to intercept Ḥusayn. al-Ḥurr represents the few who refuse to serve tyrants, knowing that they will be killed, but equally sure that history shall never write them off. His courage may have not paid off in the battlefield when addressing the Umayyad agents, but his words are still echoing,

"You can purchase praise from some slaves of lust,
 You can bribe the strong greedy men,
 You can suppress the sincere words,
 You can throttle the wind in midair,
 You can extinguish light inside the lamp,
 But history is stronger than you are.
 History is not for sale.
 (Moving away)
 Here I am delivering myself from your camp
 to history".(1)

All these situations imply more than their historical context and give a clear impression that the playwright is using history to launch a vigorous assault on the illnesses of his country. Besides, he never ceases to expose explicitly Egypt's problems that preoccupy him such as the people's fear of publicly uttering their opinions or even their prayers. There was a time in Egypt's history when the intellectuals and the public alike morally and physically suffered a great deal because of their silence and ultimately because of their utterances. Again we should be reminded, in this respect, of Ḥakīm's Sultan and Ṣabūr's Ḥallāj. Yet Sharqāwī's drama seems to convey the same tone in a daring, if somewhat short-lived, scene. At the tomb of

(1) Ibid., p.66.

the Prophet a man stands whispering prayers from which we learn that he is an Egyptian conveying his country's grievances,

"The people of Egypt entrusted me with their grievances,
 But I am scared to utter them aloud.
 (To himself)
 I am alone now, why shouldn't I say them?

 I pray on their behalf
 That punishment and anger be lefted
 That the best of men be made to rule us.
 Avenge our tyrants.
 Oh God, send Husayn victorious,
 And let him rule us"(1)

In this instance the playwright is not only aware of his country's problems, but also of a characteristic aspect of its popular tradition. People, in time of distress and anguish, dispatch pilgrims to Mecca or any Muslim shrine with their oral and written grievances. The device proves dramatically successful and, moreover, proves Sharqāwī's sincerity and originality which are considered to be the motive behind all his writings.

Through the disguise of history the playwright has been able to raise such disturbing questions about an era, for which the traditional theme, with all its inherent revolutionary elements, provides the answers. The answer is, in fact, symbolised by an activist revolutionary like Husayn whose spiritual and moral stature qualifies him to abolish evil and restore justice. The dilemma he has to face on the way to fulfil his moral obligation is

(1) Vol. I, pp.65-6.

reminiscent of that facing Hallāj. It is a dilemma of a conscientious intellectual aware of the consequences that his inevitable choice may have to bring about. His monologue, at the tomb of the Prophet manifests this dilemma and reveals the soul of both an intellectual and revolutionary. Addressing his grandfather, he says,

"... ..
Should I pay homage to that debauchee (Yazīd)
To save myself or to save others,
I would be unbelieving
In what you had brought to the people from God.
Should I refuse I will reluctantly be killed
And if I remain here to rally the people against
him,
He will run a bath of innocent blood."

Then he makes the inevitable choice from which any ordinary man would flinch; the choice that has made Husayn the epic hero we still admire,

"I shall depart to save the people,
I shall depart to shout to the people of reason:
'Save the world. The mad world has gone astray.
Save it from chaos and fear.
Save the people from this hell'."(1)

But, unlike Hallāj, he openly confronts the authority in the battlefield, sacrificing himself in order to free his people from moral destruction and point the way for future generations,

"... ..
I have come to free your souls from darkness,
To restore light into your sight.
I have come to remove the plague afflicting the
state.
I have come to bring back smiles that faded away
from a child's face
... .."(2)

(1) Ibid., pp.66-9.
(2) Vol. II, p.97.

It is significant that Sharqāwī never ceases emphasising the socialist aspect of Husayn's struggle. So much so that he depicts his followers as good young people who have as yet not been corrupted by power, as though to say that the innocence of a new generation is being severely tested by the old but corrupt establishment. But perhaps more significant is the fact that Husayn becomes the refuge for slaves and needy men of society, who look to him as their saviour, as a symbol of freedom and as a source of inspiration. At this, the Umayyad governor of Medina remarks,

"The eyes of my manservants are fixed upon him,
The hearts of the people incline to him.
With him they are expecting to get better."(1)

Moreover, Husayn is depicted throughout the play as a man, a human being who, besides his heavy moral responsibility, engages in the public life of the people. He jokingly receives and comforts complaining lovers, and hospitably pays off the debts of a wretched Bedouin.⁽²⁾ Yet he is not devoid of weaknesses towards his children and kinsfolk. He loves them so much that, at seeing them suffer an intolerable thirst, offers to give himself up to the enemy in return for a drink of water, but they stop him.⁽³⁾ Such emphasis on the human aspect of Husayn's character is indeed of great importance since the playwright has intended not only to present an epic hero who could be somehow alien

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- (1) Vol. I, p.26.
 (2) Ibid., pp.46-56.
 (3) Ibid., p.26.

to the modern audience, but also an intellectual human being with whom we can identify.

Related to this human aspect of Husayn's character is the special attention given by the playwright to the hero's suffering from thirst in almost an entire scene.⁽¹⁾ The hero's suffering is most intense because it is most human. It symbolizes the will of man and his destiny, with a shattering disclosure of his agony as we constantly hear these cries: "Thirst. Thirst." The historical narrative has the speech made by al-Hurr on the day of Karbalā' as evidence testifying to this suffering. It runs as follows,

"... He (Husayn) became in your hands like a captive... You have deprived him and his womenfolk and his people of the flowing water of the Euphrates which is being drunk by Jews, Christians and Magians. Even the rural pigs and dogs indulge freely in it..."⁽²⁾

When the same character addresses Husayn's tormentors in the play, the meaning and the wording of this historical narrative are fully and appropriately exploited in order to bring about the hero's suffering,

"Look at the Euphrates flowing with water delicious
to drinkers,
Free for all fish, pigs and even dogs.
(overcoming tears)
Whereas the Prophet's offspring are burning with
the fire of thirst..."⁽³⁾

Suffering here lies at the heart of the tragic action.

The German dramatist Friedrich Hebbel (1813-63) "was the

(1) Vol. II, second scene.
(2) Ansāb... op.cit., 189.
(3) Vol. II, p.90.

first to recognize that the difference between action and suffering is not quite so profound as the words suggest, that every suffering is really an action directed within, and every action which is directed against destiny assumes the form of suffering. Man grows dramatic by virtue of the intensity of his will, by the outpouring of his essence in his deeds, by becoming wholly identical with them."⁽¹⁾ Through his exploitation of the hero's suffering, the playwright has been able to launch his most vigorous assault on both his and the hero's eras; in verse combining the true feelings of grief and rebellion, of hatred and anger.

The desire to arouse the people's bitter feelings against their oppressors is underlined further by the use of flash-back technique to recall to scene a quite similar incident that took place at the battle of Uḥud in the early days of Islam, when Waḥshī killed Ḥamza, the Prophet's uncle, at the incitement of his Umayyad mistress Hind. Waḥshī appears twice⁽²⁾ wandering aimlessly in the desert, mad and drunk as though to bear witness for the fate of all murderers over the years. It may also be a warning of the tragedy which is about to happen, and as such it adequately serves to underline the message of history which Sharqāwī advocates.

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- (1) George Lukacs, 'The Sociology of Modern Drama' in The Theory of the Modern Stage, edited by Eric Bentley, Penguin, London 1968, p.429.
- (2) Vol. I, pp.15-8; Vol. II, pp.68-70.

particularly in the sixth and eleventh scenes, where the playwright pursues the meetings of Husayn's followers in Kufa, then moves to describe the plotting of his enemies at the Emir's palace. In both scenes the action is centred on Muslim, Husayn's cousin and messenger to Iraq, and his fate. He exhausts the traditional narrative of this incident for no dramatic purpose other than to win sympathy and blast the age. Despite its dramatic potentialities and its bearing on the principal action, the playwright could have stripped it of the minor details, and effectively related or linked it through a Greek-type messenger, instead of disrupting the main line of action with these two scenes.

The action of the play is not determined only by the external conflict between two opposing forces, but also by the character's inner conflict. More than once, does the playwright penetrate into the hero's agony, through monologues, in order to elevate the conflict to the level of moral agony. He achieves some success, especially in situations where a character has to make a choice. For example, the situation in which Husayn is seen at the end of his tether, confined in the sanctuary of the Prophet's tomb, is one of a few where the conflict is most intense,

"... ..
Should I pay a humiliated homage to him (Yazīd)
Then I'll be safe at home among my family
As a lamb in a flock?..."(1)

(1) Vol. I, p.67.

We also have the growing conflict in al-Hurr's soul, as he is divided between his loyalty to the Emir and his spiritual inclination towards Husayn before the decisive battle,

"I am not one of those who serve two masters
Now I have to please either my conscience or
my Emir."(1)

Then at the moment of recognition, he remorsefully approaches Husayn,

"... ..
I didn't know they wanted to kill you,
Here I am at your mercy, repentant to God,
Will my repentance be accepted if I fight
them with you?"(2)

Al-Hurr's uncompromising choice and determination can be compared to Sir Thomas More's, when he refused to serve King Henry at the expense of his conscience and devout Catholicism. He says to the King in a similar state of agony,

"I am sick to think how much I must displease
Your Grace."(3)

Whereas the monologue in these instances succeeds to a great extent in revealing the character's inner feelings and agonies, and in adding a dramatic dimension to the work, unfortunately it fails to do so in other situations. Frequently the playwright, out of enthusiasm and anger, turns a character into a mouthpiece for his own views such as his portrayal of Wahshī without any

(1) Vol. II, p.65.

(2) Ibid., p.85

(3) Robert Bolt, A Man for All Seasons, in Three Plays, Heinemann, London, 1976, p.140.

dramatic necessity or bearing on the action. Furthermore, some characters particularly Yazīd and ibn Ziyād appear flat and stereotyped as a result of the playwright's over-expansion of the subject, and making a clear-cut distinction between the two conflicting camps. The portrayal of these characters as such has caused them to lose their individuality, hence their right to live as dramatic personae since a single character is enough to represent the rest."⁽¹⁾ Sharqāwī himself seems to be conscious of the defects in the play's structure when he admits rather apologetically in the earlier mentioned interview,

"I commit myself to playwriting, having in mind only a minimum number of characters. But because my drama tackles a vast range of people and events in epic-like themes, I attempt to use the narrative technique of fiction as an addition to the dramatic structure."⁽²⁾

In this tragedy, Sharqāwī has gone a long way towards finally resolving the verbal pattern of his verse drama. His earlier works were criticised for having colloquialisms and prosaic prattle,⁽³⁾ and for their inclination towards rhetorical lyricism.⁽⁴⁾ The play has the facings of the three traditional poetic fronts: epic, lyric, and dramatic.

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- (1) Fārūq ^cAbd al-Wahhāb, 'al-Husayn thā'ira wa Shahīda', al-Masrah, Cairo, April 1969, p.33.
- (2) Op.cit., p.49.
- (3) M.A. al-^cAlim, al-Wajh wa al-qinā^c fī masrahinā al-^cArabī al-mu^cāsir, Dar al-Adāb, Beirut, 1973, p.100.
- (4) M.Gh. Hilāl, op.cit., pp.58-64.

The epic facing has resulted from the nature of the historical subject itself, and the playwright's intention to make the meaning of history transparent. In order to do so, the subject is presented in a leisurely manner and detail with a very limited freedom, as his prospective audience knows the story and would resent radical changes. Sharqāwī's verbal powers are, therefore, devoted to focussing on and expanding the epic elements of the story. Such verbal elaboration is evident in the playwright's treatment of the tremendous suffering of Husayn and his associates from thirst. When the hero's towering resistance is about to break for the sake of his innocent followers, the playwright finds a means, through Zaynab Husayn's sister, to restore the epic quality to the event. She says,

لابل فداؤك كل مافى هذه الدنيا .الدنية
 من صفار أو نساء
 إنا احتملنا فوق ما يحتمل الجبل الأشم
 لكى نمونك
 لابل يموت الكل دونك
 أتموت أنت ؟
 لابل فداؤك كل ماطلعت عليه الشمس يا رجل الحقيقة
 من ذا إذن يمشى بنور الحق فى سود الليالى الداجية ؟
 من ذا يهب إذا ادلهمت غاشية .. ؟
 فى كبرياء الشر يحترق المساكين الضعاف ويصرخون
 فمن يجير ؟
 لا كانت الدنيا ولا كان الزمان اذا انتهيت
 بالله ما طعم الحياة وما انتفاع الناس بالدنيا
 إذا قتلوك أنت ؟
 لابل تعيش على المدى
 وتظل أنت إمامنا المرجو أنت
 (تكاد تبكى)

من ذا لأهل البيت بعدك؟
 من يطعم الفقراء خبزك؟
 لا كانت الدنيا ولا كان الزمان ولا الوجود إذا فنيت
 (باكية)
 لابل نموت جميعنا عطشا وصبرا يا أخى
 وتعيش أنت " (١)

But the playwright sometimes falls short of achieving this, when he endeavours to influence the action and audience by merely rhetorical discourse. The desire to involve or disturb cannot be reached by preaching; for drama is a matter of action and gesture as of verbal language. To cite only one example in which the prime verbal statement has a diminished impact on the drama, because it is too closely associated with a static tableau, I shall quote Husayn's speech to the Kufis,

ماعد فى هذا الزمان سوى رجال كالمسوخ الشائعات
 يمشون فى حلل النعيم وتحتها نبتن القبور
 يتشامخون على العباد كأنهم ملكوا العباد
 وهم إذا لاقوا الأمير تضاءلوا مثل العبيد
 صاروا على أمر البلاد فأكثرُوا فيها الفساد
 أعلامهم رفعت على قمم الحياة ..
 خرق مرقعة ترفرف بالقدارة فى السماء الصافية
 راياتهم مزق المحيط البالية
 يا أيها العصر الزرقى لأنت غاشية العصور
 قد آل أمر المتقين إلى سلاطين الفجور ..
 قل أى أنواع الرجال جعلتهم فى الواجهات؟
 قل أى أعلام رفعت على البروج الشاهقات؟
 أى الذئاب منحتة السلطان والملك العريض؟
 يا أيها العصر البغيض
 يا أيها العصرى الزرقى وأنت غاشية العصور
 العصر ينفث حولنا الغثيان مما أحدثته به أمية

(1) Vol. II, pp.91-3.

عصر يشير تقزز النفس الأبية ..
يا أيها الشرفاء لاتهنوا إذا طغت الذئاب ..
سيروا بنا كي ننتقد الدنيا من الفوضى ومن هذا الخراب
سيروا نعد للعصر رونقه القديم
وننصر الحق الهضم
لاترهبوا طرق الهداية إن خلت من عابريها
لاتأمنوا طرق الفساد وإن تراحم سالكوها
سيروا على اسم الله لاتهنوا فنحن بنو أبيها
سيروا بنا نستخلص الإنسان من عار العذاب " (1)

Needless to say the playwright's voice here is louder than that of the character since he strives primarily to afflict his era and his contemporaries with abuse and blemish.

The lyric tendency in the play has resulted from Sharqāwī's attempt to bring about the inner conflict of the hero as an intellectual revolutionary assuming all the moral burden in a languid environment. He has succeeded enormously in conveying this conflict in many monologues particularly those dealing with Husayn's dilemma. The monologue at the Prophet's tomb reflects exactly the hero's feeling and corresponds nicely to the dramatic sequence,

(1) Vol. I, pp.230-1.

بآبى أنت وأمى يارسول الله إذ أبعد عنك
 وأنا قررة عينك
 إننى أرحل عن أركى بلاد الله عنى
 خارجا بالرغم منى...
 غير أنى...
 أنا لا أعرف ما أصنع فى أمرى هذا فأعنى
 أنا إن بايعت للفاجر كى تسلم رأسى
 أو لكى يسلم غيرى... لكفرت
 ولخالفتك فيما جئت للناس به من عند ربك
 وإذا لم أعطه البيعة عن كره قتلت
 وإذا عشت هنا كى أحشد الناس عليه
 خاض من حولك بحرا من دماء الأبرياء...
 موقف ما امتحن المؤمن من قبل به ،
 أو سيق إنسان إليه...
 امتحان كإمتحان الأنبياء .
 أترى أمنحه بيعة ذل ؟
 بعدها آمن فى بيتى وأهلى
 مثل شاة فى قطيع ..
 ثم أسقى الناس خمر الراحة الممزوج بالذلة
 فى كأس بديع من ذهب ؟
 أم ترى أجهر بالشورة فى وجه الطغاة ؟
 لا أبالى بالذى يحدث منهم
 إذ يجذون ورائى فى الطلب ؟
 مستخفا بالحياة
 بحياتى وحياة المسلمين الآخرين ؟
 موقف ما امتحن المؤمن من قبل به
 أو سيق إنسان إليه .
 امتحان كإمتحان الأنبياء
 أنأذا أحمل آلامى وأحلام الجميع
 كالمسيح المضطهد .
 تتلقاه حراب الظلم فى كل بلد
 وهو ييمضى يفرس الأقدام فى شوك السلام
 ليزيح الشوك من كل الربوع
 مثل موسى خارجا يوجس خيفة
 هاربا من بطشه فرعون إلى التيه الفسيح المترامى .
 ما على النفس يخاف

إنما يشفق من أن يغلب الظلم ودولات الضلال
 إننى أخرج كى أنقذ أعناق الرجال
 إننى أخرج كى أصرخ فى أهل الحقيقة
 أنقذوا العلم ، إن العالم المجنون قد ضل طريقه
 أنقذوا الدنيا من الفوضى وطغيان المخاوف
 أنقذوا الأمة من هذا الجحيم . " (١)

One cannot help wondering, however, why Sharqāwī, in comparing Husayn's suffering with that of Christ and Moses, has not referred to the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina in spite of its close resemblance and suitability to this situation.

While such monologues serve a dramatic purpose, others have not served real dramatic values and sidetracked the action into lyric channels weakening the play's structure. They can only be regarded as reflections of a dissatisfied and meditative poet that would capture us with their beautiful images and strong emotion; as he reflects through Husayn in the following one,

ربى ... إلى من توكل العبد الضعيف " "
 أنادى أدعوك مثل جدى
 حين طارده رجال من ثقيف قد أتاهم بالهداية :
 "إن لم يكن بك رب من غضب علىّ فما أبالى ،
 إنى فرغت إليك من دنيا يزيد
 وهرعت نحو رحابك القدسى بالخير الطريد
 وبكل أحلام السلام وكل آمال العدالة

(1) Ibid., pp.66-9.

أنا ذا لجأت إليك يا ذا الحول والجبروت يارب الجلالة

بهضنى الفقير وعزة المستضعفين

فليفعل الأعداء بي ما يشتهون

.....

يا أيها المعشوق وافاك المحب يبيت وجده فامنحه شيئاً من رضاك

وأفض عليه بحكمتك

فأرى الصواب من الجنون فلا أضل ولا أضل

أنا ذا أذوب وأضحل وليس بالمعشوق بخل

إني أعيدك أيها المعشوق عن كل الصفات فأنت موصوف بذاتك

أنا لست أطمع في العبارة فالعبارة قد خصمت بها العليم

إني لأضرع طالباً منك الإشارة فالإشارة رائد فوق الطريق المستقيم

إن كان بي مطمع للملك والمجد المؤثّل

إن كان ما بي رغبة في أن أكون أنا أمير المؤمنين

إن كنت مفتوناً بأعراض الحياة ولا أحس

إن كان ما بي شهوة للملك لكن لاتبين

قدخالطت كوساوس الشيطان عقلى فالتبس

ومضت تخادعنى لتبرير الخطيئة مثل آدم

فأظن أن تطلبى الدنيا دفاع عن حقوق المسلمين

واخال أن تطلعائى ثورة ضد المظالم إن كان بي هذا الفتون

إن كان بي زهو خفى لابس زهد التقى

فاسكب على قلبى شعاعاً من جلال حقيقتك

لأرى اليقين

لأرى الحقيقة والخديعة في الذى هو كائن حولى

وفيما قد يكون " (1)

Quite aside from those highly-toned and emotion-charged passages, the dialogue, which manages to avoid colloquialisms and archaisms while still giving the flavour

(1) Ibid., pp.72-5.

of the period, flows effortlessly. This is due to the playwright's eloquence and articulateness which have been enhanced by his assimilation of the traditional narrative on one hand; and the attempt to portray as naturally as possible the environment of the event on the other. The influence of the tradition on his language can be seen in either inserting an appropriate traditional quotation into the dialogue,⁽¹⁾ or making use of the meaning as well as the wordings in a whole situation. Ibn Ziyād's speech to the Kufis is most illustrative in this respect, he says,

يا أهل الكوفة ... أما بعد " "

فإني أبصر لى فيكم والله رؤوسا تستحصد
لى فيكم صرعى لكنى لا أضربكم حتى أعذر
... ..
فعيونى تسعى بينكم
وجواسيسى يستقصون دبيب الهمسة فى الاعماق
وسأخذكم بنواياكم ، بالأفكار المكتومة
لا بالاعمال المعلومة
... ..
وإليكم نصحى فليسمعه العاقل منكم ويفكر
المقبل مأخوذ بالمدير
ومطيعكم بالعاصى
وصحيحكم بالمعتل والدانى منكم بالقاصى
... ..
وبعد ، فلى يا أهل الكوفة فيكم صرعى مازالوا
وإليكم دستور الحكم :
من يدلج فى ليل يقتل
... ..
فكلكم منهم عندى حتى يبرأ من ذنبه

(1) For examples see Vol. I, p.37 and II, pp.66,121.

من ينبش عن سرى منكم يدفن حيا في قبره
من نقب عن خبرى منكم نقبت الشرطه عن قلبه «(١)

ibn Ziyād's speech in this instance is almost entirely based upon his father's actual speech known as Batrā (imperfect) to the people of Baṣra when he was appointed as their governor, although it slightly echoes another famous speech by Ḥajjāj on a similar occasion. Ziyad's speech runs as follows:

"

"... وانى أقسم بالله لأخذن الولى بالولى ، والمقيم
بالظاغن ، والمقبل بالمدبر ، والمطيع بالعاصى ، والصحيح
منكم فى نفسه بالسقيم ...
فايأى ودلج الليل ، فانى لا أوتى بمدلج إلا سفكت دمه ...
فمن غرق قوما غرقناه ، ومن أحرقت قوما أحرقناه ، ومن نقب
بيتنا نقبنا عن بيته ، ومن نبش قبراً دفناه فيه حيا ...
ولاتظهر على أحد منكم ريبة بخلاف ما عليه عامتكم إلا ضربت عنقه ..
وأيم الله إن لى فيكم لصرعى كثيرة ، فليحذر كل امرئ منكم أن يكون من عاى" (2)

There is also the Qur'anic influence on the play's verbal pattern which is demonstrated in the many Quranic verses incorporated throughout the dialogue. It is fitting that the playwright should be tempted to echo the sublime

(1) Vol. I, pp.158-168.

(2) al-Jāhiz, al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn, edited by A. Hārūn, Vol. II, pp.61-5.

rhetoric and rhythmic pattern of the Qur'an as he endeavours to achieve an adequately stylistic quality emulating that of the period. Furthermore, these Qur'anic verses would stir the recipient's feelings and win his sympathy by their inherent emotional power, as they do in the following situation. Husayn is seen by some of his followers distributing alms for the needy and the poor under the cover of night; and as he is tired of carrying the heavy sack, they want to carry it for him,

سعيد : أحمل عنك ..؟
 الحسين : من يحمل عنى يوم الحشر ؟
 بشر : حملك قد أنقض ظهرك .
 الحسين : ولذا أتخفف من حملى كى يشرح ربي لى مدري
 وليرفع ربي من وزرى
 عساه يبسر لى أمرى . " (1)

The incorporation of certain Qur'anic verses does not only apply a touch of the Qur'an's magnificent diction to the play's language, but also provides a powerful and convincing parallel for the recipient to ruminate on the past struggle of Moses and Muḥammad to guide humanity.

(1) Vol. I, p.45; and The Qur'an XX, 25-6, XCIV, 1-4.

CHAPTER VIII
CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Originality and the Dramatic Form

When Yūsuf Idrīs called for the exploration of our popular tradition for a purely Egyptian theatrical form, he had in mind certain dramatic elements such as the shadow theatre, Arāgūz, and Sāmīr which had been established in the popular tradition of Egypt throughout the years. To him Sāmīr is the most attractive form of all the three because "it has been crystallized in the consciousness of the vast majority of our people in the countryside and towns."⁽¹⁾ Defining it he says,

"It is a theatrical festivity held on special occasions whether weddings or religious anniversaries... The narrative of Sāmīr contains several fasls (literally means chapters, but dramatically means plots). Some fasls aim to be funny and others preach moral maxims... The principal role in Sāmīr is that of the farfūr (a Figaro-type character) round whom the story revolves. His satirical remarks and gestures keep the audience entertained. Farfūr is the true personification of the gay, witty and mocking Egyptian folk hero... And 'Farfūrism' is a significant feature of the Egyptian *tamasruh* (the complete involvement of the audience in the dramatic act). It is therefore characteristic of the Egyptian *dramatis personae*... which had a profound influence on the Egyptian popular comedy and was particularly discernible in 'Alī al-Kassār's comedies."⁽²⁾

To support his case, Idrīs wrote his play al-Farfūr which was presented by the Cairo National Theatre in 1964. It deals with the subject of human relationships as seen through the relation between two characters: the domineering Master and the dominated Slave. The two characters go

(1) Introduction to his play Al-Farfūr, Cairo, 1964, p.30.

(2) Ibid., pp.30-33.

through various experiments of changing roles in order to reconcile their diametrically opposed positions, but they fail to reach any satisfactory solution even in the next world. Enveloped in an atmosphere of black humour, the play ends on a seriously pessimistic notion that totally rejects all systems of government and admits explicitly to the impossibility of achieving egalitarian relations among members of the human race.

The play was a major success in that it "makes considerable use of characters and situations taken from Egyptian popular comedy, such as the hen-pecked husband and his sharp-tongued wife; the match of abuse in which characters in Arabic popular comedy readily indulge and which never fails to produce delicious laughter, as well as some slap-stick comedy and various comic numbers."⁽¹⁾

While Idrīs' contribution to the Sāmīr drama has been confined only to al-Farāfir, a further attempt to promote the genre was made in 1965 by the promising young Egyptian playwright Maḥmūd Diyāb. In his play Layālī al-Ḥaṣād (Harvest Nights, published in Cairo 1970) he uses the Sāmīr form in a more subtle and simple way to tell the story of antagonism which erupted among the inhabitants of an Egyptian village over the beautiful Ṣayyūra. From the beginning the play embarks on the dramatic elements which constitute the state of tamasruḥ as being reflected in the

(1) ^CAlī al-Rā^Cī, 'Some Aspects of Modern Arabic Drama' in Studies in Modern Arabic Literature, edited by R.C. Ostle, SOAS, London, 1975, p.168.

nightly entertainment of the villagers. The use of conversation, song, dance, outdoor games, and other theatrical tricks gives the play its deliciously illusive nature.⁽¹⁾ This attempt was the only and perhaps the last one to come closer to a purely traditional form.

Idrīs' theory indeed sprang from a desire to restore a national identity to the imported genre by underlining the dramatic elements of the popular tradition; a desire which must have been initiated by "the deep sense of resentment felt by modern Arabs on account of what was thought to be the semi-total absence of drama from Arabic culture and literature."⁽²⁾

But in spite of Idrīs' enthusiasm and sincere intention, the critics have reacted sharply to his attempt, rejecting it on the grounds, that it was thematically and formally influenced by European drama. M. Mandūr and R. Rushdī saw in it essential elements of Pirandello's dramatic technique of acting, and the convention of improvisation related to Commedia dell'arte.⁽³⁾ ^cAllī al-Rā^cī went as far as to deny any possible existence of a purely Egyptian drama, pointing out that "there can only be two dramatic forms: the Western one adopted in Egypt,

(1) Ibid., p.168.

(2) Ibid., p.171.

(3) Sa^cd Kāmīl, 'al-Nuqqād yarfuḍūn fikrat masrah miṣrī jadīd', An Interview with Critics, al-Muṣawwar, Cairo, May 1964, pp.38-9.

and the Oriental form which has recently had impact on the West." (1)

In July 1965 the Cairo monthly al-Hilāl invited playwrights and critics to a debate to discuss the problems of the Egyptian theatre. Again Idrīs complained that "Egyptian drama is still entirely dependent on European drama... and that we ought to create our own form and theme." In reply Bākathīr said "The most important thing is not the form but the content... If we can produce such a thing as Egyptian content, then there is no harm in adopting universal forms of drama..." (2)

Whether or not we agree with Idrīs' theory, there can be no doubt that his attempt reflected the heated debate which characterized the sixties in search for a national identity and direction in the field of drama. The attempt, moreover, led to other experiments and theoretical inquiries on the part of writers and artists of the theatre. Ḥakīm contributed a book to an exploration of these possibilities. In Qālabunā al-masrahī (Our Dramatic Form, 1967) he called for a form that would combine the art of the narrator (al-ḥākī) and that of the impersonator (al-muqallid), a form that "he found appropriate to our needs. For one thing it is easy to take up. It is really a poor man's theatre... On the dramatic and

(1) Ibid.

(2) 'Mashākil al-masrah al-miṣrī', Nadwat al-Hilāl, VIII (August 1965), pp.120-35.

aesthetic levels, it affords double pleasure to its audiences. It simultaneously shows them actors impersonating given characters and being their real selves... It also has the advantage of doing away with illusion. No pretence is made in that kind of theatre that what goes on is anything but a play. The audiences are kept wide awake, and are encouraged to take part in the show, either as judges and 'critics', or simply as lively spectators."⁽¹⁾

Both theories were doomed to failure, at least for the time being, not only because of the critics' outright rejection but for other reasons. They were confined to light comedies and satirical farces which by and large take a limited tradition with its vernacular in this case the Egyptian, as their means of expression. This, in turn, constitutes a dangerous isolation from other dramatic genres, and an even more serious isolation from the world dramatic tradition in general, and Arabic in particular. If such calls were to succeed, the unity of Arabic culture, which manifested itself in the appearance of drama from the very beginning, would surely be in jeopardy.

Moreover, apart from Idrīs' and Diyāb's attempts, the Sāmīr form was never furnished by sufficient practices to establish itself as a worthy form in the soil of Egyptian drama. Ḥakīm did not himself write plays to prove his

(1) al-Rā^cī, 'Some Aspects...' op.cit., p.169.

theory, but instead gave several illustrations from Greek and modern dramas as to how it could be accomplished. Indeed his main achievement has remained hitherto in the conventional forms of European drama which were being acquired by Arabic theatre in the mid-19th century. His actual contribution to an Arabic drama has proved as we have seen, that originality is not to look for a national form which can barely claim any success, but rather to adopt the available international one and wed it to his tradition. According to his earlier views, there is every reason to be proud of the fact that,

"In recent years Arabic literature, like any lively literature has not turned, nor can afford to turn, a blind eye to the achievement of the surrounding civilizations. The influence on it of the Latin and Anglo-Saxon cultures at the present time is equal to the impact of the Indian, Persian and Greek cultures upon it in the past. It would be foolish to ask a person to retain his old-fashioned attire so we could recognize his personality; for surely there is a difference between the personality and the attire. Arabic literature has always retained its personality and spirit in spite of changing its outward appearance over the years."(1)

The adaptation of western dramatic forms in Arabic literature must not deter us from asserting the identity of Arabic culture. In this respect, Hakīm's work together with his critical views have formed the general trend for Arabic drama for years to come. M. Manzalāwī rightly observes that:

(1) T. al-Hakīm, Fann al-adab, Cairo, n.d., pp.28-9.

"When we turn to modern drama in the western manner, two features strike us. One is that the imported genre, from its earliest years, seeks to indigenize itself, and is at its most successful when it does so: notably, it only achieves the depth and breadth which make universal art when it becomes least derivative and most indigenized. The second is that by contrast with the phenomenon of arrested development, modern Arabic drama, between 1848 and the present day, has run through manifold stages of development, adapted itself to changing conditions and new concepts, and assimilated new styles, in a speeded-up process even more striking than in the case with modern Arabic prose fiction."(1)

Such a "speeded-up process" can be seen in a major body of works by Arab playwrights, in Egypt and in other Arab countries, whether those studied here or elsewhere. Time is not yet ripe for changing the present course of drama; nor does the traditional form suffice by itself to challenge long-established forms that can no longer be claimed by a particular nation or people. The Arab artist does not forfeit originality by adopting a form of expression, but by being at a loss for expression; and as long as he continues to enrich it with his own culture, no one can ever accuse him of that.

Stages of Development of the Relation between Drama and Tradition

The relation between drama and Arab-Islamic tradition, as shown in the course of this study "has run through manifold stages of development" which for the sake of convenience, can be summed up as follows:

(1) Mahmoud Manzalaoui, Introduction to Arabic Writing Today, 2 Drama, published by American Research Centre, Cairo, 1977, p.20.

The First Stage: Tradition for asserting drama and the national identity.

From the beginning, as we have already seen in an earlier chapter, the primary task of the Arab dramatist has always been directed towards asserting and enhancing the newly acquired genre by enriching it with relevant elements drawn from his own tradition. This happened even at a time when the pioneers of Arab theatre were still advancing cautiously in search of the fundamentals of dramatic technique from translations and adaptations of Western works. It is true that the traditional materials upon which the dramatic writings of that period were fashioned, were derived mainly from popular sources such as The Arabian Nights and past folk-tales, but it is equally true that the original dramatic activities were oriented at these sources because they offered materials which were both easy to handle in dramatic form and familiar to the audience. In doing so, they sought and gained the acceptance of their audiences that might otherwise have been reluctant to embrace an alien phenomenon. Besides, as soon as a score of classical works were made available, the formal tradition, as represented by historiographies, religious and literary biographies, also became a focal point for dramatic writings.

The outcome of that period which culminated in Shawqī's verse dramas constitutes the first phase of the relationship between the Arab dramatist and his tradition. Taken against its historical background, this relation sprang

primarily from a general desire to revive the national and spiritual heritage of the Arabs by means of reviving their culture in order to face what seemed to be an attempt at alienation. It was no coincidence that the cultural revival began in Egypt at a critical time when the British invasion was posing a threat to the country's independence. But as far as drama was concerned, the relation with this cultural resurgence was reciprocal in that it served to promote the feeling of cultural identity in the people's consciousness, while thematically still drawing upon the abundance of tradition; a process which gave Arabic drama a great impetus.

Motivated by such noble desire, the early Arab playwrights proceeded with their efforts to directly be inspired by their past culture for possible dramatic themes which would correspond to and reflect the turbulent nature of the age. To a certain extent it was like the revival of Roman and Greek plays in England during the sixteenth century when "the English humanists, by adapting Latin plays to meet conditions created by the Reformation, greatly reinforced the didactic element of traditional religious plays inherited from the mediaeval past. In doing this they brought the refinement of their own style, grounded in study of classical models, to bear upon historical narrative and ethical disputation."⁽¹⁾ Their efforts were

(1) Glynne Wickham, 'Neo-Classical Drama and the Reformation in England' in Classical Drama and Its Influence, Essays presented to H.D.F. Kitto, Edited by M.J. Anderson, Methuen & Co., London, 1965, p.172.

confined to dramatically expressing such traditional themes without making many alterations of the traditional narrative, or charging them with modern interpretations.

The relation as such can be said to have been superficial and therefore ephemeral, but we must take into account two important facts. One is that the early dramatist never claimed to have looked into his tradition from an interpretative standpoint, but rather from a stance where it could be revived, in its entirety, in the people's consciousness. It was the sheer public interest in the glorious past which created and developed a trend of historical drama dealing with the heroes of the Arabic and Islamic past.⁽¹⁾ The second is that, in doing so the Arab dramatist was, consciously or otherwise, aiming at consolidating the imported genre by establishing it in familiar soil; while at the same time asserting his identity through it.

Shawqī was the mature embodiment of this direction, whether in poetry or in verse drama. Not only did he produce verse plays of some dramatic quality, but also succeeded in linking the people to their cultural heritage, be it national or Arab-Islamic, through the channels of theatre. Moreover it was due to his undoubted talent and undisputed stature as a poet that verse drama was given a badly needed impetus to be fully integrated into the fold of the Arabic environment and literature.

(1) N. Barbour, op.cit., p.186.

The Second Stage: The Use of Tradition for Communicating
Philosophical and Political Concepts

The relation between drama and tradition, having been laid down, developed still further, when the Arab dramatist became more aware of the perpetual elements in his own tradition, which could relate the inherited past to the present. In other words, he sought to emphasise the continuity of his inherited tradition through these relevant elements that would illuminate, and add familiar dimensions to, present problems. As early as 1930, Hakīm began to examine the literary possibilities that the Arabic tradition could offer to drama. His interest in Arabic and Islamic mythology and its relevance to his philosophical concepts and modern political preoccupations was sparked off by The Qurān which in his view,

"Brought forward a new style to literary writing, not only with regard to language, but also through tales and myths, the narrative of which aims at expressing religious directives. What bewilders me is the fact that Arabic literature in the past regarded the Quran as only a linguistic model and never as an artistic one. It never occurred to its men of letters that the Quranic tales and myths could have been a fantastic source for artistic inspiration..."(1)

To establish a firm ground between his philosophical concepts and the recipient, Hakīm deliberately presented them through the elaborate medium of the Qurān. The Cavemen is a dramatic manifestation of man's struggle against time;

(1) T. al-Hakīm, Fann al-adab, op.cit., p.26.

and Solomon the Wise symbolises his concept of equilibrium that must exist between man's power and wisdom. In both plays the fusion of such abstract ideas in the familiar Quranic accounts has served to remove the indistinctness of the themes without causing them to lose the philosophical dimension. As far as the language is concerned, the traditional narrative has given life to the dialogue which otherwise could have been unwieldy, a factor that has made Ḥakīm so unique a playwright. His prose dialogue is so enjoyable to read because of its clarity, virility, and expressive wit.

It may be argued that these plays were designed for reading since their intellectual content can only be taken in by a thinking audience. Indeed Ḥakīm admitted that he endeavoured to write drama that could be read as literature, and his call for 'an armchair theatre' may enforce this assumption.⁽¹⁾ Yet the historical background shows that he did so in protest against the trite theatre which had dominated the arena at the time. In such circumstances as R. Long rightly points out,

"The Cavemen was so traumatic an affront to the young traditions of the Egyptian stage that it would probably have been impossible for Ḥakīm to find even partial acceptance without the eruption of a new regime which sought to rethink all the attitudes of the one it dispossessed... Apart from The Cavemen, however, there were other factors in his disfavour before 1952. Among them were his 'ivory tower' reaction to his work's rejection, his character, his passive

(1) See p. 64.

stance among his cultural brothers-in-arms, his misunderstood protest that some of his best plays were designed only for reading and his apparent lack of interest in their fate. Some of these applied equally after the revolution, but their effect was diminished by the changing circumstances it brought in its wake."(1)

Perhaps the failure of The Cavemen, when performed by The National Theatre in 1935,⁽²⁾ was due largely to the failure of the production to grasp many dramatic and imaginative effects inherent in the play. In fact the play is brimming with verbal and visual stimuli that could have captured the audience's imagination. Alī al-Rā'ī listed these dramatic effects and comments:

"Actually the artistic material, the dual and quadruple dialogue, the sub-plot represented by an implausible love-story, and the theatrical ending; all these elements which form the play classify it under the Operatic genre. How fitting it would be if one day it is turned into an opera worthy of success because it springs from our national heritage and retells things that have captured the people's imagination throughout the centuries."(3)

An imaginative production using various theatrical techniques to embody these effects, can easily communicate the intellectual content of The Cavemen to an ordinary audience.

In spite of Ḥakīm's noticeable dramatic maturity in Solomon the Wise with regard to the stage-requirements, it has not yet been given a chance to justify his approach

(1) R. Long, op.cit., p.179.

(2) After twenty-nine years it was restaged by the National Theatre, making the most of Ḥakīm's high tide in the sixties, "but disappointingly, on this occasion, it seems to have made little impression while, as before, spectators tended to doze", R. Long, op.cit., p.93.

(3) A. al-Rā'ī, Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, op.cit., p.44.

of furnishing the theatre of intellect amidst the familiar ground of tradition. Indeed the play is full of significant stimuli, verbal and visual, which are determined by their dramatic context. Whether the play has not been performed on account of religious inhibition, or because of "its Jewishness"⁽¹⁾ or the financial cost that a production would impose, is an open question. But it is hoped that such poetically magnificent drama will one day see the light of the stage.

After nearly thirty years of continuous effort and experimentation to reconcile the tradition of Western drama with that of Arabic literature, Hakim reached the summit of his achievement in The Sultan's Dilemma. If the purely philosophical concepts of his previous intellectual plays and the lack of a refined dramatic sense among the ordinary audience had prevented it from fully appreciating that sort of drama, The Sultan's Dilemma has succeeded in appealing to the whole understanding of the general public. The reason for this is probably that the play, besides its intellectual nature, has topical reference to contemporary issues, in which so many of the modern audience would be directly concerned. Its subject, being triggered off by an outward historical incident, has fundamentally served as a pretext for an inward subject which questions the legitimacy of government, not just in the immediate situation

(1) Long, op.cit., p.56.

but at all times. Moreover, by enveloping the whole action in the fairy-tale atmosphere of The Arabian Nights, Ḥakīm has provided a clue and an example for the emerging writers of his own generation and the next, of how to recreate the possibilities of tradition as a whole in positive dramatic works. Seven plays out of eleven major works by him stand as concrete proof of his appreciation of Arabic and Islamic tradition, and of what a healthy tradition can offer a talented writer.

The Third Stage: Tradition and Verse Drama

On the basis of what Ḥakīm has achieved with regard to the relation of the Arab dramatist to his tradition, some poets have shown their awareness of the special relevance of Arabic and Islamic culture to the modern predicament by making use of traditional aspects and characters. Traditional outward subject-matter has furnished the inward dramatic themes of a number of successful dramas. Ṣabūr's The Tragedy of Hallāj, while embarking upon a historical sufi figure, symbolizes "the suffering of the intellectuals in most modern countries and their dilemma whether to fear the sword or to utter the word."⁽¹⁾ Embarking on the outward historical incident should be interpreted, then, as an attempt by the playwright to put his problem into a new perspective. In other words it is a diligently genuine

(1) Ṣabūr, Ḥayātī... op.cit., pp.119-20.

attempt to provide means for philosophizing the problem by adding substance to his vision, instead of evading the immediate problem or treating it in an abstract way.

Sharqāwī's The Tragedy of Husayn is another attempt which aims at exploiting one of the most rebellious aspects of tradition in order to instigate and stir its recipients to take a more positive attitude towards the problem. Whereas Ṣabūr's Hallāj resorts to verbal utterance in fighting corruption and social injustice, Sharqāwī's Husayn overtly declares his armed hostility to all kinds of degradation and demoralization inflicted on humanity. But in both cases Islamic tradition has been capable enough to meet the artist's requirements in a tragic age. It has enabled the playwright to reach his goal and communicate his message, whether political or revolutionary, without exposing himself to the retribution of utterance or silence, and without being alien or haughty to his recipients. Tradition here serves his purpose in identifying itself with the general public, because it is capable of convincing it through its familiarity and sincerity. As long as the artistic work combined these qualities the reconciliation between it and the public will be prompt.

The stage reaction to both plays reflected one of the cruel realities of the theatre business in Egypt. There was no objection to performing The Tragedy of Hallāj, nor was there a lack of popular response to it when first presented

in Cairo in 1967 and Khartoum.⁽¹⁾ Sharqāwī's play was less fortunate for no apparent reason other than the religious sacredness of its hero. Due to this reason only, the play which had been in preparation by the bright Egyptian director Karam Mutāwī^c, was withheld permission to be featured on stage.⁽²⁾

In the light of what Ṣabūr and Sharqāwī have achieved in Arabic verse drama as far as Arabic tradition is concerned, one can observe certain facts:

Firstly, contemporary verse drama in Egypt has developed considerably in the past twenty years when the new movement of poetry asserted itself as a force to be reckoned with.

"For a long time poets had been searching for new metrical forms that would allow a greater freedom for self-expression and would enable the poet to realize a truly organic unity in his work, would extend the scope of Arabic poetry so as to make possible the writing of verse drama that was truly dramatic and not lyrical... or rhetorical like those by Shawqī or Abāza."⁽³⁾

It was the radical development in the traditional pattern of the Arabic ode which served to challenge the mechanical use of metre, and to replace it with other dramatic devices, thus creating an acceptable correlation between Arabic poetry and verse drama. The trend has become so

(1) By The New Theatre, see F. ^cAbd al-Qādir, 'Izdihār wa suqūt al-masrah al-miṣrī', Cairo, 1979, p.140, and Yūsuf A. Dāghir, Mu^cjam al-masrahiyyāt al-^carabiyya, Baghdad, 1975, p.449.

(2) See pp.242-3 of this thesis.

(3) M.M. Badawi 'Convention and Revolt in Modern Arabic Poetry' in Arabic Poetry, Theory and Development, edited by G.E. Grunebaum, Wiesbaden, 1973, p.203.

forceful in modern Arabic literature in Egypt that many poets have come to accept it as a broader and deeper form for expressing the plights and preoccupations of their era, which cannot be elaborated freely and clearly in meditative poetry. What makes this trend more significant is the fact that it always strikes deeply into the people's consciousness by drawing them closer to their cultural past, thus becoming more expressive of their sufferings and reflective of their aspirations. The verse dramas studied here are just representatives of this growing trend, which includes other works such as:

Muḥākamat Rajul Majhūl (Trial of an Anonymous Man, Cairo, 1971) by ^oIzzal-Dīn Ismā^oīl.

Hamzat al-^oArab (Hamza of the Arabs: Cairo, 1971) by Muḥammad Ibrahīm Abu Sinnah.

Sindibād (Sinbad, Cairo, 1972) by Shawqī Khamīs.

Secondly, that in order to get to grips with the problem of dramatic verse which had long alluded Shawqī, their approach was quite simple thanks to Bākathīr's pioneering efforts. The dialogue could embark on the base rhythm of the traditional metres that could feature the rhythm of daily conversation, and the modulations of character necessitated by the dramatic situation, while still maintaining the poetic mood. Most of the traditional metres used are those which would afford musical variety with their changeable rhythmic patterns. The musical potentialities of metres such as rajaz, mutadāarak, khbab, and mutaqārib are thoroughly exploited, not only because of

their great flexibility but also because of their homeliness and correspondence to the requirements of the dramatic dialogue. Aware of this when writing his verse comedy Night Traveller, Sabūr says in the postscript,

"I have had consistently two things in mind: The first was to try and imagine that the 'people' of my play are able to speak in verse; the second was to try to create a poetic mood for my play, rather than to write poetry which could be 'recited' or 'delivered' on the stage."(1)

Associated with this is the modification of poetic language to suit the requirements of the dramatic dialogue. Present-day poets have tried to avoid sheer verbiage and the use of archaic and far-fetched words which, for instance, made it necessary for Abāza to provide glosses in his plays to explain the meaning of difficult vocabulary. The dialogue should be written in simple literary Arabic; but simplicity which aims at using intelligible words and expressions, or appealing to all tastes, while preserving the literary quality. Now many colloquial words and expressions which are grammatically and syntactically sound, find the door open to the poetic language of drama as the poet strives to identify himself with his audience. Sabūr, notwithstanding, had no regrets when he said,

"The Arabic reader might be shocked by the colloquialisms used, or the apparent 'prosaic' style of some parts in the dialogue. Certain expressions (examples are provided) are indeed low, to the extent that they represent a prominent divergence from the traditional

(1) Op.cit., p.60.

standards of 'poetic' language. This has been deliberate. Every work of art has its own rhetoric which modifies, I believe, the existing criteria of literary judgement. More eager to sustain the poetic mood than to present a collection of poeticisms, I maintained this 'low style' in certain parts as it arose naturally from the dramatic situation."(1)

Thirdly, there is a great deal of progress in the technique of contemporary verse drama which is attributable to the growing awareness of the function of drama in general, and Ḥakīm's vigorous contribution in particular. The task that Shawqī left behind unfinished has been completed by Ḥakīm's constant activity and endeavour to wed the Western dramatic form to Arabic and Islamic tradition in order to bring a fusion between the two mentalities. As R. Long points out,

"He remains the creator of a body of original and extraordinary varied dramatic literature which must not be ignored. It has a large sweep and less insularity than that of a Western author - of a minority tongue and culture, Ḥakīm has had to keep abreast of events and developments in other tongues and cultures in a way no British playwright would see a need to - and deals with his major themes in an atmosphere and with dialogue which it would be hard to match..."(2)

Indeed his literary achievement in this respect, says Ṣabūr, "surpasses our literary maturity by at least twenty years."(3)

Fourthly, at its best "the New Arabic poetry has its own original character... Its contribution lies in the fact

(1) Op.cit., pp.60-1.

(2) Op.cit., p.197.

(3) Madhā yabqā minhum... op.cit., p.103.

that, while it expresses the anxiety and bewilderment of modern man in the face of ultimate questions, it is deeply concerned about the identity and future of Arab culture in a tragic age. It is both metaphysical and national at one and the same time."⁽¹⁾

The connection between the modern Arab poet-dramatist and his tradition should then be viewed from this perspective: his anxiety to find a cultural identity that would withstand the pressure of the fast moving changes of present-day values. And in this respect we do find that his relationship with tradition is as deep and strong as never before, in spite of what might initially strike us as being a total rejection of, or rebellion against, some of its aspects. For, whereas the poet rebels against the traditional pattern of the Arabic poem in favour of a free form that would accommodate his new artistic requirements, he strengthens his ties with tradition as a whole. He looks into it from a selective point of view, by drawing from its abundantly relevant elements in order to shape his present, thus improving and rejuvenating it in a new context.

It is no exaggeration to say that modern poets are more conscious of the potentialities of Arabic and Islamic culture than the traditionalists themselves would claim to be, so much so that in bringing tradition to bear upon modern preoccupations, not only has it proved successful

(1) M. Badawi, 'Convention...' op.cit., p.208.

and resourceful, but also it has promoted the newly acquired genre and enhanced its acceptance among the public.

"... The audience came to expect of drama that it should express, or at least reflect, their own preoccupations, and that it should give them a moral, intellectual, or imaginative leadership. This is surely the most meaningful sign that a borrowed genre has finally become indigenized, taken to a people's bosom, and into their intellectual clasp."(1)

Tradition and the Language of Arabic Drama

Since the introduction of drama to the Arab world, the problem of whether to use classical or colloquial Egyptian Arabic in the dialogue has been a subject of debates and attempts to find an appropriate solution. What gave rise to the question in the early days of Arabic drama was the fact that "the literary style of the classical Arabic of the time seemed to be overloaded with rhetoric, beautifying metaphors and similes, which led to lifeless and inactive styles."(2) A brief look at the development of modern Arabic literature shows that the problem is confined to prose writing in drama and the novel.

In drama Muḥammad^c Uthmān Jalāl and Ya^cqūb Ṣannū^c (1839-1912) were probably the first Egyptian playwrights to use colloquial Egyptian Arabic in their plays. Jalāl in particular "was working according to a theory of literary

(1) M. Manzalaoui, op.cit., p.34.

(2) Maḥmūd ibn al-Shārīf, Adab Maḥmūd Taymūr, Cairo, n.d., p.61.

expression which assumes that the Egyptian vernacular is at least as good a medium as classical Arabic, and that there can be no true national literature in Egypt unless Egyptian vernacular becomes the accredited literary medium for all themes and genres and modes and not only for local, popular and realistic subjects as practised by Ṣannū^c..."⁽¹⁾

Perhaps the most distinguished representative of this tendency was the playwright Muḥammad Taymūr (d.1921) whose three plays on modern life in Egypt were all written in the colloquial language in accordance with their social themes. If the spoken Arabic of Egypt were ever to become a language of literature, Taymūr's social dramas would undoubtedly rank among its foremost products. His views regarding the language of prose writing, according to his brother Maḥmūd in the introduction to his collected works, were that "a writer should use the Egyptian colloquial if the theme of the play is based on modern life, and literary Arabic in historical works and in translations of foreign plays."⁽²⁾

While Arabic drama differentiated between two styles of Arabic according to the nature of the theme, the novel combined the two: a colloquial one for dialogue, and a classical one for the narrative and descriptive passages.

(1) L.^cAwad, 'Problems of the Egyptian Theatre' in Studies in Modern Arabic Literature, op.cit., p.181.

(2) Introduction to Mu'allafāt Muḥammad Taymūr, Cairo, 1922, Vol. I, p.56.

Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1888-1956) adopted this method in his first novel Zaynab (published in 1914) which "is a conscious plea for the emancipation of women and expression of a lost generation of intellectuals."⁽¹⁾

The problem was later solved by Ibrahim ^cAbd al-Qādir al-Māzinī (1889-1949) in a different manner. "Whereas Haikal had used colloquial in all his dialogue, Māzinī's technique was usually to translate colloquial phrases into simple classical ones where possible, so that the dialogue sounded natural and at the same time harmonized with the classical Arabic of narrative and descriptive passages."⁽²⁾ It should be mentioned here that this technique has been widely adopted by many other writers and novelists; most important of whom, are, for instance, A.A. Bākathīr and Najīb Maḥfūz (1911-). Their dialogue is written in simple literary Arabic, a modern version of the classical one; but the simplicity drives at using intelligible words and expressions that are grammatically and syntactically sound in spite of the seemingly colloquial forms of structure. The dialogue as such would need only changes of syntax to be turned into perfect spoken Arabic. Maḥfūz, who does not see any discrepancy between his commitment to using literary Arabic and the realism he is striving after in his novels, states,

(1) M.M. Badawi, 'Islamic Commitment in Contemporary Arabic Literature'. Journal of World History, XIV, 4(1972), p.862.

(2) H. Sakkūt, op.cit., p.27.

"I regard colloquial as a disease that has been caused basically by the lack of education. Lack of study and education has widened the gap between classical and colloquial Arabic. When education is spread in the Arab world, the gap will disappear, or at least become narrower."(1)

The approach that consists in using a mixture of literary Arabic and idioms borrowed from the colloquial has been tried by many a dramatist, including Maḥmūd Taymūr, Bākathīr and Ḥakīm. Although the latter had begun his writing career in the tradition of the popular theatre of the twenties by writing light social comedies, sketches and novels in colloquial, he soon developed his literary style which was to dominate Arabic drama in Egypt for more than two decades. During that period Ḥakīm has employed in his drama a language which reflects the dignity of the wide range in his choice of themes. It creates in relation to theme and plot a truth of character we are willing to believe; and it would have been unnatural for the characters of The Cavemen, Solomon the Wise and The Sultan's Dilemma to express the topicality of these themes in a language that lacks the means to do so. Moreover, had these characters been made to speak or to use straight colloquial Arabic, the traditional theme, owing to its nobility, would have suffered a diminishing impact. Good dramatic dialogue is a reflection of the nobility of its theme as it is an intensification of normal

(1) F. Dawwāra, Ashrat... op.cit., pp.286-7.

speech. It is a fusion between the language of a play and its theme; a fusion which arises naturally out of character, situation and conflict. John Arden put it this way in an answer to an interviewer's question,

"I think it is important that plays should use speech in the same way that a poet uses individual images. One has to form language in the theatre rather than just report it. There has to be a tension and rhythm in the language; even if one is using ordinary colloquial speech it has to be carefully worked over so that it comes to have a dramatic rhythm which is not quite that of ordinary talk."(1)

In his endeavour to achieve such a fusion the playwright is confronted with the task of forming his language so as to make it correspond with other elements of the play. Before we accuse Ḥakīm of being "confined by the limitations of the Arabic language",⁽²⁾ we must look at the language of his drama in relation to its subject and context, because language, after all, depends on the circumstances and situations in which it is used. There is no doubt, that, as Ḥakīm explains, that "exalted themes and problems would indeed elevate the level of language used even if it is used by half-educated characters."⁽³⁾ The unpopular response to The Cavemen on the stage has always been taken as proof against using classical Arabic in drama. Yet no mention is made of the

(1) John Fletcher, New Directions in Literature, (A Critical Approach to Contemporary Phenomena), Calder & Boyars, London, 1968, p.149.

(2) L. °Awad, op.cit., p.185.

(3) Dawwāra, op.cit., p.42.

production itself; nor of the failure of the audience to grasp the meaning of its philosophical content, which might well have been the cause of its theatrical unpopularity in the eyes of these critics. Further evidence in support of my view is The Sultan's Dilemma which, although written in the same language as its predecessor, has evoked a wide response in Egypt⁽¹⁾ and abroad for the simple reason that its philosophical theme (Power versus Law) closely expresses preoccupations of our age as well as touching upon a political issue.

Whatever the case may be, one cannot deny the fact that, as far as the dramatic language itself is concerned, The Cavemen is "unmistakably a work where for the first time in the history of Arabic dramatic literature conceived and executed in the fushā (the classical Arabic), an effective fusion of dramatic action and language takes place."⁽²⁾

It might seem irrelevant here to mention the problem of language in modern Arabic drama, since the phenomenon which this study has been concerned with, has employed only one language, that is classical, for treating dramatically subjects and themes derived mainly from

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- (1) In the season 1961-2 the play enjoyed 37 performances and seen by a total of 5661 audience which was at that time a remarkable success. See: Rajā' al-Naqqāsh, Maq^cad Ṣaghīr amām al-Sitār, Cairo, 1971, p.10.
- (2) J. Stetkevych, 'Classical Arabic on Stage', in Studies in Modern Arabic Literature, op.cit., p.159.

tradition. The classical language in this respect provokes a wider response not only among the educated but also among the ordinary people, and reflects the dignity of these subjects and themes. In presenting these traditional themes in stage terms a playwright needs not only to have talent and theatrical convictions but also to have "a poetic sensibility and ability to handle language with evocative skill if his work is to have a more than passing and topical interest."⁽¹⁾

The controversy of which language should be used, arises only, as it always has done since the early days of Arabic drama, when a play deals with a contemporary issue. Here we have those who argue in favour of colloquial because it offers greater spontaneity and natural directness; and those who see simple literary Arabic as the only medium capable of preserving the dramatic work for future generations in the face of rapidly changing colloquial. Literary Arabic in the eyes of the latter group is indeed "the unifying factor par excellence... upon which rests the unique linguistic unity of the Arab world."⁽²⁾

As for Ḥakīm, he seems to favour simple literary Arabic, and all his plays are written in this language, except for the one-act comedy al-Zammār (The Piper, 1932

(1) Fletcher, op.cit., p.149.

(2) David Johnson-Davies, Modern Arabic Short Stories, London, 1967, Introduction, pp.ix-x.

which was published in The Variety Theatre 1956). The simplicity of his style is unmatched by any other playwright as everybody can understand and relish it. However he seems to believe that productions of social or realistic plays can be performed in colloquial Arabic, but it is imperative that the published versions be in classical.

"The use of classical Arabic would make a play more acceptable in reading. In acting, however, it needs only to be translated into colloquial according to the needs of the characters. Therefore, classical Arabic is not always the ultimate solution...

On the other hand, the use of colloquial can be objected to, and rightly so, on the grounds that it cannot be understood at all times and in all parts of the Arab world, or even in all provinces of one country. Hence its inaptness."(1)

In application of this theory, he wrote his play al-Safqah (The Deal, 1956), in simple classical Arabic. The performance was executed in Egyptian colloquial and it was a major success.(2)

Although the spread of education has to some extent narrowed the gap between classical and colloquial Arabic, it seems that Arabic drama requires constant consolidation and indigenization of the many relevant aspects of Arabic tradition and culture in order to close this gap entirely. We must be reminded that this very tradition has not only served to revive modern Arabic literature, but has also secured a smooth incorporation of the dramatic genre in

(1) Epilogue to al-Safqah, Cairo, n.d., p.162.

(2) Seen by a total of 12337 spectators, Naqqāsh, op.cit., p.10.

an Arabic milieu, and enhanced its acceptance among the general public in the first place.

Tradition has also been an inspiring force for modern Arab poets in their sincere efforts to forge a new style between Arabic poetry and drama. Modern Arab poets have come to realize the possibilities offered by the theatre as a medium for poetry which could express their preoccupations as well as those of the ordinary people. In this respect tradition has been able to provide legendary, historical, religious and mythological themes that lend themselves naturally to poetry and stage-conventions. Such an approach, hitherto unknown in Arabic poetry, has been used on a large scale by the contemporary Arab poet. However "there is no question of this tendency being conventional or a desire for orthodoxy, because in the process of employing Islamic symbols and imagery he (al-Sayyāb) recreates his material skilfully and makes his readers look afresh at it, breaking down in them the compartmentalization in their minds and putting (these) elements in a new poetic context."⁽¹⁾

The writing of dramatic prose, where tradition has been sought as a vehicle for conveying the playwright's message, is another important step towards finding a final solution to the problem of language. The original aspect

(1) M.A.S. Abd al-Halīm, 'al-Sayyāb, - A Study of his Poetry', in Studies in Modern Arabic Literature, op.cit., p.80.

in this respect consists in treating an original content in an original language. It would be a gross blunder to tackle a classical theme from a classical culture in a language other than classical, because "the receptacle of classical Arabic is indeed much wider and deeper than that of the colloquial... Furthermore the use of classical Arabic is more appealing to literature from a purely artistic point of view as we know well the technical artistic characteristics of the literary style in the Classical Arabic." (1)

The insistence on writing in classical Arabic is, therefore, an integral part of the originality of a work since the whole content is determined by the essential literary characteristics of style in that language. One clear effect of this tendency has been demonstrated in producing high quality drama of original colour that can now rival world drama. Recapturing relevant elements of tradition in order to express them de novo in a relevant language has won Arabic drama a measure of universal acclaim which is being manifested through the translation of most of Ḥakīm's dramatic works into major European languages. It is a healthy sign for modern Arabic drama just as it is for tradition.

(1) Muḥammad Mandūr, 'Bayn al-fuṣḥā wa al-^cāmmiyya fī al-ta^cbīr al-adabī', Hiwār, Beirut, 1965, Vol. III, pp.48-9.

An awareness of the importance of coming to terms with questions such as the consolidation of the Arabic identity of Arabic drama, and the use of simple literary Arabic is clearly echoed in the Arabic Theatre Conference held in Damascus in 1973. The Resolutions and Recommendations related to these issues that were put forward at the end of the Conference, can be found in the Appendix of this thesis.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the cultural revival which began in Egypt in the second half of the nineteenth century, the newly acquired dramatic art formed close ties with the Arab-Islamic cultural tradition. This revival sprang from the desire to assert national identity in the face of alien forces, and from the ambition to give a new impetus to the still declining Arabic literature.

Although Classical Arabic literature contained a number of dramatic elements, we have seen in the discussion above how these were insufficient in themselves to produce drama. However, the possibility of creating a truly Arabic drama existed right from the very beginning owing to the presence of such elements and to the incorporation of classical material from the Arabic tradition into a Western dramatic framework.

It is clear from this thesis that the relationship between the Arab playwright and his tradition has taken two distinctive forms. Firstly, there were the pioneers of Arabic drama who, through their lack of dramatic skill, and driven by their desire to bridge the gap between this new art and its Arab audience, called upon traditional material, whether popular or historical. This was because such material was already familiar and also easy to handle in a play. We have seen how Shawqī, despite all his weaknesses as a dramatist, was an

important link not only between drama and Arab-Islamic culture, but also between drama and Arabic poetry.

Secondly, there were the later and more intellectually mature Arab dramatists who benefited from their direct contact with Western Dramatic literature. These writers, as has been mentioned, used traditional material in order to convey timeless preoccupations. They employed aspects of the Arab-Islamic tradition in the context of their plays so as to express themes ranging from the philosophical to the political and social. In this way they proved not only their awareness of the continuity of tradition but also its relevance to our modern requirements.

One of the major points brought out in this thesis is the fact that the interaction between drama and tradition is in no way retrogressive. On the contrary, it is a vital source for the artistic enrichment of a Western imported form. Furthermore, it is one of the most important and elaborate ways whereby Arab dramatists are able to express their political convictions without fear of alienating themselves from the recipients of their works.

Rather than building on the inadequate tradition of the maqāmāt and shadow-plays, the writers discussed in this thesis, while showing a willingness to accept Western dramatic forms, also displayed their originality and broadmindedness. This was achieved through the constant

consolidation of dramatic form with traditional themes and content. The result was that their most successful works were those which contained a fusion of these apparently diverse elements.

All indications in this respect point to the fact that Arab playwrights, by frequently drawing upon tradition, have made it a common feature of dramatic writing in recent years. Not only does this tendency manifest itself in a great number of good quality plays, but in the attitude of playwrights whom one would not have expected to have been influenced by it. Alfred Faraj, for instance, even though an Egyptian Copt, has enthusiastically endorsed Ḥakīm's efforts in this domain. Moreover, he has written a score of successful drama in lucid Classical Arabic derived from and built on the atmosphere of folk tradition. It is hoped that his achievement will be the subject of future investigation in the context of popular tradition.

However, the most outstanding contribution to these developments is that of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm who has received international acclaim. As early as the 1930s his works began to be translated into the major European languages - a privilege which no other Arab artist has enjoyed. There is no doubt that had he been attracted to commercial theatre in Egypt he would not have been recognized internationally.

The conclusions drawn in the last chapter of this thesis point to the fact that the relationship between tradition and contemporary Arabic drama is a reciprocal one. Thus, while enriching Arabic drama, tradition has also been revived in the people's consciousness, and has provided adequate solutions to many problems, most important of which is that of the language the playwright employs.

APPENDIX

Resolutions and Recommendations of
The Arabic Theatre Conference held in Damascus 15-22 May 1973⁽¹⁾

First: Establishing Arabic drama on the firm roots of
Arabic Culture:

1 - The Arab Heritage.

In view of the numerous components which make up the Arab heritage and which could enrich contemporary Arab drama, the Conference believes in the importance of continuing to draw from the diversity of this heritage through fresh approaches, so that it may become an important factor in the crystallization of the distinctive character of modern Arab theatre. The conference therefore recommends the need:

(a) to lay down plans which would revive the heritage and present it in a manner that is easily accessible and enjoyable; and to create the suitable climate so that those who work in the Arab theatre can draw on events, personalities and different forms of the Arab heritage.

(b) to make deeper studies of the various ingredients which make up the Arab heritage, such as the fine arts, popular literature, and other literary genres, because they constitute the sources for reinforcing the Arab elements of the Arab theatre, and because the theatre is a comprehensive medium which includes all these arts.

(c) to overcome the obstacles which prevent the portrayal of high cultural values which are inherent in the religious aspect of the Arab heritage, and to reaffirm and revive these values on stage.

(1) Published by The Arab League Munazzamat al-ta^clīm wa al-thaqāfa wa al-^culūm, Cairo, 1975, p.11.

2 - New Experiments.

Having reviewed the outcome of some promising theatrical experiments which aimed at consolidating the Arab elements of Arab drama, the Conference emphasizes the need to -

- a - encourage and expand the scope of these experiments
- b - encourage all serious attempts at creating new dramatic forms that would highlight the characteristics of Arab theatre.
- c - strengthen the connection between the theatre and the environment of contemporary Arabs and their socio-political preoccupations.

3 - The Identity of Arabic Drama and International Influences.

- a - The Conference believes that the influence of international drama on the Arab Theatre must be checked by specific rules, so that it does not contradict the principle of consolidating the Arab identity of Arab drama, and so that the latter is not isolated from international trends and experiments. The Conference considers it essential to remain in touch with these trends and movements in order to facilitate Arab experiment, but on condition that such contact is based on careful assimilation and objective assessment of these experiments, and not on mere copying and blind imitation of the new forms.
- b - The Conference believes that successful consolidation of the Arab elements of Arabic drama will enable it to spread universally.
- c - The Conference also believes that simple Literary Arabic should be adopted for dramatic dialogue.

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