Chapter-2

Arabic Drama: Origin and Development

2.1 Origin of Arabic Drama

There is a long-standing and ongoing dispute among both the Arab and non-Arab critics as to whether or not drama existed in the Arab world prior to its contact with the West. There are two opposing viewpoints concerning this matter. One claims that there was no drama in the Arabs' history and puts forth its assumptions and justifications accordingly; the other is equally adamant in its argument that drama did indeed exist in the Arab world. One who studies Arab history, culture and civilization can rule out neither of these claims. It is even debatable that drama and theatre in the modern Arab world originated from the roots of Arab theatrical traditions.

There are critics having the opinion that the Arabs had drama, but they did not practice it on stage as the Greeks and later the Europeans, generally did. According to Al-Khozai, the Arabs possessed their own form of dramatic expression, but this did not develop into a national drama. He says, "Despite the fact that the Arabs had their own dramatic expression in two embryonic forms, namely *khayal al-zill* and the *ta'ziya*, these two antecedents of Arabic drama failed to develop and evolve into a national drama."[1]

Pilgrimage Prayer: The Syrian playwright Ali 'Uglah Arsan examined this subject in great detail in his book, *Al-Zawahir al-Masrahiyya 'Ind al-'Arab*. `Arsan was of the opinion that like certain other peoples, such as the ancient Egyptians, Indians, Japanese and Chinese, the Arabs did have drama in their history, but for some reasons this did not develop into a national genre. He gives as an example an early Makkahn ritual from pre-Islamic times which consisted of dancing around the *Ka'bah*, in worship of multiple gods, quoting a Qur'anic

[1] Al-Khozai, Mohamed. A, *The Development of Early Arabic Drama: 1847-1900*. London, 1984, p. 225

verse to support his claim that in the days before Islam religious rituals existed involving singing and dancing: "And their prayer before the house is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands" (Qur'an VIII 35). These rituals, which involved circling the *Ka'bah* while chanting the *talbiyah* (songs of obedience) were performed twice a year. Each tribe had its own *talbiyah*. Nizar, one *talbiyah* is quoted here as an example:

> Here we are! O Allah, at your service.
> Here I am at your service,
> No partner you have but a partner is yours.
> You owe him, he owes not.[2]

The *Istisqa* (prayer for rain) was a pre-Islamic practice that had the elements of a drama. In times when there was no rain the people of Makkahh used to wash themselves with water, perfume their bodies and then circumambulate the *Ka'bah* seven times, after which a pious man would call upon Allah to send rain. This ritual included singing and dancing as well. The pre-Islamic Arabs used to sing and dance to celebrate other occasions too, including when the Makkahn Arabs received visitors from outside the city during the pilgrimage.[3]

Islam did not prevent the Arab Muslims from singing and dancing; rather it actually encouraged them to do so. In support of this Arsan quotes the Prophet as having said: "Carry on, O Bani Arfidah, so the Jews and Christians know that there is entertainment in our religion."[4]

In support of his claims Arsan cites certain written texts with theatrical aspects, such as *Al-Mutahhar al-Azdi*'s narrative of Abu al-Qasim al-Baghdadi and the story of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension to the Seven Heavens. In

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[2] Ali Arsan, *Al-Zawahir al-Masrahiyya Inda al-Arab*. Damascus, 1985, pp. 32-33
[3] Ibid. pp. 48-49
[4] Ibid. pp. 68-69

addition to this he mentions certain elements of the theatre, such as the shadow play and popular entertainment forms.[5]

Popular Entertainments: The Egyptian critic, Muhammad Kamal al-Din considers that although the Arabs practiced various arts in pre-Islamic times, including the art of drama, they did not practice it formally. He speaks of three stages of Arabic drama:

1. Popular theatrical plays represented in the festivals such as *'Id* and *Mawlid* and activities such as shadow plays and the *maqama.*

2. Borrowing from European drama and its influence through translation, Arabisation, and performance.

3. Attempts by the Arabs to draw upon their rich history in order that their drama would reflect their own culture.[6]

***Maqamat* and *Hakawati*:** The Egyptian, Abdul Hamid Yunus sees the *maqama* as a dramatical work in both pre and post-Islamic times.[7] It acquired a literary status under Ibn-Faris, who was followed by his pupil Badi al-Zaman Hamdani (969-1008 A.D.) who is credited with the creation of *maqamat* in Arabic literature. Al-Hamdani's work served as a model for Al-Hariri of Basra (1054-1122) whose *maqamat* were esteemed as the chief treasury, next to the Holy Quran.[8] In the *maqamat* we find some approach to the dramatic style, which has never been cultivated by the pervious. Yunis mentioned various elements as part of dramatical phenomena including the *maqamat*, the *naqa'id* (polemic poems), *munshidin* (professional singers), *hikaya* and *hakawati* (narrative and narrator) and *mufakhara* (boasting).

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[5] Ali Arsan, op.cit., p. 153

[6] Balqasim Al-Nusayri, *Muhawala fi Istiqa Madda min al-Turath*, 1984, pp. 160-167

[7] Al-Sheddi, Baker. *The Roots of Arabic Theatre*, University of Durham, 1997, p. 79

[8] Hitti, P.K. *The Arabs, A Short History*, London, 1960, 403

Religious Rituals: According to the Palestinian critic, Muhammad Najm, Arabic literature consists of a number of dramatic phenomena and considers it to be far less simple, primitive and isolated from everyday life than has been suggested by certain Islamic sources. Instead, he sees Arabic paganism as having been complex and deep-rooted in the hearts of the people, and affecting many aspects of life, including human emotions, nature and the seasons, the rituals of purification and resurrection, and festivals. Music and singing played a part in all these events and rituals. Najm cites examples of popular art found in historical works by Al-Tabari and later Al-Masudi, which go back as far as the third century after the Hijrah.[9]

***Ta`ziya*:** Theatrical forms existed for the Arabs both before and after the advent of Islam. Shawkat, an Egyptian researcher, notes that the Persians were familiar with the passion play, which was only performed by the Shi'ites of Fatimid Egypt and in Iran. This would be performed on the tenth day of the first month of the Islamic calendar and commemorated the killing of the Prophet's grandson, Husayn. The performance was usually given in the open air surrounded by tents. The actors played the parts of Husayn, Al-'Abbas, Zaynab, Sukyna and others. The performance ended with a recitation of the story of Husayn's martyrdom in a sad voice intended to make the audience weep.[10]

Shawkat likened this dramatic form to that of Christian plays in medieval Europe adapted from religious books by priests who wished to achieve educational and moral goals.[11] This type of performance is known as *Ta'ziya*.

***Kurraj* and Polemic Poetry:** *Kurraj* is a Persian word meaning donkey or mule.[12] The Iraqi scholar, 'Umar al-Talib, in his book, *Malamih al-Masrahiyya*

[9] Najm, Muhammad. *Suwar min al-Tamthil fi al-Hadara al-Arabiyya*. 1977, pp. 81-85
[10] Sawkat, Mahmud. *Al-Fann al-Masrahi fi al-Adab al-Arabi al-Hadith*, Cairo, 1963, pp. 10-11
[11] Ibid. p. 56

al-Arabiyya wal-Islamiyya, provides evidence to support the theory that theatrical performances were known in Arabian society in Islamic times. Al-Talib cites the use by the poet Jarir of the term *Al-Kurraj* in some of his poems. Jarir says:

> (Labistu Silahi wal-Farazdaqu lu'batun / `alayhi wishähä kurrajin wa jalajiluh)
> (I have put on my arms while al-Farazdaq is a laughing stock / dressed in the two ornamented belts and bells of a kurraj.)
> (Amsa'l-Farazdaqu fi jalajili kurrajin / ba'da al-Ukhaytal Lu'batan li Jariri)
> (al-Farazdaq with his bells of kurraj became / after the small Akhtal a toy to Jarir.)[13]

In explaining his theory, Al-Talib refers to the theatrical aspect of pre-Islamic rites of worship and pilgrimage. According to Al-Talib, when the Arab tribes used to visit Makkah in order to perform the Hajj, as they were walking around the *Ka'bah* seven times they would recite certain hymns. He sees the participants in this act as both actors and audience at the same time.[14] Furthermore, al-Talib sees the literary gatherings which took part in Makkah during the peak commercial seasons to have been highly theatrical. They gave the poets the opportunity to gather to present their poetry before an audience who would provide feedback, thereby creating an interaction between the performers (the poets) and the audience. Al-Talib describes how some of the rich rulers in the days before Islam used to pay actors and entertainers to imitate other rulers and emirs in a satirical way.[15]

It is most important to mention some popular dramatic elements which are undoubtedly unique to the existence of Arabic drama.

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[12] Moreh, Samuel. *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arabic World*. Edinburgh, 1992, p. 23
[13] Al-Talib, Umar. *Malamih al-Masrahiya al-Arabiya wal-Islamiya*, Dar al-Afaq, 1987, p. 7
[14] Ibid. p. 57
[15] Ibid. p. 61

2.1.1 *Ta`ziya* (passion play)

The word *ta'ziya* means "expression of condolence in general or consolation";[16] but the word *ta'ziya* for the Shi'ite Muslims, the word signifies the annual event commemorating the slaughter of `Ali's (the fourth Muslim caliph) descendants. Samuel Chew notes that, "the tragedy of the house of `Ali was not dramatized till quite recently, probably towards the close of the eighteenth century or even in the first years of the nineteenth."[17] This statement is true if Chew means the performance of this event in the context of conventional theatrical presentation (i.e. performed in a theatre on a conventional stage before an audience who paid admission). But since the second half of the tenth century, the event has been commemorated and performed as a ritual drama in public places and in private homes every year during the first ten days of the Muslim month of *Muharram*, especially in Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon. When Shi'ism became the state religion of Persia after the Safavids came to power in A. D. 1502[18] *ta`ziya* was endorsed and gained its importance.[19]

The Origin of *Ta'ziya* : After the Prophet's death, the Muslim community split into two opposed parties, those who believed in the ancient Arab practice of succession by election and those who supported inherited succession in the family of the Prophet. The result was two sects known as *Sunnites* (orthodox Muslims) and *Shi'ites* (the partisans of `Ali, the cousin and the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad).

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[16] Landau, Jacob M. *Studies in the Arabs Theatre and Cinema*. Philadelphia, 1958, p. 5

[17] Chew, Samuel. *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance*, New York, 1965, pp. 229-230

[18] Persia's intimate relationship with the house of 'Ali was a result of Husayn's marriage to the Iranian princess, Shahrbanu, daughter of the last Sassanian king.

[19] Al-Sheddi, op. cit., p. 100

During the struggle for the Caliphate, `Ali, Caliph at the time, was assassinated on his way to the mosque at Kufa (A. D. 661) and later his elder son, Hassan, was poisoned in Madina (A. D. 669). The headquarters of the Caliphate had already been moved by `Ali s efforts from Arabia to Iraq and after the death of `Ali, to Damascus, Syria. `Ali s second son, Husayn, who lived in Madina, refused to acknowledge the rule of Yazid, the Umayyad Caliph in Damascus. After the death of his father and brother, the Iraqis invited Husayn to be the Caliph. Husayn therefore left Medina with a small escort of relatives and supporters, for Kufa in Iraq.

At the beginning of *Muharram* (680 A. D), `Umar ibn Abi Waqqas besieged Husayn with his escort near Kufa, in the open field of Karbala' and attacked them on the tenth of *Muharram* after their refusal to surrender. Husayn received a mortal wound in the course of the battle and his body was decapitated by Shi'mr. The head was sent to Yazid in Damascus for display as a trophy, but was later buried with the body in Karbala'. Therefore, the people of Kufa, the partisans of `Ali, repented their failure to give Husayn their promised support.

In commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom, `Ali s partisans, the shi'ites annually observe the first ten days of *Muharram* as a period of mourning and lamentation. As an expression of grief, they have developed a passion play enacted in three interrelated complementary parts, opening with *majlis al-Ta`ziya* (mourning assemblies), followed by *mawakib al-aza* (mourning procession) and culminating in *mashhad ashura* (presentation of the events of the tenth of *Muharram*).[20] The first function, *majlis al-Ta`ziya*, is held throughout the first ten days of *Muharram* in a house or a hall. In this assembly a Qari (reciter) narrates the story of the Martyrdom of Husayn and his family and enhances his narration with poetry. On the tenth day or *ashura*, the

[20] Al-Sheddi, op. cit., p. 101

processions are performed in the streets leading to Karbala', or the place representing it. Here the mourners express their grief by wailing and they also enact in a pageant parts of the events of *ashura*. The climax which constitutes the core of *mashhad ashura* is the massacre of Husayn and his male family. This recreates and revives the tragedy by means of acting and miming. This is a case in point from Arab culture where narrative expression using prose, poetry and movement is employed to recreate a significant moment in history for the purpose of remembering and learning.[21]

**Dramatic Elements in *Ta`ziya:*** Although the *ta`ziya* tradition did not offer a developed performance style of dramatic literature, the ritual theatre of Iran did attract the attention of Peter Brook (one of the great theatre directors in the twentieth century). In his *The Empty Space*, Brook shows a deep concern for establishing a vibrant relationship between audience and performer and expresses the belief that although the west yearns for a ritual theatre, it has lost the ability to create such a theatre. In his search for a spiritual tradition which he believed the western theatre had lost, Brook turned his attention to the Third World and encountered the *ta`ziya* tradition in Iran. He discovered that the ritual theatre of *ta`ziya* contained many elements which he believed essential to all theatre. He says,

> The ancient theatre clearly was, and theatre must always be, a religious action; and its action is very clear: it is that by which fragments are made whole…. The great force of artistic events is that they are temporary glimpses of what might be, and there is a healing process attached to these glimpses.[22]

Peter Brook explored the *ta`ziya* tradition in search of answers and found that the passion play (*ta`ziya*) offered contributions. Lewis Pelly, a colonel in the British army, spent some time in Iran and was so impressed by the power of the

[21] Al-Khozai, op. cit., pp. 25-29

[22] Quoted from Al-Sheddi, op. cit., p. 102

*ta`ziya* tradition to move its audience, that he took the time to collect fifty two plays from oral tradition, in spite of the fact that he had no specialized knowledge of theatre or Shi`ism.[23]

Acting: Religious personalities and preachers play active parts in *ta`ziya*. The *Sayyids* (descendants of Husayn) monopolise the prominent roles which gave them claim to gifts from patrons. Some of the most difficult roles to cast are those of the villains, Yazid, the Umayyad Caliph, and Shimr, the military leader who beheaded Husayn, as they will always be associated with their *shabih* (likeness), the symbol of evil. As the plot develops and Shimr goes to cut off the head of Husayn, no spectator is surprised to see Shimr in tears for the oppressed *Imam*, for it is clear it is not Shimr crying but the player. Performers developed a representational style in which they recite the lines of the character but do not become one with the character. For this purpose the text, or the actor's lines, are read from a piece of paper even when the *ta'ziya* player knows his lines by heart.[24] Here is an example for an actor who became too involved and needed to remind the audience that he is Mr. Sulaymani playing `Abbas while reciting an ode that he himself composed. In the middle of it, he emphasized the separation between himself and the character he was playing:

> I am not `Abbas; neither is this Karbala'
>
> I am Sulaymäni, the slave of the King of heavenly power.[25]

There are some gestures which carry special meaning, such as throwing straw on the head and beating the chest to signal mourning. These conventions are not unique to Islam but are typically Middle Eastern and extend back to pre-Christian funeral customs. Another typical gesture carrying symbolic meaning comes from the audience and relates to the Muslim custom of communal

[23] Al-Sheddi, op. cit., pp. 102-103
[24] Ibid. p. 104
[25] Qouted as Al-Sheddi in p. 105

participation in the last rites of the dead. When the body of a martyr is carried through the audience to be placed on stage, those who are close to the procession strive to lend a hand. The audience members who are not close enough to actually help carry the corpse, stretch out their hands to symbolize their assistance.[26]

The combat scenes are choreographed sequences resembling dancing patterns. Generally, the combat begins in the performance space and then continues off stage. Following a brief fight, the protagonist may depart, followed by the antagonists, and re-enter with bloody and torn shroud, still pursued by the villains. Frequently, the slaughter of the hero takes place off stage and his corpse is carried out before the audience.[27]

Audio-visual signs are present in the performances of *ta`ziya*. There is the *kafan* (shroud), a visual symbol of martyrdom; red spots of blood signify wounds, green versus red representing good and evil. The distribution of water is a reminder of the thirst experienced by Husayn's family. The chanting of verse signifies a good character, whilst bad characters declaim their lines. All spectators and performers join in a chest beating and wailing to form a unified expression of grief against the oppressors. "The flexibility of representation in *ta'ziya* through costumes, props and language serves to reinforce the connections between the action and the everyday lives of the spectators"[28]

From the description above, it is clear that *ta`ziya* contains three basic elements of the European conventional drama: plot, mimicry and characters who are dramatized on a stage before an audience. Another resemblance between *ta`ziya* and the European play is the element of audience participation with the actors and the story. In the European passion play as in *ta'ziya* during certain

[26] Chelkowski, peter. (Ed.) *Taziya Ritual and Drama in Iran*, New York, 1979, p. 6
[27] Al-Sheddi, op. cit., p. 106
[28] Ibid. p. 106

episodes, the audience participates in the performance. *Ta`ziya* has another aspect of ritual drama: the chorus. Sometimes the audience acts as a chorus in *ta`ziya,* and members of the audience also beat on their chests as an act of emotional catharsis.

Finally, *ta`ziya* resembles the European Passion play in that the antagonists viciously kill the protagonists. With the episode of the final slaughter of Husayn the *ta`ziya* ends, but the European Passion play contains one more act in which the Resurrection of Christ is enacted.

2.1.2 *Khayal al-Zill* (Shadow Play):

In the shadow theatre, the stage is separated from the audience by a frame holding a sheet of any white material but preferably fine Egyptian cotton. It is mounted like painter's canvas, stretched on a frame. The operator stands behind the screen, holding the puppets against it, using an olive oil lamp as a light source from behind. The puppets are put between the light and the curtain on which their shadows are to be thrown. The screen diffuses the light, and the light shines through the multi coloured transparent material, making the figures look like stained glass. The puppeteer holds the puppet close against the screen with rods held horizontally and stretched at right angles to the puppet.

This form of acting has been found to have existed in Islamic and Arabic lands since the middle ages. The word *khayal al-zill* means ‘fantasy of the shadow’ is the most common name for the shadow theatre. It is clear that the fate of *khayal al-zill* (the shadow theatre) was no less unfortunate than that of any other old Arab folk tradition. All were despised and treated with indifference by educated people. Although *khayal al-zill* first emerged amongst rich and aristocratic people before it became a public entertainment, it did not attract the attention of Arab and Islamic scholars to study it, nor to write more

than a few casual remarks about it. In addition, it seems that the practitioners of the art were not well acquainted with the literary standards of their time. In general, they could not raise the literary value of their texts in form, purport or subject. Their language was considered colloquial, and as a result the circulation of their works was limited to their colleagues and audiences. Nor were the actors literally bound to the text; they used to memorize it through their performances. Therefore the text passed through different stages of alteration, modification and reorganization, to such an extent that it might be completely changed. For these reasons Arabic and foreign historical and literary references lack any precise information, such as how and when *khayal al-zill* first emerged in Arab lands.[29]

On the other hand, some German Orientalists, such as Kahle and Jacob, no longer regard the episode mentioned by Rashid al-Din as the starting point in the history of the Arabic shadow play, since sufficient evidence has become available that the Fatimid Caliphs encouraged shadow theatre performers who used to entertain them in their palaces.[30]

Old References to *Khayal al-Zill* :

The efforts of certain historical and literary scholars and writers of recent centuries have been limited to a few casual remarks about the Arab shadow theatre, remarks which are mentioned within the context of historic events or incidents.

The earliest is found in *Al-Diyarat*, written by Al-Shabishti and Dr. Ibrahim Hamada believes that the advance of *khayal al-zill* into Arab and Islamic lands began from the period of the late tenth century and through to the onset of the twelfth century. His belief depends on the fact that *khayal al-zill* was very popular during the late Fatimid period. On item of evidence is that adduced by the German Orientalist, Paul Kahle, who proves that Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (A.

[29] Hamadah, *Khayal al-Zill*. Cairo: Maktabat Misr, 1963, p. 38
[30] Ibid. pp. 42-43

H. 564-589), and his minister, al-Qadi al-Fadil, watched together a performance of *khayal al-zill*.[31] This incident was previously mentioned by Ibn Hijja in his *Thamarat al-Awraq*, and by al-Ghazuli in his *Matali' al-Budur*. They give more detail about this incident, such as that al-Qadi al-Fadil agreed to watch *khayal al-zill* reluctantly, just to satisfy Salah al-Din, and that when the performance was over, Salah al-Din asked him about what he had seen, and he replied that he had seen great morals and nations pass and others come, and when the cloth folded, it was exactly like folding the paper of a book.

Dr. Hamada has extracted two points from Al-Fadil's comments. First the fondness of Salah al-Din for *khayal al-zill* may indicate that this art had achieved a certain stage of development, and had become well formed and composed, thus encouraging an educated person such as al-Fadil to make such comments. This could not have been achieved unless *khayal al-zill* had undergone a period of practice and experiment.

Secondly, it is obvious from al-Fadil's comment that the art was not limited to farcical and satirical performances alone, but must also have used religious subjects and historical admonitory stories. These two points prove that the Arabic *khayal al-zill* had passed through certain stages until it had achieved a standard which satisfied al-Fadil and Salah al-Din. However, because it was treated with indifference by literary historians, its heritage has fallen into oblivion apart from such casual references.[32]

There is also another record which says that Muzaffar al-Din (ruler in Iraq, A. H. 549-630) used to celebrate the Prophet's birthday every year, and that among other entertainments at this celebration was *khayal al-zill*. There are also a few other references to *khaydl al-zill* at different stages in Arab history, such as the remark of Zayn al-Din al-Jaziri in his *Durar al-Fard'id al-Munazzama*,

[31] Hamadah, op.cit. p. 40
[32] Ibid. p. 41

which says that when Sultan Sha`ban went on the Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) during the year 778 A. H, he took with him some mukhayyilin (shadow players).[33]

Al-Qadi al-Fadil's comment on the performance of *khayal al-zill*, along with the above poetry, may allow us to assume that there were, in addition to the farcical shadow plays, shadow performances at least during the late Fatimid period, which were very different from the farcical types which pushed some Muslim leaders, such as al-Zahir Baybars and al-Sultan Jaqmaq strictly to oppose this artistic activity because of its abundant sexual scenes and expressions, such as in Ibn Daniyal's text.

However, some scholars have decided, perhaps because of the above remarks, that "Historical shadow plays were performed, too, but more rarely".[34] There is, however, another possible reason for this situation, which we can find in this quotation:

> The farces more frequently were humorous rather than satirical, but had important socio-economic and political undertones. In what amounted to a `comedy of character', many shadow plays ridiculed the upper classes and denounced the exploitation of the poor, while in North Africa the shadow play sometimes criticized French rule.[35]

The Turkish *karaquz* which is equivalent to the Arabic *khayal al-zill*, may be confused with another type which had also been referred to by the same word, *karaquz*. This second type was also found in Egypt. In Egypt *karaquz* become *araguz*; according to Egyptian local pronunciation, it is equivalent to the hand puppet rather than to the shadow theatre, for while the latter is a silhouette of characters which appear on a screen lit from behind, the former comprises three-dimensional puppets which appear from the upper opening in a curtain behind

[33] Hamadah, op. cit., p. 55
[34] Landau, op. cit., p. 1136
[35] Ibid.

which the puppeteer conceals himself to manipulate his puppets by hand. Dr. Hamada has noticed that some scholars, among them the English Orientalist, E W. Lane, in his *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptian*, have confused *qaraquz* with *araguz*, to such an extent that this confusion led them to believe that the Arabic *khayal al-zill* was brought to Egypt by the Ottomans.[36]

2.1.3 *Hikaya* (story telling)

Storytelling that had its roots in a preaching tradition could be distinguished through imitation. Both preaching and storytelling were used for the same religious purpose, and at times therefore it became difficult to distinguish between the two. Ibn al-Jawzi made a clear distinction between storytelling and preaching. Important for our purpose is Ibn al-Jawzi's definition of storytelling:

> The storyteller conveys the stories of the past through imitation (hikaya) and commentary (sharh); this is called storytelling. It consists mostly of narrating (yarw) stories (akhbar) about the people of the past[37]

The pre-Islamic Arabs found great pleasure in gathering at night or during their free time to listen to tales, most of which were based on mythology and pre-Islamic beliefs. Stars, animals and human attributes, such as generosity and courage, which were highly valued by the Arabs, were often the subject of the stories. With the advent of Islam, religious storytelling developed into a theatrical, ritualistic, ceremonial event. Narrative and religious traditions had been among the early elements by which the form and content of the art were influenced; imitation now became an essential element of the storytelling performance.

In medieval Islamic culture the art of storytelling developed into a profession, as the political and religious powers realized to what extent

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[36] Hamadah, op.cit., pp. 62-63

[37] Mandur, Ibn. *Lisan al-Arab*. Vol. 4, p. 191

professional storytellers were able to influence their audiences with their performances, and bring about unity among them.

Islam brought about great changes in the way of life of the Arabs. What until then had been a simple existence, gradually became highly civilized, and these changes affected the themes of Arab literary prose, including those of stories and tales. Arabic literature was greatly enriched by the new forms and themes found in the stories told after the appearance of the new religion.[38]

Religious *hikaya* and politics: Islam as a way of life does not separate politics from religion; therefore religious storytellers were also able to influence the political arena. They were used by politicians to rally support, incite the masses against enemies and to influence the opinions of the public regarding political events. This was done under the pretext of religious implications. However, unlike religious storytelling, political storytelling provoked a generally negative attitude toward storytellers. At times this led to prohibition, censure, or even in some cases execution.

It was customary when there were political differences in the Muslim community, for storytellers to rally public support for one side or another. Religious storytelling was used by both parties during the civil wars between `Ali, the fourth caliph, and Mu`awiya, governor of Syria, in 657. Each party used examples from the Qur'an, Hadith and everyday life to justify its position and refute the other.[39]

After `Ali settled the civil war with Mu'awiya, the Kharijites (Khawarij) ‘dissenters’ revolted against him. This radical, militant movement spread their ideas with the use of storytellers, taking advantage of people’s suspicions toward non-Arab Muslims in areas to the east of Iraq. The people were greatly influenced by the storytellers, and Ibn al-Jawzi claimed that the use of

[38] Ibrahim, Abd al-Hamid. *Qisas al-Ushshaq al-Nathriyya fi al-asr al-Amawi*, Cairo, 1987, pp. 28-34
[39] Ibid. p. 72

storytellers in this way brought about a negative attitude in general towards them. According to Ibn al-Jawzi,

> When the Kharijites took over, they popularized storytelling and engaged in it frequently. The imitating of these Kharijite storytellers came to be frowned upon.[40]

As a result of the Kharijites vulgarizing storytelling, it eventually became associated on the socio-political level with a tendency toward disorder, violence, and separation.

One early storyteller, Ibrahim al-Taymi (d.711), known for his strong emotional involvement during performance, even to the point of weeping.[41] Al-Taimi's view that believers had good reason to revolt against unjust rulers led to his death in prison.

In the same way that religious storytellers had been able to simplify complicated religious issues for their audiences, by incorporating politics into their policies they enabled the masses to understand complex political matters. In this way they could serve as either an aid or a threat to the government of the day. The official storyteller who was appointed by the government and represented its views to the masses was easily controlled. However, in order to control the popular (free) storytellers the government had to ban them from performing in the streets or mosques during periods of political crisis or unrest. Such action was taken in 892 by the Caliph al-Mu`tadid who banned storytelling performances on streets and in mosques and instituted punishment for anyone who gathered to listen to a storyteller.[42]

Storytelling as profession: Officially-appointed storytellers in the early days of the Umayyad caliphate (AD 661-750), received salaries and were held in

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[40] Ibn al-Zawzi, *Kitab al-Qusas wal Mujakkirin*, ed. By Dr. Muhammad al-Sabbagh, Beirut, 1988, p. 346

[41] Ibid. p. 248

[42] Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Tabari*, Cairo, 1960, Vol. 10, p. 54

great esteem. This position was first given an important status by the first Umayyad caliph (AD 661-680) Mu`awiya, who appointed a provincial judge as storyteller. Of course, this well respected and powerful storyteller effectively reflected the government's policies. The importance of the storyteller in society is reflected in the fact that their salaries equaled those of judges. Judges who were also appointed as storytellers received double salaries, as in the case of a judge in Egypt whose salary totaled two hundred dinars (gold coin) per year for each office.[43]

Muslim bin Jandab al-Hazli (d. 728) was a well-known storyteller and judge who used the Prophet's mosque for his performance. He was renowned for his eloquence, distinctness of speech, and his beautiful voice. According to al-Jahiz, his student the Caliph `Umar Ibn `Abd al-`AzIz (A. D. 717-720), said of Ibn Jandab's public recitation of the Qur'an: "Whoever likes to hear the Qur'an freshly, as it was transmitted, should hear the recitation of Muslim bin Jandab."[44]

The judge-storyteller's salary would probably have been made from the caliph's funds. However, during the time of the Caliph al-Ma'mun (A. D. 813-833), the government allowed the people to give alms to subsidise the storytellers' incomes. Normally Islam restricts the use of alms to such purposes as conducting holy wars or supporting orphans.[45]

A poem written in the tenth century by Abu Dulaf, entitled *Qasida Sasdniyya*, describes the vagabonds and beggars who made up the underworld of that time. Among these he lists an unscrupulous storyteller. One example was that of the two religious storytellers who gave performances in markets, during which each one would take an opposing viewpoint. One would represent Abu

[43] Al-Sheddi, op.cit. p. 174
[44] Ibid. p. 174
[45] Ibid. p. 174

Bakr, the first caliph and give the Sunni's viewpoint while the other would represent `Ali, the fourth caliph, and give the Shi'a's viewpoint. Each maintained his point of view to the end of the performance, after which they would each collect money from the supporters of their own side and then divide their takings between themselves.[46]

Conclusion is that the suggestion of some Arab and Western scholars that medieval Islam had no drama tradition may no longer be accepted. The storytellers' central act is a performance before an audience in a given space and a given time, using actors, staging, lighting, dialogue, makeup, and imitation. The art of medieval *hikaya* and the presence of other theatrical forms such as *khayal al-zill, ta'zia, kurraj* etc., persuade finally of the existence in medieval Islam of an early rich dramatic tradition.

2.2 Development of Drama in Arabic

2.2.1 Historical Background

The History of Arabic Literature gives us an account of its various stages of decay and fall. It made considerable progress during the Umayyad period, and it was during the Abbasside period, which is called its golden age, that it reached its zenith. During these very periods it was influenced by Persian Literature and culture as well as the translations of Greek philosophy and Sanskrit works. Politically, with the down fall of Baghdad in 1258 and the defeat of the Tatars in 1260 by the hands of Mamluks who were Turks they patronized Arabic by learning it and encouraging its writers. They were also defeated by the Ottoman

[46] Al-Sheddi, op.cit. pp. 196-197

in 1516 and the earlier rulers who manifested a keen interest in promoting Arabic were tolerant to a great extent.[47]

Taking the full advantage of the rule of tolerance proclaimed by Ibrahim Pasha in 1833, the foreign missionaries were welcomed to Syria and established schools, colleges and published book and news papers in Lebanon also later on. The missionaries brought with them modern sciences such as medicine, engineering, technology and European Literature which had some fresh matters like short story, novel and drama. The European literature and sciences brought about a drastic change in Arabic in which the style of Al-Hariri in prose and that of Al-Mutanabbi in poetry were popular. Both the styles were same in character: highly technical, artificial, rhymed and decorated by words with less meaning. Among the European and Arabian, some were prominent figure to cultivate the Arabic language and literature in various fields and Arabic has reached the unique position among the first ranked literature in the whole world, the unique personalities among them are Nasif al-Yaziji (1800-1871), Butrus al-Bustani, (1819-1883), Ahmad Faris, Salim al-Bustani, Sulaiman al-Bustani and Ibrahim al-Yaziji (1847-1906).

It is an established fact that modern Arabic drama was borrowed from the west independently by Marun al-Naqqash in the Lebanon in 1847 and by Yaqub Sanu in Egypt in 1870. Both men had been inspired by the example of Italian opera and influenced by European drama, particularly French comedy. Yet the Arab world did have certain indigenous types of dramatic representation at the time, some even going back to medieval Islam as mentioned earlier. These traditional types determined to some extent the manner in which the important form was conceived and subsequently developed, and they continued to exist side by side with it for some time. They were, to begin with, dramatic recitations

[47] Ahmad, Maqsood. *The Beginnings and development of Drama in Arabic*, New Delhi, 2006, pp. 51-52

by rhapsodies, accompanied by simple story instruments of popular medieval romances composed in a mixture of verse and prose, half narrative and half dramatic.[48]

Gradually, one after another dramatic elements came to the Arab world and found a place in its culture by the way of socio-political, traditional and religious performances; passion play, shadow play, mimicry etc are famous among them. These different types of traditional dramatic entertainment had in common certain elements that seemed to have left their mark on the development of modern Arabic drama.

2.2.2 Arabic Drama in Lebanon and Syria

The modern drama, till the early nineteenth century, had been unknown to the Arab world. At first, the translations of European journey's and stories into Arabic inspired the Lebanese who had been educated at foreign school to write dramas.[49] Prior to the discovery of an Algerian play, the honour of composing the first modern Arabic drama had traditionally been held to belong to the Lebanese dramatist Marun al-Naqqash (1817-55). Born in Sidon, Marun al-Naqqash moved with his family to Beirut in 1825 and acquired an education that combined commercial skills with an interest in various facts of the arts. In addition to Arabic and Ottoman Turkish, he learned French and Italian also, and for a time served as chief clerk in the Beirut customs house. He later became a businessman, travelling not only in Syria, Lebanon and Egypt but also to Italy, where in 1846 he made the acquaintance of Italian theatre and opera. On his return to Lebanon, he wrote and produced three plays in Arabic which have some claim to be regarded as the first true examples of modern Arabic drama, and which certainly set the tone for much of the subsequent early development

[48] Badawi, M.M, *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*. Cambridge, p. 1
[49] Ahmad, Maqsood. op. cit., p. 68

of modern Arabic theatre, both in their emphasis on musical elements in the drama, and in their combination of local and imported material and techniques. Unfortunately, Marun al-Naqqash's dramatic works came to a premature end when he fell ill on yet another business trip and died in Tarrus in 1855, but his plays were subsequently collected and published by his brother Niqula al-Naqqash under the little *Arzat Lubnan* in 1869. [50]

Marun al-Naqqash's first play *Al-Bakhil* was first performed in Marun's own house towards the end 1847 before an audience that included a number of foreign consuls and other dignitaries. The play itself is remarkable not only for being composed entirely in verse, and far being entirely set to music, but also for the mixture of registers of Arabic that the another saw fit to employ- a blend of classical Arabic and Lebanese colloquial, but also incorporating some Egyptian dialect, as well as an attempt to mimic Turkish speakers with an imperfect knowledge of the language.[51]

By contrast, Marun al-Naqqash's second play *Abu al-Hasan al-Mughaffal* is, based on a story from the *Alf -Layla wa-Layla* that tells of the man who became caliph for a day. Written in a mixture of rhymed prose and classical Arabic verse, and performed before the Ottoman Governor in 1850, the play, is considerably more than a simple adaptation of the story from the *Alf-Layla* for the stage; for Al-Naqqash not only uses it to illustrate the theme of fantasy and reality, but also injects a theme of romance and even social criticism. [52]

His third play *Al-Salit al-Hasud* probably the most symmetrically structured of Al-Naqqash's plays set in nineteenth century Beirut was staged in 1853 in the author's own theatre beside his house. The plot, which revolves around a jealous suitor, with a series of love and marriage intrigues, is again written in a mixture

[50] Starkey, Paul, *Modern Arabic literature*, Edinburgh, 2006, pp. 164-165
[51] Ibid. p. 165
[52] Ibid. p. 165

of verse and rhyming prose, and includes the use of a chorus that changes its role through the play.[53]

Next to Marun, his brother Niqula al-Naqqash (1825-1894) became recognized in the field of Arabic drama with a number of free plays. It was on 13th June, 1858 that a troupe led by him performed his play, *al-Shaykh al- Jahil* in Beirut at the house of his brother Khalil, before an audience of consuls, Europeans and local dignitaries. Two years later (1860), he produced *Al-Hasud al-Salit* on his brother's (Marun) old stage, on the anniversary of his brother's birth day. The play was again staged in the house of Marun to raise money for the poor and the performance was attended by Nasr Allah Franco pasha, Mutasarrif (governor) of Lebanon. Again a four act play by him *Al-Majnun bi'l Ghasb* (the madman by Force) was performed in Beirut on February18, 1868 in aid of the city's poor and orphans. The year 1869 witnessed the publication by Niqula of Marun's three plays in a collection *Arzat Lubnan* (The cedar of Lebanon), with his own introduction on the theatre and acting.[54]

He did not confine himself only to his own efforts, but he also encouraged his friends and acquaintances to try their hands at writing plays. As a result, a number of his friends later became good playwrights. Worthily of special mention among them are Istifan al-Shamali, Antun Qiqanu, Shaqir Shuqayr, Antun Shuhaybar and Yusuf al-Asir. Besides, he gave his support to the performance of a social drama by Tannus al-Hurr, which was a three act play, namely *Al-Shabb al-Jahil al- Sikkir* (The ignorant Young drunkard).[55]

Besides Marun and Niqula, Sadallah al-Bustani, a pupil as well as admirer of Marun, played a key role in the field of drama by forming a new troupe of young amateurs which continued to prudence plays in Beirut. No less famous in

[53] Starkey, Paul. op.cit., pp. 165-166
[54] Ahmad, Maqsood. op.cit., p. 70-71
[55] Ibid. p. 72

this field was Salim al-Naqqash (1850-1884), Marun's nephew, he performed his uncle's play *Al-Bakhil* as well as Horace by Corneille in Beirut. Salim brought to Egypt his uncle's above mentioned three plays and five works which had been adapted or loosely translated by him.[56]

Apart from them (Marun, Niqula, Sad Allah, and Salim), there arose another playwright, Khalil al-Yaziji, who is credited with being the first to write a play in Arabic verse. His play *Virtue and faithfulness* was staged in Beirut in 1878. The other well-known playwright was Adib Ishaq who translated Racine's *Adromaque*, which was performed in Beirut three times. Ishaq Joined Salim in Alexandria where they co-operated in theatrical activities for some time.[57]In this context, the contribution of Najib Hubayqah also deserves special mention, who published the *Catholic-bi-monthly al-Mashriq,* a long and detailed study of acting in 1899. Besides, he Arabized several plays such as *Ibn al-Khain, al-Faris al-Aswad, Shahid al-Wafa* etc. Arabic drama, thereafter, made a great progress with a number of writers devoting their time to the composition of plays. Among the most prolific writers was Iskandar Farah (1855-1919) who wrote four plays, of which two were for the purpose of charity.[58]

In 1900 Niqula Fayyad and Najib Salim Tirad translated a play entitled *Al-Khaida wa'l-Hubb* and Al-Khuri penned a play *Adam and Eve* in Beirut in 1903. Continuously Butrus al-Bustani also published a drama *Dawud al-Malik* in 1906. This was a religious play taken from the story of Samuel of the Torah.[59]

In Syria, the history of full-fledged Arabic drama actually started with Abu Khalil al-Qabbani rising to prominence in 1865. But to assume that drama was totally absent therein will be wrong because in some missionary schools the

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[56] Badawi, M.M. *Early Arabic Drama*, Cambridge, p. 53
[57] Ibid. P. 56
[58] Ahmad, Maqsood. op.cit., P. 75
[59] Ibid. p. 76

students would perform Arabic plays at the end of the educational years. These plays were for religious and cultural purposes. However, Al-Qabbani was the first to play a particular attention to Arabic drama in Syria (That is why he is regarded as the father of Syrian theatre). In 1865 he started his theatrical activity which continued till 1884 when he left for Egypt. Having ability to arrange the events in a narrative form with simple and easily understandable dialogues, he did a lot to popularize drama among the Syrians. His first play *Nakir al-Jamil* (The ungrateful man) is the best example of his aforesaid characteristics and encouraged by the Governor of Syria (1871-72) produced *Wadah*, which are performed successfully before the public.[60]

In 1884 Al-Qabbani moved to Alexandria where he began to produce his plays. He performed thirty one plays, of these fifteen were his own work, while the rest were either written by other Arab authors ranging from Marun al-Naqqash to Najib al-Haddad or freely translated from plays by European playrights notably Corneille, Racine, Victor Hugo and Alexandra Dumas.

Next to al-Qabbani was Iskander Farah, who showed a keen interest in Arabic drama. Encouraged by Midhat Pasha, the Governor of Syria, he produced his first play and thereafter, he left for Egypt where he formed own troupe, which produced a large number of plays.[61]

2.2.3 Arabic Drama in Egypt

It is understandable that the early popular forms of entertainment were in no way affected by the performance of European opera and drama in Cairo and Alexandria, either in Italian or French, before an audience of Europeans (or, later, westernized local aristocratic elite). Such performances began during the

[60] Ahmad, Maqsood. op.cit. p. 88
[61] Ibid. p. 90

brief French occupation of Egypt (1798-1801).[62] Arabic drama, in its modern form, first came to Egypt with the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798 when, in addition to men of letters, Journalists, engineers and persons in fine arts, more particularly in music, accompanied him. They staged some French plays in Egypt and a theatre called *Masrah al-Jamhuriyah wa'l Funun* was erected.

After the return of Napoleon Bonaparte to France in 1799, General Kleber (1753-1800) who was asked by the former to pay due heed to the development of drama and the theatre, evinced a keen interest in it and several theatres were established.[63] But with the growth of the European community under the modernizing rule of Muhammad Ali and his successors, particularly Khedive Ismail; it was natural that interest should develop in local amateur productions promoting visits of foreign troupes. Theatres began to be opened for that purpose, culminating in the Cairo opera House (1869). It was not long before Arabic plays were presented in these theatres as well as in the private theatre which Khedive Ismail had built in his palace, Qasr al-Nil. The earliest of these plays were the work of the father of the Egyptian drama, the Jewish born Egyptian Yaqub Sannu' who significantly enough, was dubbed *The Egyptian Moliere* by Khedive Ismail, who was for a while his patron.[64]

Sannu was passionately committed to the stage and deeply convinced of the civilizing role of drama in renaissance of modern Egypt; he formed his troupe of players in 1870, from among his old pupils. For a while he was encouraged by the Khedive, but in 1872, he was ordered to close his theatre and his dramatic career came to an abrupt end.[65]

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[62] Badawi, M.M. *Arabic Drama in Egypt*, P. 4
[63] Ahmed, Maqsood. op.cit., p. 97
[64] Badawi, M.M, *Arabic Drama in Egypt*, p. 4
[65] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Literature*, pp. 334-335

During the seventies of the nineteenth century, a sizable number of prominent Syrians connected with the stage immigrated to Egypt. The most prominent among them were two playwrights, Salim al-Naqash and Adib Ishaq. The troupe of Salim al-Naqqash consisting of twelve actors and four actresses first presented *Abu al-Hasan al-Mughaffal* and then *Al-Hasud al-Sali*, written by his uncle Marun al-Naqqash. Salim al-Naqqash adapted Ghislanzoni's *libbertts for 'Aida* and then wrote a five act drama in literary Arabic prose and verse. Adib Ishaq (1856-1885) who had adapted Racini's *Andromaque* into Arabic which had been produced in Beirut, rewrote for the troupe of Salim his adaptation of *Andromaque* and added new verses to it; then translated a historical play named *Charlemagni* as well as a higher one by Comte d' Ache, La Belle parisienne, which he named *Ghar'b al-Ittifaq*.[66]

After Salim and Adib Ishaq, their task was carried on by an able Syrian actor, Yusuf al-Khayyat who presented *Sun al-Jamil* in 1877 and *al-Akhawan al-Mutahariban'*in 1878. At the beginning of the year 1879, Al-Khayyat left Alexandria for Cairo where he first produced *Abu-al-Hasan* and then *Al-Zalum*. Next to him, Sulayman Qurdahi, a member of Usuf's troupe introduced women on the stage in Egypt for the first time. He performed *Telemaque* and *Fursan al-Arab*, *Zifaf Antarah* etc. He toured the provinces both in lower and upper Egypt like Assiyat, Mansura and Tanta; even he took troupe to North Africa: Tunisia, Algeria, and in Tunisia he founded the Arabic Theater. One of the influential among these was Ahmed Abu Khalil al-Qabbani (1833-1902), came in 1884 to Alexandra and staged at the Zizinya theatre several dramas including *Iffat-al-Muhibbin*, *Antar* and *Nakir al-Zamil* which are penned by him. Besides, he

[66] Ahmad, Maqsood. op.cit. pp. 100-101

produced some new dramas such as *Lubab al-Ghuram* and *Hamzah al-Muhtall* also writing by him. He was the first to introduce operetta to Arabic drama.[67]

The combination of the dominance of love themes, the Romance like quality of events, the passion for singing and satire to point out overtly the moral significance of the action is to be found in the work of the more popular Syrian dramatist Ahmad Abu Khalil al-Qabbani (1833-1902), generally regarded as the father of Syrian drama. In 1884 he moved his troupe to Egypt, where he had an active career until 1900 when he returned to Damascus. Together with his own work, he performed plays by other Arab writers, ranging from Marun al-Naqqash and Salim al-Naqqash to Najib al-Hadded, as well as free Translations of works by Corneille, Racine, victor Hugo and Alexandra Dumas. His own plays, which number fifteen, are either adaptations or free translations of European works, or original efforts based upon Arab and Islamic history and Folktales, notably the Arabian Nights. Among the most popular of the first category were *Nakir al-Jamil* (The ungrateful man). *Afifah* (The chaste woman) is a variation on the theme of Genevieve where he wronged chaste heroine is improbably saved a rewarded. In *Lubab al-gharam aw al-Malik Mitridat*; al-Qabbani's version of Racine's *Mitbridate*, the love interest is predictably emphasized and the tragedy is turned into a melodrama of love, treachery and war.[68]

2.2.4 Further Development in Egypt

The Lebanese and Syrian dramatists, actors and their successors and Egyptian imitators, together with their various splinter groups created a healthy sort of competition which led to the prosperity of the theatre in Egypt, thus making possible the rise of talented actors and singers such as Al-Shykh,

[67] Ahmad, Maqsood. op.cit., p. 102-103
[68] Badawi, *Modern Arabic Literature*, P. 341

Salamah Hijazi, Jurj Abyad and later Najib al-Rihani, who contributed greatly to the popularity of the Arabic theatre.[69] From the late 1920s, the Egyptian government began to take an active interest in theatre, in an attempt to protect it from the threat posed by the popular commercial theatre which provided a cheap diet of singing, dancing, slap-stick comedy and Arabized French vaudevilles. Scholarships were provided to study drama and acting in Europe and in 1930 a school of dramatic arts was setup under the direction of Zaki Tulaymat. By the thirties, drama and acting had acquired some respectability for various reasons, which include the increasing number of well-educated or highly born individuals who became involved in the theatre and the growth of theatre criticism, published first in national news papers or weeklies and then in many magazines devoted almost exclusively to the theatre which began to flood the market in the twenties.[70]

Another relevant factor is the interest taken in drama, ancient and modern, by the highly esteemed author and critic Taha Hussaiyn, who had written and translated extracts from classical Greek drama. A further boost to the standing of the genre was provided by the neo-classical poet Ahmad Shawqi, who had dabbled with the drama as a youngman, composing a play entilled *Ali bey al-Kabir* (1932). Shawqi returned to the theatre in 1928 composing during last few Years of his life, a comedy play *Al-Sitt Huda*, a prose play *Amirat al-Andalus* and a total of five poetic dramas, all of which are based on historical or mythical figures. Although Shawqi's verse dramas made little direct or immediate contribution to the development of the modern Egyptian theatre, his example was nonethless followed by a number of other authors, of whom Aziz Abaza

[69] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt,* p. 342
[70] Ibid. p. 5

(1898-1969), Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi(1920-87) and Salah Abd-al-Sabur (1931-81) are the most obvious examples.[71]

There is a good reason for beginning a study of Modern Arabic drama in Egypt with Tawfiq al- Hakim. When al-Hakim started publishing his work in the early thirties, drama was slowly becoming a respectable form of literature. The Egyptian theatre world was shrinking rapidly, and the theatrical activities that managed to survive were largely confined to popular commercial stage. The rift between drama as literature and drama as a stage performance was always becoming over wider. Al-Hakim's extraordinarily long and active career as a dramatist, during which he produced more than eight plays, spans over half a century, from the 1920 to the 1970s, a period which can justly be described as that of the full-fledged modern Egyptian drama. The main hurdle which had faced dramatists, and indeed modernist writers in general, namely how to produce specifically Egyptian drama and Egyptian literature, had gradually been overcome, to a large extent by the successful efforts first of Uthman Jalal in his super adaptation of Moliere's *Tartuffe* (al-Shaykh Matluf) and then by the attempts, which met with varying degree of success, of Farah Antun (1876-1922), Ibrahim Ramzi(1884-1949), Muhmmad Taymur (1892-1921), and Ali Ahmad Bakathir (1910-1969). [72]

This period saw a number of theatre companies, many of which were offshoot from the Syrian troupes that arrived in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, those of Iskandar Farah, who counted among his protégés Najib al-Rihani, Aziz Id, and the famous singer Shaykh Salamah al-Hijazi(1852-1917), and of Jurj Abyad (1880-1959). Both as director and actor, Abyad set himself to present the classic aspect of Arabic drama, establishing through his acting contributions to his own productions a yardstick for the more histrionic

[71] Starkey, Paul. op. cit., p. 175
[72] Badawi, M.M. *Arabic drama in Egypt*, P. 6

qualities of the literary level of language as a medium of drama. By contrast, a host of actors and troupes, Yusuf wa-habi, Ali al-Kassar and Aziz Id, for example, concentrated on more popular fare. Another of these troupes was that of the two brothers, Abdallah and Zaki Ukashah who built a theatre in 1920 and used it to offer performances that would Endeavour to strike some kind of balance between the various extremes that the combination of language and cultural attitudes had engendered.[73]

As the brief account above makes clear, Egyptian audience in the latter half of the nineteenth century found themselves presented with an extremely varied fare within the larger context of the theatre. On the stage there were plays based on traditional tales of romances which were performed in the literary language by a constantly expanding collection of troupes. Such performances, involving a collection of managers and actors which now combined the skills of Syria and Lebanon with those of Egypt, continued to be a fusion of the dramatic and the musical. Elsewhere, there were other performances of a more popular kind in Terms of both themes (with emphasis on domestic farce and socio-political satire) and language. The reaction of audiences to this wealth of opportunity ranged from the obvious appreciation of the educated elite to sheer bemusement among large segments of the populace. In spite of the best intentions of al-Qabbani and others who concerned themselves with the promotion of the dignified nature of this newly imported literary genre, audiences reaction suggested quite the opposite. Indeed for certain members of the audience the occasion clearly had all the attractions of the burlesque.[74]

2.2.5 Egyptian Drama after the 1952 Revolution:

[73] Allen, Roger. *The Arabic literary heritage*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 331
[74] Ibid. p. 329

Following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, a complete generation of younger playwrights came to the fore who were able to build and expand upon the basis that had been laid by Al-Hakim himself and by other prominent pre-revolution dramatists such as Mahmud Taymur (1894-1973) and Ali Ahmad Bakathir (1910-69), the latter of them had been much inspired by the verse dramas of Ahmad Shawqi. [75]

Although Al-Hakim's drama of the post 1952 period continued to provide a useful commentary on contemporary Egyptian life, his near-monopoly of the Egyptian theatrical scene was by this time beginning to give way to a new generation of Egyptian playwrights whose impassioned tone contrasted with his more answered tones and who quickly added a distinctively new voice to the development of Egyptian drama. This new mood was heralded by Numan Ashur's (1918-87), *Al-Nas Illi Taht* (1956), which combines a strong element of popular comedy with an exploration of the class struggle in contemporary Egypt through a group of characters who inhabit a basement. The play was followed the following year by *Al-Nas Illi Fawq* (1957), which represent a powerful condemnation of the old Egyptian aristocracy, by the less well known *Sima-Awanta* (1958), in which he viciously satirized the Egyptian cinema industry and by *Ailat al-Dughri* (1962), wherein the author uses the breakup of a middle class Egyptian family to symbolize disintegration of society in post revolutionary Egypt. The play provides another vivid illustration of how quickly the optimism engendered by the change of regime had given place to disillusionment.

Ashur's plays, which attracted audiences of considerable size, are among the first production of what has sometimes been called the *new wave* of Egyptian dramatists; Alfred Faraj, Najib Surur, Sa'd al-din Wahba, Mahmmad Diyab and Ysuf Idris. Although each of these authors retained his own particular literary

[75] Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Literary Heritage*. pp. 340-341

stamp, they shared a number of common characteristics. In the first place, like most poets and the prose writers of their generation, much of their work is characterized by the attitude of *Iltizam* (commitment) that swept the Arab world from the beginning of the 1950s.

Meanwhile, on an artistic level, their work is characterized by an awareness of, and eagerness to experiment with, dramatic techniques being employed in contemporary western theatre, including not only the committed theatre of Brecht and Sartre, but also the so called 'theatre of the absurd' of Beckett, Artand and Loneesco. At the same time, their desire to forge a more Egyptian theatre led many to look back to older indigenous theatrical forms, including the use of the traditional Arab story teller or *hakawati*.[76]

Both Numan Ashur and Alfred Faraj, among others acknowledged their debt to Tawfiq al-Hakim, and many of Faraj's plays in particular continue al-Hakim's technique of utilizing material from the Arabic literary or historical heritage to comment on issues of contemporary relevance. For example, Sulayman al-Hababi (1964) uses the murder of general Cleber by Sulayman in 1800 as a peg on which to hang a discussion about freedom and justice; *Al-Zir Salim* (1967) is a reworking of a medieval Arab romance. He continued the dramatic tradition originally started by Marun al-Naqqash of drawing on the *Thousand and one nights* to construct a work in which the interplay between fantasy and reality plays a major part. [77]

Many writers followed Ashur's early lead with distinguished contributions from such writers as Sa'd al-din Wahbah (1925) Mahmud Diyab (1932-83), and Ali Salim (b. 1936). Both Wahbah and Diyab concentrated initially on the life of the village[78] and also had considerable success with other plays that focused on

[76] Starkey, P. op. cit., p. 187
[77] Ibid. p.188
[78] Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Literary Heritage*, p. 343

different aspects of society. Wahbah's *Sikkat is-Salamah* (Road to safety, 1965) brings a cross section of Egyptian professionals face to face with death as their car is marooned in the desert, while *Bi'r al-Sullam* (The stairwell, 1966) shows the way in which the incapacitation of Shubrawi - an unseen father figure whose illness causes him to loss his traditional moral hold over his wife and children, is exploited by each member of the family.

His first work to appear following this major cataclysm was a group of three one act plays, *Rajul Tayyib fi Thalath Hikayat* (A good man in three stories 1970), in which the effective creation of an atmosphere of callous indifference on the part of various symbols of authority reflects the black despair of the period.[79]

Ali Salim's mode of confronting the unpleasant realities of his intellectual and political surroundings has been through comedy, seen at its most enjoyable in his pointed satire of the all-pervasive triumph of bureaucracy. While Salim's talent clearly lies in the medium of satire, he has also written a number of more serious dramas, of which *Kumidiya Udib aw Anta Illi Atalt al-Wahsh* (The comedy of Oedipus, or you're the one who killed the best, 1970) is the most accomplished. In this play, Salim takes the characters from the Greek myth of Oedipus, but places them in the environment of the ancient Egyptian city of Thebes.[80]

Yusuf Idris was one of a group of writers who began by contributing examples to the kind of drama of social commentary, but who went on to explore the more experimental and absurdist aspects of the genre. He presented the play *Al-Farafir* (1964), as evidence of the application of the theories he had explored in his article. But in spite of Idris's success in using these plays to depict some of the socio-political problems confronting modern man, each of the

[79] Allen, Rogger. *The Arabic Literary Heritage,* p. 343
[80] Ibid. p. 344

works shows structural flaws, particularly an unwillingness to exert some editorial control over length. A greater mastery of dramatic economy is shown by Mikhail Ruman (1927-73), whose images of contemporary man as a victim of the system, most notably in *Al-Wafid* (The New Arrival, 1965), are brilliant and chilling visions of the callous anonymity beloved of mindless bureaucracy.[81]

This period of efflorescence in Egyptian drama coincided with an increase of scholarly and governmental interest in the revival of the heritage of Egyptian folklore. Among those associated with this movement were at least two dramatists, Shawqi Abd al-Hakim and Najib Surur (1932-78). ‘Abd al-Hakim found inspiration in the popular heritage for several plays, including *Hasan wa-Naimah* (Hasan and Naimah, 1960), *Shafiqah wa-Mitwalli* (Shafiqah and Mitwalli 1961), and *Mawlid al-Malik Ma’ruf* (king Maruf’s birthday, 1965). Surur, a graduate of the Moscow theatre school, directed many plays (including those of Numan Ashur), but his own contribution to the genre were steeped in the folkloric tradition of Egypt and crafted in a melodious colloquial poetry.

During the golden age of Egyptian drama that we have been exploring here, at least two writers, ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi(1920-87) and Salah’ Abd al-Sabur (1932-81), succeeded in making contributions that both avoided the linkage with music and were successfully performed on stage. Of the two ‘Abd al-Sabur was certainly the more accomplished, most especially in his remarkable play, *Ma’sat al-Hallaj* (The Tragedy of al-Hallaj,1965), Which retells the true story of the famous mystic, Al-Hallaj, crucified in A.D. 922 for uttering the phrase ‘*Ana’l-Haqq’* (I am the Truth).[82]

Finally, in a brief account it may be mentioned that the new regime , recognizing from the start the importance of cultural propaganda in mobilizing the forces of the nation, created a Ministry for culture and National Guidance

[81] Roger, *The Arabic Literary Heritage*, p. 346
[82] Ibid. p. 347

which set up among other things; the general foundation for theatre Arts and Music in 1960 . The foundation created theatres, in order to promote the cause of experimental drama; encouraged actors by raising their salaries substantially; tried to make available to them texts of good plays, both indigenous and translated; and invited distinguished foreign producers and directors from England, France, Greece and Germany. By 1966, ten theatre troupes had been formed and nine main theatres were active in Cairo; together with the musical and Revue theatres there were the following: the comedy, the modern theatre, world theatre, the pocket theatre, and the national theatre as well as the puppet theatre. Each of them put on several productions during the same season: apart from the foreign authors, ancient and modern, such as Aeschylus and Aristophanes, Brecht and Durrenmatt, among the dramatists whose works were performed during, for example, the 1966-67 seasons were Alfred Faraj, Numan ʻAshur, Sa`d al-Din Wahba, Mikhail Ruman, and the poets Abd-al-Sabur and Najib Surur. Television, which produced its own drama, also helped by broadcasting their plays; in one year alone it showed, together with 200 short and full-length T.V. plays, no fewer than 50 plays televised from the theatres.[83]

2.2.6 Arabic Drama in Different parts of the Arab World

As with other genres, theatrical and dramatic development in countries outside Egypt during the twentieth century has been somewhat erratic. Tours by Egyptian troupes to other Arab countries provided an initial stimulus to production in several Arab countries from the first quarter of the century onwards, and the renewed blossoming of drama in Egypt following the 1952 revolution also had a powerful impact elsewhere in the Middle East, despite these, some general features of theatrical development during this period may be

[83] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, p. 141

noted, the first is that – as the western genre perhaps got further removed from the Arab tradition, Arab theatrical development has been very obviously marked by a series of attempts to devise a 'genuine Arab theatre'. This has sometimes involved the use of historical and folkloric elements, such as *hakawati* and *maqama*. It has not infrequently involved the use of music as part of the dramatic performance- a feature of much modern Arab drama since its origins in 19th century. Most notably, it has very often involved the use of colloquial rather than classical. With some exception also, its emphasis has been on the potential of 'theatre as theatre' rather than 'theatre as literature'.

Another notable feature of the development of Arab theatre during the twentieth century has of course been its progressive involvement with other forms of the modern media, including cinema, radio and television.[84]

Iraq: In Iraq in the twentieth century, for obvious political reasons, the progress of the theatre in Iraq has been even less straight forward. Tours by the Egyptians Yusuf Wahbi, Jurj Abyad and Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi in the early part of the century attracted some interest, and some local and even national institutions were established. The development of the theatre in Iraq in the first half of the century appears to have been a halting one. In later years, government support and the opportunities provided by radio and television ensured the survival of some sort of theatrical activity. Fuad al-Takarli and Abd al-Rahman Majid al-Rubay'i have demonstrated some interest in drama, either on stage or on radio, but only Yusuf-al-Ani (b.1927) appears to have achieved a sustained dramatic output comparable with his contemporaries in other parts of the Arab world.[85]

Palestine: Perhaps unsurprisingly, in view of the political upheavals of the area, the history of the drama in Palestine has been more hesitant than that of

[84] Starkey,P. op. cit., pp. 189-190
[85] Ibid, p. 192

many other countries. The novelist and political activist Ghassan Kanafani wrote a play *Al-Bab* in 1964 based on the Quranic story and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has tended to dominate productions.

The prominent poets Samih al-Qasim (b.1939) and Muin Basisu (1927-84) wrote three full length plays between 1969 and 1971. Of particular interest among these plays is Basisu's *Thawrat al-Zanj*, which links the Palestinian cause to the *Zanj* rebellion of the Abbasid period, and Samih al-Qasim's *Qaraqosh* (1970), which features a one-eyed character clearly standing for the Israeli General Moshe Dayan.[86]

Tunisia: Tunisia had made the earliest gestures in the development of a drama tradition. From initial efforts that followed visits by Egyptian troupes in 1908, several theatre troupes were founded that performed regularly in the period before independence (1956). Following the European and Egyptian inspired productions of the early 20th century, there appears to have been something of a hiatus in theatrical development. In 1940, Mahmud al-Masadi (b.1911) wrote a unique composition entitled *Al-Sudd*, in ostensibly dramatic form, satirizing the conflicts between traditional Muslim society and the idealism of social reforms.[87]

A major factor in the development of Tunisian theatre since independence has been the comparative decentralization of theatrical activity. From the 1960, municipal theatres were to be found not only in the capital but also in provincial centres. Cultural festivals, some of which have achieved international standing, have also given a boost to theatrical and related activities. Against that background, it is not surprising to find that many writers more usually thought of as novelists, including Mustafa al-Farisi (b.1931) and Umar bin Salim, have also made forays into the theatrical field.

[86] Starkey, P. op.cit., p. 193
[87] Ibid. p 194

In 1964, an Arab theatre festival was organized, which has served as the focus of much discussion concerning the nature and direction of the drama genre in the Arab world. One of the participants in such discussion was ‘Izz al-din al-Madani (1938), who has written a series of plays that take as their theme popular revolution : in order of publication they are *Thawrat Sahib al-himar* (1971), *Rihlat al-Hallaz* (1973), *Diwan al-Zanj* (1974) and *Mawla al-Sultan al-Hakim al-Hafsi* (1977).[88]

Libya: In Libya the case was not at all different from many other Arab countries: the usual visits by Egyptian compares awakened the latent interest of local intellectuals and lovers of the theatre in the dramatic arts. Some interesting plays have been written in Libya, such as *Zari’a al-Shayatin* (1973) by Al-Mahdi Abu Qurayn, depicting the malpractices of Al-Haddar, a contractor and rich landowner, who oppresses his womenfolk (a wife and a helpless daughter) and pampers his good-for-nothing semi-illiterate son.

Abd al-Karim al-Danna is another significant playwright. He wrote five plays, among which *Sadun* (1974) stands out because of the careful balance he strikes between protagonists and antagonists, Libyan nationalists and Italian conquerors, *Al-Aqniab* (masks), by Muhammad Abd-al-Jalil Qunaydi, is a different play. Cast in the form of a fable, it attacks the injustices of a whole regime: Sultan, vizier, Head of the Royal Guard and Queen. The play is very effective, avoiding, as it does, preaching and hyperbole. Like others it shows that the Libyan dramatists can write well constructed plays, however, they have failed to produce a national dramatist who is one of the mainstays of every dramatic movement.[89]

Morocco: The first stirrings of theatrical activity in Morocco seem to have taken place following a visit by a Tunisian troupe in 1923 and local troupes were

[88] Allen, Rogger. *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*, p 212
[89] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Literature*, p 399

soon formed in imitation. It was enthusiastically welcomed even by religious leaders as well as by intellectuals and men of letters. The first Moroccan company was formed in 1924 by students of Fez secondary school, aided by some artists from the eastern part of the Arab world. But despite the undeniable services rendered by amateur, the theatre in Morocco attained maturity only through the efforts of two leading men; Ahmad al-Tayyib (b.1928) and Al-Tayyib al-Siddiqi (b.1938). The two men worked together for some time, before each went his separate way. Al-Tayyib is the author of some forty dramas, as well as of a greater number of Moroccanized plays. His *Waliy Allah* is an impressive Moroccanization of Molier's *Tartuffe*, so clearly done that it looks perfectly Moroccan when shown on stage.[90]

Al-Siddiqi founded his own troupe and theatre in 1956, staging both western plays and his own original dramas. His Diwan Sidi Abd al-Rahman al-Majdhub (1966) is based on the life of the wandering poet after whom the play is named; it was followed in 1971 by *Maqamat* Badi-al-Zaman al-Hamdani, an attempt to dramatize the medieval writer's maqamat. More recently Abdel-Karim Burchid has produced a number of modernistic plays, including *Imrul Qays fi Bariz*, in which the author seeks to demythologize a heroic figure, while implicitly commenting on the political and social situation in contemporary Morocco.[91]

In addition to the above mentioned areas Kuwait, Bahrain, Sudan etc. also had their share in the history of modern Arabic drama. Again, it is amazing that the Arab theatre reached even the Americas especially, the united states where a large number of Arab immigrants lived, the Arab theatre found expression in the United States mainly in the writing of plays. Jibran Khalil Jibran wrote four plays which include *Al- Sultan, Iram Dhat al-Imad, al-Rajul Ghayr al-Manzur* and *Malik al-Bilad wa Rai al-Ghanam*. Again Al-Rihani produced two dramas

[90] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Literature,* p 403
[91] Starkey P., op. cit., p 196

in Arabic. They are *Sijill al-Tawba* and *Wafa al-Zaman*. Mikhail Nuayma has also three plays- *Al-Abu Wa'l-Banun, al-Waraqa al-akhirah* and *Qahir al-Mawt*. Fawzi al-Maluf, who migrated to Brazil, penned *Ibn Hamid wa Sngut Gharnata*, a famous Arabic drama; Nasir Shatila also gave a deep attention to the field of novel in dramatic style. [92]

2.3 Prominent Figures in Modern Arabic Drama

2.3.1 Tawfiq al-Hakim (1898-1987)

The most imaginative writer of the Arab world Tawfiq al-Hakim was born in a well placed family in Alexandria, where his father worked in the Judiciary. As a child, Tawfiq al- Hakim kept to himself; his interest in drama was aroused by a play he saw at a very tender age. After finishing school, al-Hakim joined the law college in Cairo where he stayed with his uncle. Away from the watchful of his control parents, he could indulge freely in music and the theatre.

In 1924 al-Hakim went to Paris for further studies. Neglecting his main subject law, he made a thorough study of European literature, both classical and contemporary. An idea of his life in Paris can be gleaned from two autobiographical accounts: *Zahrat al-Umr* (1943) and *Usfurmin al-Sharq* (1938).

On his return home the transition from Paris to the Egyptian country side and the general negligence there irked him and the human suffering caused by injustice and poverty pained him and art and harmony around him were conspicuous by their absence and his genius could not be curbed. Thus began a lifetime devoted to creative writing, particularly the drama in which he specialized.

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[92] Ahmad, Maqsood. op. cit., pp 239-240

Women often occupied his thoughts but failed to influence his life seriously. His revolt against his mother's early domination over him affected his attitude towards women in general, and he built many plays on this theme- *Al-Mar'a al-Jadidah, Al-Khuruj min al-Janna*, *Pygmalion* etc. Mostly he absorbed all the trends of European culture from ancient to modern times although wrote his first play *al-Daif al-Thaqil*, a satire on the burning topic of British occupation.[93] He was influenced by Sophocles, Bernard Shaw, Isben, Moliere, Chekhov etc. Their abstract plays and one act plays gave al-Hakim the idea to depict social themes but in his own individualistic style.

The development of this purely intellectual and objective style enabled al-Hakim to extend it to other plays and even to the short story and the novel for example *Awdat al-Ruh* the prominent of Al-Hakim's novels begins with a dialogue which enables the author to introduce all his characters within a short space. Serving the society from 1954, al-Hakim has been a member of the Arabic language academy. In 1959 he was appointed Egypt's representative to UNESCO in Paris. Till last day of his life he was a member of the board of directors of *Al-Ahram*.[94]

2.3.2 Successors of Tawfiq al-Hakim

The towering presence of Tawfiq al-Hakim over Egyptian (effectively the Arab) dramatic scene has sometimes threatened to obscure the fact that a number of other dramatists were producing works in Egypt. Among them are Mahmud Taymur, Ali Ahmad Bakathir and Fathi Ridwan. A brief account of these dramatists is given below:

Mahmud Taymur (1894-1973)

[93] Mahdi, Ismat. *Modern Arabic Literature*, 1983, p. 126
[94] Allen, Rogger. *The Arabic Literary Heritage*, pp 336-337

Mahmud Taymur is primarily an author of narrative fiction, short stories and novels, rather than a dramatist. Nevertheless, he wrote a dozen or so full-length plays and a handful of one act dramas, many of which were performed on the stage in Egypt as well as in other Arab countries. It is remarkable that he turned to play-writing relatively late in life. Apart from the general literary background of his distinguished family which included several outstanding literary figures, the strongest single influence on him was that of his elder brother Muhammad, the dramatist, who advised him to read Muhammad al-Muwaylihi's Hadith *Isa bin Hisham* and Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab*.[95]

Under his brother's tutelage, he developed a particular interest in Maupassant and Chekhov, the former impressing him by his narrative skill and his simple, realistic portrayal of many aspects of life, while in Chekhov the admired the author's sense of tragedy and capacity for deep psychological analysis. For a while Mahmud held government posts in the ministries of justice and foreign affairs, but having independent means he soon gave them up, devoting his time to writing and travel; in 1925 he visited Europe, mainly Switzerland. His closer experience of European literature modified his views: he came to realize that it is not enough for literature to have local colour, great literature must also be universal.

Taymur began to publish his literary works in 1925, in 1947 he was awarded the first prize for fiction by the academy of the Arabic language; in 1949 he was elected a member of the academy, and he was given the state prize for literature in the following year.[96]

His works: One of the most prolific writers, Mahmud Taymur wrote plays, short stories, novels and travelogues. His humorous plays *Al-Makhba Raqm 13* and *Al-Qanabil* are the most famous. Taymur's historical plays include: *Al-*

[95] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, p 88
[96] Ibid. p 89

Hawwa al-khalid dealing with the Jahlliyya hero Antar; *Al-Yaum Khamr* about the poet Imru'al Qais and *Ibn Jala* about Al-Hajjaj, the notorious governor of Basra.

His novels comprise of *Nida' al-Majhul, kilyubatra fi khan al-Khalil* (1946), and *Salwa fi Mahabb al-Rih*(1944). The collections of Taymur's short stories are named after a leading character. *Al-Shaykh Jum'a wa Aqasis Ukhra* (1925), *Amm Mitwalli* (1925), *Shaykh Sayyid al-Abit* (1926) and *al-Hajj Shalabi* (1927) are more celebrated.[97]

Fathi Ridwan

Like Bakathir, Fathi Ridwan, a lawyer with an active revolutionary past who rose to the position of Minister of National Guidance under President Nasser, wrote only a handful of plays, but they are of considerable interest. Some of his works show the profound influence of Al-Hakim unlike that of Bakathir, on whom the influence of the more important playwright did not go much beyond the choice of the same subjects from the world of Ancient Egyptian and Greek mythology and Arabic heritage, such as *Osiris, Oedipus* and *Shahrazad.* Ridwan also used literary Arabic for his dialogue although he seemed to move away from it in his later work, as seen some of his plays, in which the colloquial is also used instead. He was also different from Bakathir in that he never attempted historical drama. From the beginning his interests have been confined to moral, philosophical ideas as in *Dumu' Iblis* (1951), or social political issues as in *Shuqqa lil-Ijar* (1959).[98]

His works: Fathi Ridwan has bestowed his literary power mostly in the field of Arabic drama and occupied a unique position among the remarkable Arabic dramatists. Some of his distinguished dramas are mentioned below:

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[97] Mahdi, Ismat. *Modern Arabic Literature* (1900-1967), Hyderabad, p. 120

[98] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, pp. 129-130

Akhlaq li'l-Bai' (1957) is a full length play of four acts published in 1957. In 1962 Ridwan published *Ilah Raghma Anfih* which is a collection of five one act plays, *Laytahu Mat, Al-Mayyit al-Shakhir*, *Al-Muhallil* and *Al-Jallad wa'l-Mahkum Alayhi bi'l Idam*. The year 1971 witnessed the publication of another collection of one act plays entitled *Mumis Tuallif kitanban*. Other plays included in this collection are *al-Mutarada al-Maqluba*, *Mawizat Akhir al-Layl*, *al-Nahw wa'l Mawt* and *Ihtaris min al-Kabb*. He also published two full-length dramas in 1972: *Al-Hairun* and *Ya-Badr*, both are written in spoken Arabic. The former relates to the Egyptian nationalist movement and deals with the events of the First World War.

Ridwan's above mentioned works are marked with broadmindedness, sanity and sympathy with human feelings. In it he has kept himself away from political sectarianism and direct preaching and endeavoured to create 'convincing characters of considerable complexity.

Ali Ahmad Bakathir (1910-1969)

Bakathir was born in 1910 in Surabaya (Indonesia) to an Arab family, which, like most local Arabs, originally came from Hadramawt. When he was ten years old, he was sent to Hadramawt for his further education. From here he went to study at the University of Cairo- at the time called the Fu'ad I University-which was not unusual for the children of Indonesian Arabs. From 1940 till 1955 he was a teacher in Cairo. In 1962 he received the state Encouragement prize for literature. Although he was not born in Egypt, Bakathis did play a part in Egyptian literary life.

As this work is on the dramas of Ali Ahmad Bakathir, his life and works his life and works will be discussed elaborately in the next chapter.

2.3.3 Post-Revolution Dramatists:

A remarkable revival of the Egyptian theatre occurred during the fifties and sixties of the 20th century. A combination of factors must have contributed in no small measure to this efflorescence. Mainly a wave of optimism swept over Egypt in the wake of the army revolution of 1952, and the rise of the young dramatists such as- Numan Ashur, Lutfi al-Khuli, Sa'd al-Din Wahba, Yusuf Idris and others. They were more eager to do experiments in dramatic field, particularly related to the form and language of drama. Particularly as the new regime soon adopted socialist and populist slogans addressed to the masses, the spoken language- the language of the people- became the dominant medium, with the result that dramatists and audience alike achieved a greater degree of communication. [99]

The authors who were well aware of the theatrical activity going on in Paris, London and New York, used the theatre as an important medium to express their political and other views. It is also to be mentioned that the Egyptian dramatists who were inspired partly by western theatres and partly by Egyptian and Arab nationalism, tried to establish their work on the basis of traditional village entertainment as well as in medieval Arabic forms such as *maqama* and Shadow theatre. For the rapid grown of drama and theatre the Ministry for Cultural and National Guidance was established which setup- among other things such as palaces of culture- the general foundation for theatre, arts and music in 1960. And it encouraged actors, providing with some texts of good plays and inviting distinguished foreign producers and directors from England, France, Greece and Germany. By 1966 ten theatre troupes had been formed and nine main theatres were active in Cairo together with the musical theatre. During 1966-67, these theatres performed the works of both European and Egyptian authors including

[99] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, p. 40

Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Brecht, Durrenmatt, Alfred Faraj, Anis Mansur, Mahmud Diyab, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Rashad Rushdi and Sa'd al-Din Wahba.

Like theatre troupes and theatres, television also played an active role in promoting the cause of Arabic drama. In one year alone it showed, together with 200 short and 30full-length T.V plays, no fewer than the plays televised from the theatres.[100]

Such was the volume of dramatic activity and the experiment it caused that one critic wrote, in 1973, 'during the last ten years the Egyptian theatre has taken such an enormous stride that we can confidently say that we now have a well established Egyptian drama', and with more heady enthusiasm, 'Egyptian drama entered its stage of maturity with the appearance of Nu'man Ashur's *Al-Nas Illi That*. A western scholar claimed that 'the period from 1952 until 1967 is almost certainly the most fertile in the history of the Egyptian drama. Although the dates chosen have reference more to significant political events than to landmarks in the history of Egyptian dramatic writing, there is no doubt that the Nasser revolution led eventually to a spate of dramatic writing of remarkable magnitude. However because of the sheer size of output and the relative case of publication, the drama produced, despite its historical or sociological interest, was of a distinctly uneven quality. Much of it can be dismissed as catering merely for the needs of the moment. However, although it is still too early to tell with any confidences which of them are likely to stand the time, many of these plays had considerable literary and dramatic interest.[101]

2.4 Verse Drama in Arabic

[100] Ahmad, Maqsood. op. cit., pp. 173-174
[101] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, p. 142

The neo-classical poet Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932) was by no means the first to write verse drama in Arabic, for the early attempts at writing plays by Marun al-Naqqash, his nephew Salim al-Naqqash and al-Qabbani included works in verse or in rhyming prose. Moreover, their verse, as Badawi maintains, was of indifferent quality and was often meant only to sing on the stage.[102] Hence, it could not develop into a genre. The credit of introducing verse drama as an independent genre into Arabic literature actually goes to Khalil al-Yaziji who composed *Al-Muru'a wa'l Wafa* in 1000 verses. Al-Yaziji was followed by Sulayman al-Bustani (1856-1925) who translated the *Iliad* of Homer into Arabic verse in 1895. Another remarkable figure is Uthman-Jalal (1829-98) who wrote a one act drama in the colloquial verse of Egypt known as *Zajal* and also translated some French plays into *Zajal*.[103]

In this chapter an attempt has been made to assess the valuable contribution of Shawqi and his contemporaries as well as his successors towards the development of Arabic poetic drama.

Ahmad Shawqi: The aristocratic poet of Cairo, Ahmad Shawqi was a mixture of Arab, Turkish, Kurdish and Greek lineage. His education was secular and European as opposed to the traditional schooling of Al-Azhar. He joined the law school and graduated in 1887 from its department of translation with mastery in French. Royal patronage governed Shawqi's life for almost half a century. First, the Khedive Tawfiq appointed him at the palace secretariat and later he became the chief spokesman of the next Khedive as well as he was sent to France to study law and literature. Shawqi travelled widely in Europe acquiring all aspects of its culture and literature.

When Abbas II was dethroned by the British, Shawqi was deprived of royal patronage and carefree life and forced to leave Egypt for Barcelona (Spain)

[102] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt,* p. 207
[103] Ahmad, Maqsood. op. cit., pp. 197-198

where he lived throughout the world war-1. In the period of exile (1914-19), he missed the royal patronage and for the first time he had to face panic, and he saw human sufferings things unknown to him earlier, thus the period became as highly productive for Shawqi.[104]

Shawqi started his career as a poet by composing a eulogy to the Khedive Tawfiq. His first attempt was in fact inspired by his teacher Muhammad al-Baysuni. Moreover, his poetry on the whole bears the marks of the influence of Abu-Nuwas, al-Buhturi, al-Mutanabbi, Ibn-Zaydun and Mahmud Sami al-Barudi. Likewise, he seems to be influenced by England's greatest poet and dramatist, Shakespeare (1564-1616) and French dramatist Corneille (1606-1684).[105]

His collections of poem entitled *al-Shawqiyyat* was first published in 1898 in two volumes; it contains eulogies, elegies, national poems, pharaonic poems, Islamic poems, poems on national and world leaders, on social and educational reforms, on contemporary issues, historical and dramatic compositions.[106]

Now it seems appropriate to discuss Shawqi's dramatic poems at length. His first verse drama was *Ali Bayk al-Kabir*. Between 1928 and 1932 he wrote seven plays six in verse and one in prose. His verse dramas include *Masra 'Kilubatra* 1929, *Majnun Layla* 1931, *Qambiz* 1931, and *Ali Bayk al-Kabir* 1932. In this period he had also rewritten his earlier plays by the same name, *Antara (*1932), and *Al-Sitt Huda (*1932).These plays may be divided into comedy, tragedies and historical plays. First five are tragedies and historical dramas, while the last i.e. *Al-Sitt Huda* is his only comic play which was published posthumously. At last he left uncompleted the eighth play- *Al-Bakhila*.[107]

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[104] Mahdi, Ismat. op. cit., p. 48
[105] Ahmad, Maqsood. op.cit., p. 202
[106] Ibid. p. 203
[107] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Literature*, p. 359

Aziz Abaza: Method of writing poetic drama of Ahmad Sawqi was closely followed by Aziz Abaza (1898-1969), who burst upon the Egyptian literary scene in 1943 with a volume of deeply moving poetry inspired by his grief over the loss of his wife. In the same year he published the first of his seven poetic dramas, *Qays wa Lubna*, which deals with a theme similar to that of Shawqi's *Majnun Layla* and is set in the same period; it is that of Qays Ibn Dhurayh's love for Lubna, whom he, unlike the hero of Shawqi's play, was able to marry, but was latter forced to divorce by his parents, particularly his mother, who was Jealous of her daughter in law, and who used her sterility as an excuse for the need for him to marry another woman to beget children, as he is the only son. Qays finally gives in, but he continues to be afflicted by his passion for Lubna. He uses the good offices of an influential man to intercede for him and manages to get Lubna's second husband to divorce her, and he is once more reunited with the woman he loves.[108] With their remarriage they ultimately achieved their goal and lived a happy and satisfied life for a few years. Then Lubna says goodbye to Qays and leaves for her heavenly abode. Qays who out live her, cherishing her sweet memory also says good bye to the all.[109]

Qays wa Lubna is followed by a number of historical or semi historical dramas, Among them are: *al-Abbasa* (1947), *al-Nasir* (1947), *Shajarat al- Durr* (1951), *Ghurub al-Shams* (1952), *Shahriyar, Awraq al-Kharif (*1957), *Quficat al-Nur* (1959), *Qaysar wa Zahra* (1969).

Drama, more than any other literary genre, is the vehicle of such an imaginative conflict. A world view which gives answers to all the questions raised by those who live under it, rather than permit them to seek alternatives, does not provide the type of conflict out of which drama developed in the West. But a theologically oriented world view could also produce a form of drama,

[108] Badawi,M.M. *Modern Arabic drama in Egypt*, P. 215
[109] Ahmad, Maqsood. op.cit., p. 215

rooted in its own world view. Writers such as Ali Ahmad Bakathir attempted to create this form of drama which makes their works interesting. Their failure or success is of great importance to our understanding of the history of drama in modern Arabic literature.