Chapter-4

Ali Ahmad Bakathir as a Dramatist

Bakathir wrote dramas both in prose and verse. He has also composed an epic drama on the life of second orthodox caliph 'Umar bin al-Khattab. Bakathir had a distinct preference for subjects drawn from history, myth and legend as well as folklore, a preference for which he tried to find an aesthetic justification. Even when he wished to make a comment on the modern world, he often found it easier to use the past as a metaphor for the present. His passionate commitment to Islam made him turn naturally to Islamic and Arab history, but his treatment of myths and legends embraced a wider field, including ancient Egyptian and Greek themes.

4.1 The Social Dramas

Of his huge output, only a few plays deal with contemporary social issues: *Duktur Hazim, Al-Dunya Fawda, Qitat wa Firan, Julfadan Hanim* etc. They mostly deal, in some form or other, with the problems of Egyptian women and the relation between the sexes.

Duktur Hazim

It is a modern domestic drama in seven scenes, dealing with the disasters of the undue influence of parents and parents-in-law on their children and their influence in their children's lives and marriages.

In an introduction to this play, Bakathir points out that it revolves around two ideas[168] : who is the master of the house when the father is weak and the eldest son is the bread-winner, and should a mother-in-law meddle in the affairs of her daughter's husband? The first of the seven scenes in this social comedy parades the characters. They are Dr. Hazim, a hard-working young man, Bayyumi the chief clerk, Sharif Bey father of Dr. Hazim, an unemployed spendthrift,

[168] Bakathir, *Fann al-Masrahiya min khilal tajaribi al-Shakhsiya*, Maktabat Misr, 1958, p.31

dependent on his son's small earning for running his household, and 'Abbas, Hazim's half-brother, a perpetually drunk youth who is beyond the control of his parents. There is also Hikmat Hanim, the stepmother of Dr. Hazim. The only action in this scene is Hazim's unwilling surrender of ten out of his twenty five pound salary. 'Abbas immediately takes two pounds and his mother eight. Other characters who are mentioned in this first scene are Ihsan, Hazim's sister, and Layla, the sister of 'Abbas, betrothed to Amir who is a friend of 'Abbas.

In scene two, an argument ensues concerning the marriage of Layla to Amir Efendi. Hazim is against the marriage. Sharif Bey is angry as a result of his son's rudeness to Hikmat Hanim, and accuses Sabri Efendi, Hazim's uncle and father of Hazim's fiancée, of being the evil influence over Hazim.

Scene three takes place in the house of Nahid, Hazim's fiancée. Both mother and daughter are discussing Hazim's inability to be himself in front of his father. They are expecting Hazim and they note that he is half an hour late when he arrives. Later Sabri Efendi joins them. He informs Hazim that Nahid will not marry him since Hazim has been putting off the wedding for too long. Hazim defends himself and would have convinced Sabri Efendi if Sharif Bey had not arrived at this point. Sharif Bey accuses Sabri Efendi of turning his son against him, and Sharif Bey declares that his son now gives all his money to Nahid, daughter of Sabri Efendi. This angers Sabri Efendi who then orders his daughter to return all the gifts she has received from Hazim, including the ring Hazim has given her for their wedding. Hazim is then ordered out of the house.

In the next scene Hazim has turned drunkard. He stays away from home and do not go to his place of work. Bayyumi becomes his constant companion. Hazim's friend Ahmad comes to visit him in the bar. He advises him to change his present mode of life. Hazim confesses that the loss of Nahid has made everything in life unimportant to him. Sharif Bey and Ihsan come to see Hazim

too. Sharif Bey is repentant and promises to change his ways for the better. He informs Hazim of the fact that he has been to see his uncle Sabri Efendi and that he has apologized for his bad behaviour.

In scene five Hazim is back in his consulting room, but he still keeps away from his father's house. He reads in the newspapers of the impending sale by auction of his father's property. Ahmad, now to marry Layla, comes to plead with Hazim to save his father from the disgrace of this auction. Hikmat Hanim, Layla, Sharif Bey himself and Sabri Efendi all come to request Hazim, but Hazim is adamant.

Scene six opens in the new home set up by Hazim and his wife Nahid. His salary is even less adequate now, since he has to pay for the upkeep of two households, his and his father's. Nahid's mother comes to visit them and complains about her daughter suffering as a result of her husband keeping two houses. Hazim tells her not to meddle in his affairs. His mother-in-law is naturally angry at this and in the mean time Hikmat Hanim, Ihsan and Layla come to see Hazim and they get involved in the quarrel. Amina Hanim, Nahid's mother, orders her daughter to pack her things and follow her home. Hazim telephones his uncle Sabri Efendi. Scene seven takes place in the house of Sabri Efendi. Hazim is determind not to go there and bring back his wife since he did not drive her away in the first place. To make Hazim come, however, Sabri Efendi telephones him to say that Nahid is ill. Hazim comes and takes her back with him.

This play demonstrates some of the problems which beset young Egyptians trying to settle down in life. These problems are not only financial as shown in the relationship between father and son, but also include the problem of parental control in matters relating to marriage. There is also the problem of poverty which makes it impossible for a doctor to earn enough to live on, despite a

private practice. This situation made too many Egyptians, especially doctors, engineers and teachers, leave Egypt to work in some other African countries.[169]

One of the weaknesses of this play is the unrealistic solution provided for the realistic problems raised within the play. ‘Abbas changes because Hazim is able to open a drugstore for him. Where does the money come from? Perhaps more difficult to accept is Sharif Bey’s change of heart. He is still unemployed. He still keeps his chief clerk although his estate no longer exists. His wife Hikmat Hanim’s spending habits do not change. Neither are we told of Hazim’s salary increases. By ignoring the social situation which creates the basic conflict of this play, Bakathir weakens its effect. The conflict is not caused by the particular trait of character in any of the dramatis personae. Therefore the solution of the conflict can be achieved either by a change in the social situation, which does not take place, or by a change of attitude which makes the characters accept and conform to the social situation existing. Although we are told that the characters change, this is not convincingly done. We know that Sharif Bey’s house is not sold by auction because Hazim undertakes to save it.

Qitat wa Firan (Cat and Mice)

There are only five characters in this play, ‘Adil, son of Dr. Radi, a gynaecologist; Ramzi, the friend of ‘Adil; Nafisa Hanim, mother of Samiya and a widow who later marries Dr. Radi. The continuous working hours of Samiya threaten to break her marriage. Samiya saves all her money. ‘Adil is dissatisfied as a result of his wife’s neglect of him. He talks of murdering her. Nafisa Hanim supports her daughter, and even advises her to move out of her husband’s house and live with her since her life is in danger. Dr. Radi tries to reconcile the young couple, and takes their children to live with him so that they will not witness the

[169] Omotoso, B.A.op. cit., p.83

tension in their parents' home. Also, Dr. Radi gives money to the couple to ease the financial strain on 'Adil's twenty-five pound salary.

Dr. Radi takes 'Adil to his house to look after him and both Nafisa Hanim and Samiya also come to stay in Dr. Radi's house. Together the two parents work to reconcile their children and they are reconciled. But they oppose to the proposed marriage between Dr. Radi and Nafisa Hanim. Later they accept it.

Badawi states his view that *Qitqt wa Firan* is probably Bakathir's best play about a contemporary Egyptian social problem. It may lack al-Hakims brilliant dialogue, but its language suffers least from the use of literary or classical Arabic which in plays set in contemporary Egypt tends to produce an effect of artificiality. It flows smoothly enough to allow the generally realistic characters to reveal themselves. For the characters are convincing enough, apart perhaps from 'Adil, whose recovering from his obsessive thinking about murdering his wife seems to sudden and theatrical.[170]

Al-Dunya Fawda (This Chaotic World)

This is a satirical fantasy on women's liberation and the call for absolute sex equality. *La Femme Moderne* is a club run by the emancipated women of Egypt headed by the masculine woman president, Sonia. Dr.Ghandura, a brilliant single female scientist, who has just discovered a way of changing sex in animals and believes she can do the same with human beings. In her opinion, it would be the perfect solution to sex inequality and would enable women, by becoming man, to reverse all the injustice created throughout the ages by the male supremacy. She approaches an important stage in her experiments where she needs more money to carry on the work. What is even more important, she needs willing people for this stage of the experiment. Sonia promises to present

[170] Badawi, M. M, *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, Cambridge University press. P. 125

her request to the executive committee of the club. The club's ideal is the complete liberation of women from the bondage of men. Ahmad, cousin to Sonia and formally her future husband, calls at the club to see her. From this time to the end of the play, Ahmad ironically becomes the centre of the action of the play instead of the women. Susu, an effeminate man, he drinks some of Dr. Ghandura's potion and becomes a woman with the name of Susan. Susan now pursues 'her' desire and declares 'her' love for Ahmad. Sonia, too, takes the potion and becomes a man with the name of Hasani. 'He' declares 'his' love for Muhja, a beautiful young member of the club. Meanwhile, there is an understanding between Dr. Ghandura and Ahmad that she would change everybody in the world to the opposite sex and only the two of them would be left in their natural state. Farfetched as this dream may seem, Dr. Ghandura clings to it tenaciously.

The climax of the play comes when we discover that Ahmad and Muhja are very much in love with one another. Susan is disappointed and Hasani is angry with Ahmad for talking his girl friend. Dr. Ghandura storms off the stage calling curse on Ahmad for betraying her. Hasani and Susan console one another by deciding to get married. The play ends with Hasani and Ahmad discussing the possibility of forming a society for the protection of the rights of men.[171]

This is not a particularly impressive play: the satire lacks bite and humour is rather feeble, although the idea of sex changing on a large scale of amusing.[172]

4.2 Political Dramas

[171] Bakathir, A.A. *Al-Dunya Fawda*

[172] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, p. 124

Bakathir's dramas dealing with the political issues are *Mismar Juha, Al-Za'im al-Awhad, Habl al-Ghasil, Imbiraturiyy fi al-Mazad, Awdat al-Firdaws, Shyluk al-Jadid* and *Sha'b Allah Mukhtar.*

Mismar Juha

In this drama Bakathir found the perfect allegory for the behaviour of the British in Egypt, who claimed to have ended their occupation of Egypt but depute their forces in the Suez Canal base as an excuse for maintaining their hold over the country. The play is based on two ideas; first one is the political aspect which shows in the struggle between Juha and the Resident Governor (representative of a foreign imperial power) of Iraq. This struggle leads to the revolt of the people against the Governor and the liberation of the country from his yoke. The second is the social aspect which is shown in the contrast between the exemplary character of Juha and the gross materialism of his wife Umm al-Ghusn. This contrast is centred specifically on the marriage of their daughter Maymuna. While Juha wishes her to marry his nephew Hammad, a peasant, his wife wants her to marry a rich man. Invariably attention has been paid more to the political aspect of this play than to the social aspect.[173]

The play is in six scenes. In the first scene, Juha is dismissed from his post as Imam of one of the mosques of Kufa because of his criticism of the authorities. In scene ii, Juha returns home and his wife's tongue lashes out at him. By making Juha hesitate between staying out or going in, Bakathir heightens our expectation of the manifestation of the power of the wife over him. Umm al-Ghusn rebukes Juha for losing his job but he does not take her seriously. He starts to think of the possible profession he can take up. Hammad visits and

[173] Rizzitatano, Umberto. *Reaction to western political influences in Ali Ahmad Bakathir's Drama*, Oxford, 1962 p.444

advices his uncle to sell his rather large house and use the proceeds to buy land and become a farmer. Umm al-Ghusn does not agree with this idea, but her objection is swept aside. A revolt among the peasants brings Juha back to the position of Judge of Judges; the chief Qadi; a position won by his outspokenness against the foreign power and to be used for the improvement of the lot of the people.

Scene iii sees Juha and his family in Baghdad. He makes a plan with Hammad and cedes the ownership of the house to Hammad. Umm al-Ghusn becomes the respect-demanding wife of the chief Qadi and she makes her two children remember to behave themselves as worthy of their exalted position in the society. She now objects, more than ever before, to her daughter marrying Hammad. She invites rich people to her mansion in the hope finding a husband for her daughter. Hammad conspires with al-Ghusn to play the fool in front of these rich, snobbish guests. They are annoyed and walk out of the house.

A court scene follows where we learn that the house has been sold by Hammad to Ghanim on condition that Hammad is allowed to retain a nail in the house. Having put the nail there he comes and goes to and from the house, thus making a nuisance of himself to Ghanim. Ghanim takes Hammad to court where Juha sits in judgement. While the case is being heard, al-Ghusn comes to complain against her husband’s cruelty to her and her children. The case of Ghanim v. Hammad is suspended and both Juha and his wife make statements to the court. While this is going on the Resident Governor sends a whispered message to Ghanim. al-Ghusn is asked to go home with the promise that officials will be sent to verify her statement. The main case is reopened. Ghanim declares that he is ready to forfeit his rights to the house so that Hammad can have it and be done with it. Juha is suspicious of this move, knowing that it must

have been suggested to Ghanim by the Resident Governor. Juha then proceeds to cross-examine Ghanim with the aim of getting the truth out of him.

The court audience get impatient and start to shout that Hammad should take his nail from Ghanim's house. But Hammad, as prearranged with Juha, points out to them that there is a much more dangerous nail stuck into their land. They should demand that it be removed. The Resident Governor, sensing what Hammad is playing at, orders the arrest of both Hammad and Juha.

In scene v Juha is visited in prison by the Resident Governor with a paper for him to sign directing the people to stop what is now an open revolt against the authority of the Governor. Juha refuses to sign. Later the leaders of a revolution that has taken place visit Juha and offer him a ministerial appointment in their new government. The Governor returns to Juha to negotiate. Juha and the others imprisoned with him are released. The foreign occupation of Iraq ends. Hammad marries Maymuna and Umm al-Ghusn is reconciled to her husband.

Al-Za'im al-Awhad (The Sole Leader)

Bakathir is more at home in *Al-Za'im al-Awhad*, which deals with events in Iraq just before the fall of the dictator 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, the manner of which Bakathir claims have predicted in his play, which was written long before the event.[174]

The Iraq of Qasim (d.1963) is the setting for the play. In act i, the general state of the country is portrayed. The young have turned into fanatics and have made unreasonable. They demand the creation of a Kurdish state as against an Arab state. The country is riddled with police detectives and informers who use their positions against the people. 'Abd-al-Ma'mun is betrayed to the police by his son Husayn for hanging a picture of 'Abd al-Nasir in his café instead of the

[174] Badawi, M.M. *Modern Arabic Drama in Egypt*, p. 128

picture of the unique leader. He is arrested while listening to the state poet reciting an ode in honour of the leader.

In act ii fear for the life of the leader in the hands of a likely assassin makes his aide, al-Qurdawi, seek a man who resemble the leader so that such a man could attend all public function on behalf of the leader. A shoe-shine boy by the name of Quzman is found and brought to the presidential palace. It is soon clear that the leader is a pawn in the hands of Al-Qurdawi and the Jewish party which maintains him in power. But the leader does not mind his position as a prisoner as longer as he can keep alive. Quzman, the leader's double, is now set up in a mansion. Quzman's wife complains and starts to make trouble for Al-Qurdawi; she importunes the authority ties represented by al-Qurdawi to give her husband back to her. She is taken to a detention camp with her children.

The leader, in a conversation with his guard, confesses that he would rather not have a double. He is afraid that Al-Qurdawi is planning to kill him and put Quzman in his place as president. This would give the Kurd absolute power in the country. The leader advises, therefore, that Quzman should be disposed of. The guard agrees that Quzman should be killed to remove this immediate threat to the life of the leader.

Act iii shows the failure of the attempt to kill Quzman. The leader, who has had the shoe-shining equipment of Quzman brought to him, at the same time wearing the clothes of the shoe-shiner. Both the British and the French military attaches come to see the leader to discuss a master plan to rid him of him double. While they are discussing this, they receive telephone calls from their respective embassies. Hurriedly they leave. The leader puts on the shoe-shining gear of Quzman, arms himself with a revolver, and disappears.

Act iv shows a revolution in full swing. 'Abd-al-Ma'mun is released from detention but his son, the supporter of Kurdish nationalism is killed. For once in

Bakathir's writing, the son is the one who is in the wrong camp and the father survives as a result of his devotion to Arab nationalism.[175]

The most interesting technical element of this play is the way many people are made to speak the same words at the same time parrot fashion. This is used effectively in act i when three school-girls, members of the popular Front, come to denounce their classmate, Fatima, in her father's cafe. They parrot the accusations against her, little understanding what they are talking about. Then they demand that her father, 'Abd-al-Ma'mun, hand her over to them for justice. The situation changes when 'Abd-al-Ma'mun tactfully offers them drinks. They accept his 'hospitality' and forget about the sabotage accusations against his daughter.

Imbiraturiyya fi al-Mazad **(An Empire for Auction)**

In this political satire Bakathir creates the atmosphere of the downfall of the British Empire. Despite some penetrating insights into one minds of those at the head of this Empire, they suffers from faults which a little attention would have corrected. This is particularly so in the question of formal ways of address among the titled gentry of England. For instance, both Cohen and Lady Stately keep addressing Henry Toilman, son of Labour M.P. John Toilman, as Mr. Henry.[176] Also Edward Stately, conservative M.P and holder of a knighthood, is addressed as Sir Stately instead of Sir Edward.[177] These details are irritating if not corrected in the production of this play.

In act i, Mr. and Mrs. Toilman are preparing to receive Sir Edward and Lady Stately for tea. Their son Henry Toilman is the fiancé of Caroline Stately at

[175] Son-Father relationship in *Sirat Shuja* and *Ambrotariya fi al-Mazad*

[176] Bakathir, M.M. *Ambrotariya fi al-Mazad,* pp 7, 27

[177] Ibid. p. 30

present attending a peace conference in Paris. Mr. Toilman is very tight-fisted. He buys clothes from second-hand dealers, demands that Sir Edward remain still while sitting on one of his chairs so that the chair does not suffer stress. John and Edward get into an argument as to the party responsible for the liquidation of the British Empire. Henry, who throughout the play is to be the voice of revolutionary youth, lays the blame as well a curse on both parties. The argument shifts to the forthcoming elections and the party likely to win. The conservative party wins the election under the leadership of Sir Cercle, a thin cover for Sir Winston Churchill. There is to be a celebration party.

In Act ii, during the celebration party, the prime Minster is informed of the danger posed by a resolution passed in the Conference of the Third world meeting in New Delhi. Sir Circle loses his temper, and orders the bombing of Egypt on the pretence that Israel cannot exist as long Egypt exists. He falls down still shouting.

In Act iii the young in France overthrow the government. The British Parliament is called for an emergency session but the revolution reaches Britain before the session begins. All members of the Cabinet as well as all Members of Parliament are arrested. Sir Circle, who has disguised himself as a fat old woman, is discovered in the attic of Sir Edward's country house. Mr. John Toilman had betrayed him to the young revolutionaries.

Act iv sees both Toilman and Stately, among others, in prison. They hear of the possible sale by auction of the British Empire, the confiscation of the property of the ruling classes and the sending of Sir Circle to Nuremberg to face charges as a war criminal. The Afro-Asiatic powers, aiming to avoid the sale by auction of the British Empire because they fight for the freedom of all peoples, foil the attempt of America and Russia to buy the Empire. The English are allowed to be free but are confined to the boundaries of their island. Sir Circle's

freedom of activity is to be destroyed. Someone proposes that he be sold on the stock Exchange as he has become an archaeological piece, but in the end everybody agrees to hand him over to the Nuremberg Court.

The aim of the play is to ridicule those imperial powers-that-be in the third world. This is done successfully by degrading the English politicians who appear in the play. What the play does not succeed in doing is to make the rather swallow the wish-fulfilment revolution at the end.

***Sha'b Allah al-Mukhtar* (God's Chosen people)**

It is set in Israel before the 1956 war, when the Bandung conference and the Egyptian arms deal with Czechoslovakia were burning issues and must therefore have been written in 1955. This play, written to prove that the Arabs, and not the Jews, are God's chosen people, is in the tradition of some of the other plays of Bakathir; the young are not in agreement with the policies of their elders. They therefore organize a revolutionary take-over of government and we are left with the feeling that everything from then on will be all right. In the particular case of this play, Simon and his uncle Haym, are opposed to Israel although they are Jews. Simon grew up in Egypt, and we soon learn that he is involved with an underground movement aimed at toppling the Israeli government with the financial and moral support of two American businessmen.

Haym and his wife Sarah have a hotel in Tel-Aviv, and all the action of the play takes place here. Haym secretly shares the revolutionary zeal of his nephew, but he cannot support him out of their earnings because of the fear of his wife who does not share this feeling. Rachel, Haym's daughter, is betrothed to Simon. But this does not prevent her, and even her mother Sarah, from prostituting themselves to some of their guests with knowledge of both Haym and Simon.

When the revolution comes at last, Ben Gurion and those in his government are arrested along with all members of Parliament. The problem of running the state is temporarily given to an American businessman until everything can be handed over to ‘Abd al-Nasir. A resolution in the United Nations Organization says that all Jews in former Israel must go back to their countries of origin.[178]

4.3 Historical Dramas

The historical dramas of Bakathir are derived from both ancient and modern history of the Arab world. They are *Ibrahim Basha*, *Ikhnatun wa Nefertiti*, *Qasr al-Hawdaj*, Sirr *al-Hakim bi Amrillah*, *Dar ibn Luqman*, *Al-Silsilah wa'l-Ghufran*, *Al-Fir'awn al-Maw'ud, Shadiyat al-Islam, Al-Malhama al-Islamiya al kubra' Umar*, *Al-Dudat wa al-Thu'ban, Ahlamu Nabliun*, *Ma'sat Zainab* and *Harb al-Basus.* Most of them will be discussed in the next chapter elaborately.

4.4 The Religious Dramas

Bakathir's understanding of drama, especially tragic drama, was at the deeper than that of other Arab playwrights of his generation. This understanding, limited though it was, led him to make statements very important for the history of drama in Arabic, which has, however, been ignored and overlooked. Bakathir writes that the roots of drama are to be found in pagan religious rituals. Drama, he continues, become and independent art form when there was a break with religious rituals.[179]

On the issues of comedy and tragedy, Bakathir is of the view that tragedy developed as an aspect of religious ritual while comedy emerges at the point the

[178] Summary of *Sha'b Allah al-Mukhtar* of Ali Ahmad Bakathir.

[179] Bakathir, M.M. *Fann al-Masrahiya*, p. 25

community loses faith in its religion.[180] Once more, Bakathir does not purge the implications of this statement on dramatic writing under monotheistic theologically oriented belief systems. Compared with the views of other Egyptian contemporary playwrights, Bakathir's[181] is far more informed and more searching in its attempt to grapple with the problems posed by an alien literary form. The statements he made on the issue have been ignored by Egyptian and Arab critics of dramatic writing.

Nevertheless, Bakathir's views reveal misunderstandings of the nature and function of drama that are reflected in his practice. This is understandable, since the drama form reveals problems of the conflict between form and content more glaringly than any other literary form.

In the book *The Frontiers of Drama*, Miss Ellis-Fermor has delimited the extent of the conflict between form and content in drama. These are mainly in three categories. The first of these is the practical impossibility of containing the epic subject within the bounds of a play without losing an essential element of drama concentration. The second is the difficulty of expressing the concept of anarchy or disorderliness in the dramatic form. The third frontier of drama is the impossibility of representing the mood of religious experience in a play. There is no need here to go into Ellis-Fermor's detailed analysis and examples of each of these frontiers of drama.[182] What is of immediate relevance here is the third on the list-drama and expression of the mood of religion. Religious plays may conveniently be divided into three main groups. There are plays which make a religious experience the central theme. Good examples of this group are few

[180] Omotoso, B.A. op.cit., p. 122

[181] Ibid, p. 122

[182] Ibid, p. 123

outside Goethe's *Faust* and Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.[183] There is the second group of religious plays which make religious experience the starting point for the action of the play and then go on to its effects. Shaw's *St. Joan* is such a play. The third group of plays is deliberate propaganda for the dogmas and ethics of a particular religion. Plays of this type are the most numerous, and they are the least dramatic. The main reason for this is that: If one considers the tragedies written by Bakathir against the above background, it is easy to conclude that they are mostly religious plays which attempt to propagate Islamic dogmas and ethics and thus they suffer as drama.

A brief account of two of Bakathir's tragedies is given below:

***IIah Isra'il* (God of Israel)**

Bakathir quotes a verse from the Qur'an as preface to this play:

> For we have cast amongst them enmity and hatred till the resurrection day. Whenever they light a fire for war God puts it out, they strive for corruption in the earth, but God loves not the corrupt.[184]

The 'they' of this quotation is supposed to refer to the Jews. Where Bakathir's other political satires have been basically anti-Zionist, *IIah Isra'il* is anti-Semitic. The play is divided into three one-act play lets.

Act one, *Exodus*, deals with the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. Moses finds out that the Jews have stolen gold from their neighbours (gold which, one might say was acquired through the leader of the Israelites). Moses orders the gold to be returned to the Egyptians. The Israelites, whose leaders have met *Iblis* (the devil) and pledged their devotion to him, disobey Moses. On instruction from *Iblis* they take the gold from Harun and fashion a golden calf, which they worship. For this idolatry the children of Israel are to

[183] Omotoso, B.A. p.123

[184] Al-Quran, 5:69

suffer wandering in the wilderness until the present generation dies out. Even when this happens, the Israelites are still devotees of the devil. When they go into battle they kill women, children and defenceless old people in obedience to *Iblis*. Moses curses them and goes away to die. He asks his nephew, the son of Harun, to bury him where the Israelites will never find his body to stand upon his grave.

Act two is subtitled *The Kingdom of Heaven* and deals with the Jews in the time of Jesus Christ. When all the attempts of *Iblis* to conquer Jesus fail, he leaves him to the Jews. Caiaphas and Hananaya decide to get at him through the help of Mary Magdlene. But Mary falls in love with Jesus and repents of her life as a prostitute. When Judas Iscariot is crucified because he is believed to be Jesus, Mary, who is aware of the mistake, does not disclose her knowledge. This is to revenge herself on one of the enemies of Jesus.

Act three is subtitled *The Serpent*. Here *Iblis* and his infernal angels celebrate the coming creation of their kingdom on earth. The illogical part of this play is in scene ii of this act. Here Jewish leaders from all over the world discuss the creation of their state of Israel. The voice raised in opposition to the creation of Israel bases its argument on the claim that already controls the world through their love and acquisition of gold. What, then, do they want with a piece of land? The dissenting voice is shouted down, and war as a means of achieving their end is adopted by the Israelites. Bakathir takes for granted-without making a case for it that the Jews were responsible for the two world wars and would be for a third if it was sparked off by the Middle East situation.

The role of the propagandist is inescapable in the writing of comedies and satires. This is because there is an ideal against which the playwright sets the activities of his characters to see how far they measure up to them. These may be based on the backgrounds of a particular race, creed or sex. But in the writing

of tragedies, the sympathy of the playwright must be with humanity at large. There must be a sympathetic understanding of suffering humanity to give such a work wider dimensions than those of the playwright. It may be too much to say that Bakathir lacks such understanding. But he has allowed it to be complete clouded over by his religious and Arab nationalist priorities. This has contributed in no small measure to the failure of *IIah Isra'il*.

Harut wa Marut **(Harut and Marut)**

Harut wa Marut is an unusual play with some amusing situations and a clear line of progression towards a dramatic climax. It is in *Harut wa Marut* alone among the tragedies of Bakathir that there is the smallest trait of sympathy for the plight of humanity. Even this sympathy is not of his own creation.[185] In heaven some angels make derisive remarks on the inability of man to avoid committing sings. God is angered by this attitude and asks them to select two of their number[186] to go and on earth under the same conditions as those of man. Harut and Marut are chosen to go.[187]

Bakathir's play commences at the point where the city-state of Babel, rival to another city-state, that of al-Ru'ah, needs a new ruler and a new judge. The king has died and his two daughters, Al-Lat and Al-Uzza, are rivals for the throne. The people of Babel worship physical beauty, on the basis the two sisters are to appear naked before the whole population, and the more beautiful is to be chosen as queen of Babel. Ba'al, prince of Al-Ru'ah, is the lover of Al-Lat, but his father will not consent to his marrying her. The criterion for choosing a new

---

[185] *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp. 134-135

[186] Tha'albi gives three: *Azr'at, Harut* and *Marut*, in *Qisas al-Anbiya*.

[187] Bakathir gives three names, the third repenting of their statement at the beginning of their stay in Babel and returning to heaven.

judge is also the physical of the person and not his legal qualifications. Harut and Marut are given this job as joint judge of Babel.

When Harut and Marut have been established for some time, they are resting in their house expecting a visit from Tamara. She and her husband have brought a case before the judge. Though Harut and Marut are conscious of Tamara's resemblance to Al-Lat, who has succeeded her father as ruler of Babel, they refuse to believe that she is Al-Lat. They use her beauty as the sole evidence of her rightness, and the case in her favour. They have already failed to resist the charms of many other women. Both of them are anxious to chalk up another victory. At this point a little bit of comedy intrudes to lighten up the atmosphere of flash-backs. Marut has been dreaming of Tamara when Harut wakes him up. While they wait for her they argue as to who should have first. The following dialogue takes place.

> Marut: Listen, Harut, we must not argue in front of her since that will ruin all our chances with her. So I'll first
>
> Harut: And why should you be first?
>
> Marut: part of what you deprived me of in the dream.
>
> Harut: Do you want to monopolize her in your dream as well as in Reality? What selfishness;
>
> Marut: No, in fact I didn't get anywhere in the dream and it is your fault;[188]

Whenever there is a knock on the door after some characters on the stage have been talking about another in anticipation of his entry, it is always that character who knocks and comes in when the door is opened. But for the first time in any of the plays of Bakathir, the knock on the door does not belong to the expected Tamara. When Harut opens the door it turns out to be someone else. The person is Hermes the wise, who used to be the unheeded adviser of the

[188] This translation is quoted by Bankole Ajibabi Omotoso in his thesis '*Bakathir: A contemporary conservative arab writer- An appraisal of his main plays and novels*, 1972, p. 136

former ruler of Babel. The change of rulers has not changed Babel's attitude to him. There follows an interesting discussion on the future of man and the gradual realization his potentialities. This would seem to be a positive affirmation of Bakathir's faith in man and his eventual salvation through his trust in God.

When Tamara arrives Harut and Marut fall over themselves to make her welcome. They give her a copy of the judgment in her case with her husband. While Harut is away in the court-house bringing the document of the judgment, Marut gives Tamara some magical powers in return for the promise that she will allow him to kiss her. When he demands this payment, Tamara calls her husband Ba'al, who enters immediately. Marut is embarrassed and does not know what to say or do. To his relief and surprise, Tamara, now self-revealed as Al-Lat, upbraids Ba'al for spying on her and asks him to leave her presence. Later, in the palace of Al-Lat, Ba'al attacks Harut and Marut with his sword, but this has no effect on the two angels. When Ba'al rushes at them, they kill him. Because of this, both of them lose their power of communicating between heaven and earth. Al-Lat puts them in prison.

Harut and Marut now regret their inconsiderate criticism of man, since they themselves have not been able to resist temptation despite their being angels. When Babel is threatened by the armies of the king of Al-Ru'ah, Harut and Marut are taken away and given punishments which bring to mind that of Tantalus.[189]

4.5 The Epic Drama on 'Umar bin al-Khattab

[189] Hamid, A.B. op.cit., pp. 77-80

Bakathir is also author of an epic drama *Al-Malhama al-Islamia al-Kubra: Umar* (the great Islamic epic: Umar) on the life of the second orthodox caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattab as like as Thomas Hardy's epic drama on the Napoleonic Wars, *The Dynasts*.[190] Like Hardy's epic drama, Bakathir's was to have been divided into three parts and nineteen acts. Hardy's epic drama covers ten years of the war with Napoleon just as Bakathir's covers the ten years of the caliphate of 'Umar (634-644 A.D.). The similarity between model and imitation hardly extends, however, beyond these structural aspects. Bakathir does not make use of such other techniques of Hardy's as long stage directions, dumb shows with extended passages of visual description, aspects which have led John Wain to describe *The Dynasts* as a 'shooting script'.[191] Nor does Bakathir use blank verse or any other verse form in his epic as Hardy does. The effect of all these differences is that Bakathir's epic lacks the grandeur and awe present in *The Dynasts*. More important still, the phantom Intelligences who play an important part in *The Dynasts* have no counterparts in *'Umar*.[192] These phantom Intelligences are the expression of the characteristic fatalism which accompanies most of Hardy's heroes.

Orthodox Islam has built up the character of 'Umar bin al-Khattab as next only to the prophet.[193] He is considered to be the founder of the Arab empire in as far as he not only ordered the military conquests but also established the administrative basis of the empire. His strongest characteristic was his energy of will. He began as a declared enemy of Islam and ended by supporting it with all his strength. He was converted to Islam when he was twenty-six, four years before the *Hijrah*. He was more of a councillor than a military man. All the

[190] Omotoso, B.A. op.cit., p. 99

[191] Introduction to pocket papermac edition, 1965, p. x

[192] Omotoso, Ibid., p. 99

[193] *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2 '*Umar the Great*, p. 601

same, he was autocratic in the sense that he took decisions and pursued their execution with such singleness of mind, such tenacity of purpose, such a conviction of his own rightness, that it was difficult for his advisers to question him. But this he had a simple life style which must have impressed Bakathir at a time when he was getting disillusioned with the opulence of political leaders in Egypt. If one accepts that "an epic is a work resting primarily on the activity of one or more central figures, men who change history or who through their 'choosiness' begin a new portion of history', then 'Umar bin al-Khattab-'one of the most typical modes of all virtues of Islam"[194]-is a fit subject for an epic. The epic as planned was to cover about one thousand pages and to boast one hundred lead characters through the nineteen acts.

*'Ala Aswar Dimashq***,** is a play is prefaced with an introduction in two scenes. This introduction entitled, *Al-Fathiha*-deals with the death of Abu Bakr and choosing of 'Umar as his successor. Scene i opens with Abu Bakr on his death-bed. He sends for 'Umar and asks his opinion of the two Muslim generals, Khalid bin al-Walid and Abu 'Ubayda, as possible rulers of Islam. Umar cannot see either of these two being caliph. Abu Bakr makes 'Umar accept unwillingly that no other person could best head the young Muslim nation at that time except Umar himself. In scene ii Abu Bakr consults the most important leaders of the Muhajirun and the Ansar on his choice of 'Umar as his successor. Abu 'Ubayda and Sa'id bin Zaid are the main voices of dissent. While Abu Bakr accepts the fact that 'Umar could be ruthless, he points out that he would maintain order. While Abu Bakar again concedes 'Umar's late conversion to Islam, then convinces his listeners that 'Umar's enthusiasm would be of importance to the young religion. When they have all agreed to the choice, Abu Bakr summons 'Uthman to write down his last statement. Abu Bakr faints at the dramatic point

[194] *Shorter Encyclopedia,* op.cit. p. 601

of mentioning the name of his successor. When he recovers he is informed that the statement is complete as he would want it. The public duties of Abu Bakr and his private life are well balanced. This equilibrium between public duties and family demands is an important theme in the whole epic.

Scene i of the play itself is a battlefield on the outskirts of Damascus. In a battle against Byzantine forces, Aban bin Sa'id is mortally wounded. His wife swears to avenge his death, but Aban is happy because he is dying *Fi Sabi li Allah* and he will be one of the giants of Judgement Day-one of those who gave their lives for Islam.

In scene ii a youth of about twenty years of age is brought to Khalid on suspicion of spying but he tells a different story as he is in love with the daughter of the Khalid of 'Aban bin Sa'id whose name is Tumas. This youth is escaping from Tumas to run away and marry his sweetheart. When Khalid releases the boy, he refuses to go. He begs to be allowed to remain with the Muslim forces until they enter Damascus.

In scene iii there is a council of war. Yunus, the youth referred to in scene ii, tells Khalid that the governor of Damascus would be celebrating, that night, the birth of his son. Khalid suggests to the leaders of his army that they storm the town while this celebration is going on. They all take oath secrecy at the end of the meeting.

When the Muslim army takes Damascus in scene iv, Khalid is for ruthless measures against the Byzantines. Abu 'Ubayda, on the other hand, counsel's caution. His suggestion that the Byzantine authorities be allowed three days to leave the city is accepted by Khalid and the other leaders. But since the whole issue had occasioned argument among them, Khalid suggests that they should to the Caliph Abu Bakar asking his opinion on the issue.

In scene v, Yunus wishes to follow the fleeing Byzantines to rescue Yuduqiya. Khalid desires to pursue them and ensure that they do not spring a surprise attack on the Muslims. Abu ‘Ubayda once more opposes Khalid. He maintains that unless the Byzantines are first warned Khalid must not go into battle against them. Moreover, Abu ‘Ubayda chides Khalid for not turning up for prayers. To which Khalid replies: “I am your commander in battles and not in prayers.”[195]

Scene vi shows Khalid in pursuit of the Byzantine soldiers. When he catches up with them he insists on their surrendering all their arms-an imposition at variance with the treaty concluded three days earlier.

Scene viii shows Abu ‘Udayda, who had known of the death of Abu Bakr all the time, informing Khalid of the changed situation back in Medina. Naturally Khalid is angry that he has been kept in the dark for so long. Khalid’s main reason for opposing ‘Umar, is that six years ‘Umar was the scourge of the Muslims before his conversion. Abu ‘Ubayda tries to assure Khalid that he (Khalid) would still remain the leader of the army, but Khalid is certain that ‘Umar would not keep him much longer in the post. In the rather brief scene after the above, Heraclius is convinced by his empress that they should move to Antioch after they had started to organize their defences around Homs.

In scene x we are back in Makkah where ‘Umar is given the title of Amir al-Mu’minin. He refuses to take money from the state purse, but an arrangement is made for the upkeep of his family since he no longer has time to continue his commercial activities. News comes from Syria confirming its conquest by the Muslim army. Preparations are made for the conquest of Iraq.

In *Ma’rikat al-Jisr,* two battles take place on a bridge. The Muslims lose first battle but win a decisive victory in the second. In scene i Al-Muthanna bin

[195] Bakathir, ‘*Ala Aswar Dimashq*, p. 82

Haritha and his wife Salma discuss the recent appointment of Abu ‘Ubayada as the commander of the Muslim forces. This appointment passes over al-Muthanna and displaces Khalid bin al-Walid. Al-Muthanna is not bitter against the Caliph for this. All Muslims, al-Muthanna muses, are fighting *fi sabi li Allah*. Questions of personal ambition should not be allowed to could this supreme objective. At a party, given by al-Muthanna, Abu ‘Ubayda relates to him ‘Umar’s injunction that the new commander must work hand-in-hand with al-Muthanna. Abu ‘Ubayda must consult him on all issues before taking decisions. Rumours of the enemy’s approach circulate at the party.

In scene ii, Abu ‘Ubayda receives delegations and settles disputes. The Muslims are encamped on part of the Persian territory which they have conquered. The chieftains of this part of Persia bring gifts of choicest victuals to Abu ‘Ubayda, but he refuses to accept them, insisting that he be given the same meals as his soldiers. The food brought by the grandees is given to some Persian peasants by Muslim soldiers. These peasants are flogged by their masters not only for eating the food in front of them but also for showing that they enjoyed eating it too. Jaban, an officer of the defeated Persian troops, who has been in hiding, is brought before Abu ‘Ubayda. A Muslim civilian who did not know his identity had given him protection. When Jaban’s real identity is disclosed by another Muslim, Jaban’s protector is still ready to continue guaranteeing his safety since this was his promise to him from the beginning. Abu ‘Ubayda upholds this decision although Jaban is unrepentant. He boasts of the day the Persian leader Rustam will drive the Muslim out of Persia.

In scene iii Rustam comes to see the widowed queen of Persia. They have been lovers before but they are deliberately trying to ignore this past. Rustam proposes marriage so that the two of them can set up a new ruling house for Persia. Al-Fayrazan comes to report the general chaos of the Persian army

crumbling before the Muslim forces. Al-Fayrazan suggests that the time is not right to change command when the queen proposes that Rustam lead the forces of Persia against the Muslims. Al-Fayrazan thinks that a change in the command might lead to a hurried change of tactics. The queen arbitrarily orders al-Fayrazan himself to take over the command of the army.[196]

In scene iv Salit, al-Muthanna and Bashir are surprised at the change of behaviour they now see in Abu ‘Ubayda. When he was made the commander of the Muslim forces, he was told to consult these men before important decisions were taken. Now he has made up his mind that their forces will cross a bridge to meet the Persian host. The three men think that this means certain death for the Muslim soldiers. When Abu ‘Ubayda arrives, these men suggest that the Muslim forces hold ground and wait for the Persians. Abu ‘Ubayda accuses them of being cowards and insists they cross to meet the Persians.

By scene v, the first battle of the bridge has been fought and lost by the Muslims. Al-Muthanna saves a few soldiers by turning back and fleeing. The remaining soldiers are demoralized, but the encouragement of ‘Umar through a letter and the news from Syria show the soldiers that Allah has been victorious and they are cheered.

In scene vi Shirin, a Muslim of Persian origin married to the brother of al-Muthanna, receives a messenger from the Persian queen as the two armies are once more poised for action. The message from the Persian queen is intended to enlist the help of Shirin against the Muslims. Shirin is to spy on her brother-in-law al-Muthanna and other Muslims leaders. Shirin takes the message, kills the messenger and pretends that she is much hurt by the presumption of the Persian queen to use her against the Muslims. Al-Muthanna consoles her and praises her for killing the spy whose master he will kill in due course. In scene vii, Al-

[196] Bakathir, A.A. *Marakat al-Jisr*, p. 48

Muthanna prepares for the second battle of the bridge. The Muslims remain on their side of the bridge despite Shirin's urging against this stand. The Persians cross over to meet the Muslims. Shouting *Allahu Akbar*, the Muslims rush into battle.

Scene viii is an attempt to represent the battle on stage. The Muslim Mas'ud and Anas, a Christian of the tribe of Taghlib, die in the battle. The inclusion of Anas, who is a Christian in the Muslim army, is interesting in that Bakathir projects here his mixture of Arab and Muslim being one and the same thing. In cases where racial distinction will not cover, religion will cover it. In this case, Anas does not fight as Christian or as a Muslim, but as an Arab.

Kisra wa Qaysar, deals with the preparation of the Muslims against the newly forged friendship between Persia and Byzantium. In scene i, the Persians attribute their defeat in the second battle of the bridge to the lack of unity among their leaders. While discussions are going on as to what to do in this situation, messengers arrive from Byzantium bearing greetings from Qaysar. They come with suggestions of co-operation with Persia against the Muslims. The Persian queen is the only one who is against an alliance with Persia's erstwhile rival and bitter enemy. Her objection is cast aside and Qaysar's promise of co-operation is accepted.

In the scene ii, a Persian doctor recommended by Shirin, and therefore accepted as trustworthy by the Muslims, comes to treat al-Muthanna for the wounds he sustained at the battle of the bridge. Shirin tells the doctor to treat her brother-in-law well and then she will poison him later. This is the most positive intimation one gets that Shirin could in fact be a danger to the Muslims, being an enemy within their own ranks.

Scene iii is a meeting of the companions with 'Umar to decide whether the Caliph, in the face of the threat posed by Persian-Byzantine co-operation, should

lead the Muslim army himself. They decide that he should remain in Medina. Leaders are chosen and posted to the Syrian and Iraqi fronts. Rumour-mongering among the population of Medina is put down in a general prayer meeting addressed by ‘Umar.

In scene iv the Caliph’s messenger reaches Syria where Abu ‘Ubayda and Khalid bin al-Walid are in charge of the forces. He delivers the message that all the forces proceed immediately towards Byzantium. Khalid vetoes this order and tells the soldiers to stick to their original plan of withdrawing from the conquered lands back to Arabia. He accepts responsibility for his action.

Scene v shows the elders of Damascus pleading with Khalid not to withdraw the Muslim forces from Syria, since this would bring back to Syria the tyrannical domination of the Byzantine forces. In scene vi, al-Muthanna bin al-Haritha dies. A baby is born to one of the soldiers while al-Muthanna is dying. His last request is that the baby be named after him.

Abtal al-Yarmuk, the fourth volume of the series is important for what it says and shows of the humility and democratic attitudes of the leader of the young Muslim state. It is also important in that Bakathir emphasizes the readiness of the Muslims to die *fi sabi li Allah*.

In scene i, the Muslims under Khalid bin al-Walid face the Byzantine forces across a valley. Khalid is of the opinion that, if they wish to win the day, they will have to produce some kind of stratagem. They must also be patient. But his plans are presented as suspect through the attitude of the other leaders to them. A messenger is sent to acquaint the Caliph with Khalid’s plans. As usual, Khalid readily accepts responsibility for the consequences of his decisions and actions.

In scene iii the simplicity of the life style of these early Muslims and their leaders is shown. At the beginning of the scene Khalid makes final arrangements for battle; Abu ‘Ubayda is to be left to hold the camp while Khalid leads the

Muslims against the Byzantines. While he is still in his camp, sitting outside his tent, a messenger comes from the Byzantines. The messenger is surprised that the Muslim general be whom he is sent is the man seated casually in front of an ordinary tent. This messenger is so impressed that he immediately turns Muslim, and traitor to the Byzantines who sent him. The man, Jurja, would rather stay among the Muslims, but Abu ‘Ubayda and Khalid convince him that he would be more useful for the Muslims if he went back.

Scene iv gives an opportunity to see how the opponents of the Muslims prepare for the forthcoming battle. Jurja behaves in so pro-Muslim a fashion that his leaders suspect him of harbouring treason against the Byzantine cause. Though the Muslims are known to have a smaller army, this is no guarantee of victory for the Byzantines. Within the Byzantine army there is dissension with Byzantines opposed to Armenians and Arabs. The solidarity of the Muslims is a complete contrast to the situation in the Byzantine army.

In scene v, a message comes from Bahan, the Byzantine leader, suggesting a truce whereby both armies would withdraw, the Byzantines to Antioch and Caesarea, the Muslims to Damascus and Homs. Khalid rejects this. He chooses wing and section leaders and confirms his plans for battle. Women too are deployed. After some fighting, Khalid holds a hurried consultation with his officers and they reorganize their forces in the light of field operation. The arrows of the Armenian archers cause havoc amidst the Muslims. To make matters worse, there is a sudden change in the weather. Darkness thickens. Winds howl. The situation is confused. All the same, it is to the Muslims that Allah grants victory.

Turab min Ard Faris, is a play which deals with the ‘earth’ referred to in this title is the one of the Persian queens orders a slave to bring and which she gives to the leader of an Arab delegation. The delegation had come to present her

country with the usual alternatives of either becoming Muslim and paying taxes or facing war with the Muslim armies. To her, this giving of earth to the delegation is a symbol of their humiliation, and her courtiers laugh with her when the Arab leader accepts the proffered earth from her. After the delegation has left, Rustam comes in and explains to the queen and the courtiers that the Queen's gesture is a straightforward case of a symbolic handing-over of her country to the Arabs. Too late the queen sends soldiers to pursue the Arabs and recover Persia from their hands.

Scene i shows 'Umar worried at the possibility of bad news from the Syrian war front. He is short-tempered and unable to finish his morning prayers. *Qaysar* and his wife Martina in scene ii summon the priest Athanasius to the palace to defend himself against two charges; the first is that he had preached to people that the defeat of the Byzantine army at Yarmuk was a sign of God's anger at Qaysar for marrying Martina; the second is that he is preventing Qaysar from going to Constantinople so that the son of Martina, Harman Haraclunas, might be done out of what Martina considers his legitimate right to the throne.

In scene iii we are back in Medina where 'Umar intercedes for Tulayha who has killed two people. The Caliph guarantees safety for Tulayha before he knows what he has done. When he is informed of Tulayha's crime he does not go back on his word, although he makes it clear to the criminal that he does not like him. In scene iv, a marriage is being arranged between the widow of al-Muthanna, Salma, and Sa'd,[197] one of the leaders of the army. Al-Mu'anna and his wife, for ulterior motives, wish to marry her off to a particular army officer. The simplicity of the life style of the authorities in Medina is the focal point of the next scene. Jabala bin al-Ayham, the king of Ghassan, who has turned Muslim, comes to 'Umar. He pointedly demands to know what advantages

[197] This is *Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas*.

would accrue to him now that he has become a Muslim. He requests that he be made the ruler of the district between Basra and Damascus. ‘Umar gives him examples of rulers who have become Muslims and how these have had to reject the grandeur of their former positions and fight for Islam like everyone else.

Scene vi takes place in the court of Hirql. The true cross of Christ has arrived by sea. Sirjyus, who has been sent for, arrives Martina, still pushing the candidature of her son as heir to the throne, wants news from the capital. The action of scene vii has to do with the Persian earth episode described earlier on. In scene viii the Persian an earth arrives at ‘Umar’s house in Makkah. He is thankful to Allah.

Rustam deals with the leadership of the Persians under Rustam and his refusal to accept the Muslim’s offer of embracing Islam or paying taxes. This leads to war.

In scene i, Rustam is angry with his men for allowing their encampment to be destroyed by Muslim forces without as much as a token resistance. The reason, an old man enters to complain to Rustam of the menace of his soldiers to the villagers. They drank their wine without paying and they raped their wives and daughters. The old man points out that the Muslims do not treat people in such a brutal manner. Rustam threatens to punish all the soldiers involved, even if it is the whole army.

We learn in scene ii that Sa‘d does not discuss military matters with his wife Salma. When Salma complains of this, Sa’d says that Shirin has been passing information to the Persians. Salma is warned to be on her guard. When some army officers come to see Sa’d, Salma leaves them. The men prepare the tactics for the coming encounter with the Persians. In scene iii Rustam and his aides are expecting Zuhra bin al-Huwayya, the messenger of the Caliph. He comes alone,

and his discussion follows the usual pattern of alternatives. Rustam rejects becoming Muslim and paying taxes, and opts for war.

Scene iv shows Tulayha bin Khuwaylid al-Asadi, one of the Muslim officers, facing two problems from his wife. She complains that her husband leaves her alone to spend his evenings with Sa‘d. It was difficult to see what this scene contributes to the epic. It could be interpreted as showing the caution of the military officers against providing for the indiscretion of their wives.

In scene v, al-Mu’anna and his wife Shirin visit Sa‘d and Salma. Shirin warns Sa‘d of a certain Persian-born Muslim whom she suspects of being a spy for the Persians. Sa‘d, by way of answering her, wonders if the Muslim army is to be careful of relying too much on Persian-born Muslims. In scene vi Rustam is given the last change of becoming a Muslim and paying taxes, or facing a war with the Muslim forces. Once more he is emphatic in his rejection of Islam and of letting his country become a dependency of the Arabs by paying taxes to Makkah. The Persians are ordered to march across the bridge which separates them from the Muslims, and to attack them.

The foregoing has been an attempt to summarise the first six acts of ‘Umar. As epic drama it is a hopeless failure. Now here else in the writings of Bakathir does subject-matter influence the form so disastrously. This failure would seem to prove that a literary form cannot be imposed upon indefinitely by the subject-matter. The epic originally restricted to ‘narratives in verse of warlike adventures’,[198] has been stretched by writers who have used the epic form for dramatic writing and for prose works. A basic characteristic of all these is the dignity, the elaborateness, the heroic stature common both to subject-matter and to form. The subject-matter is vast and universal in dimension; the form is dignified and elaborate.

[198] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th Ed. Vol. ix, p. 681

4.6 The Impact of Shakespeare on Bakathir's Drama

Shakespeare, the great English poet and dramatist, influenced every generation of writers since his death and he continues to have an enormous impact on contemporary plays, movies and poems. Many authors have used phrases from Shakespeare's works as title for their own novels. There have been dozen of movies and adaptation loosely based on Shakespeare's work, including *The boys from Syracuse- The two gentlemen of Verona, Throne of Blood-Macbeth* and *West side story-Romeo and Juliet*.[199] As for the influence of Shakespeare in the Arab world, we can mention some examples of Arabic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays: *The al-Hamlet Summit* by Suleiman al-Basam from *Hamlet*, *The last day* by Ousama al-Rahbani from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Shyluk al-Jadid* by Bakathir from *The Merchant of Venice* which is the focus of this chapter.

Bakathir is a prolific Arab playwright whose effort to create enormous works proves his rich awareness not only of the Arabic and Islamic literature but also of the universal cultures and civilizations. His reputation takes place among the society after he writes *Wa Islamah* which has been rendered from Islamic culture. In poetry he is influenced by the great Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawqi, as a result he produces his first play *Humam aw fi Bilad al-Ahqaf.* Then he shifts his tendency from poetry to drama where he finds himself share some literary aspects with the great artful universal writer William Shakespeare who affects him deeply that he manages well in translating Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth night* as well as he reflects his talent of inspiration when he writes *Shyluk al-Jadid*. Bakathir has been influenced by Shakespeare in different ways- First, by translating *Romeo and Juliet* and *Twelfth Night*; Second, by using

[199] Nabilard, A. *Shakespeare's influence on other writers,* 2000, (Shakespeare online)

Shakespeare's method in dramatic manipulation as in *Ikhnatun and Nefertiti*; Third, by inspiration as in *Shyluk al-Jadid*. At the end, Bakathir's literary production comes from variety of sources inspired from Islam, Western culture and Pharaoh Culture.

Shyluk al-Jadid (The New Shylock)

The opening scene shows how the Zionists are not satisfied with what they have been given but they conspire against the Palestinians to pull lands under their feet. A part of this conspiracy is directed to the youth who are seduced to abandon their dignity, money, moralities, and most importantly lands. This seduction is played skilfully by some beautiful Jewish women. The play opens with the doubtful relationship between Abdullah al-Fayadh, as a symbol of the Palestinian (Arab) youth and Rachel, a beautiful Jewess, whose body is being used as a means to seduce Abdullah, ruin him morally, spiritually and financially. Thus, when Abdullah's uncle, Mr Kadhem, is not satisfied with the behaviour of his nephew and rebuked him, Abdullah leaves the house; and when Abdullah's engagement with the Egyptian girl, Nadia Fawzi is broken, then the Jews are sure their plan works well. Abdullah goes directly to his enemy, Shyluk, the Jewish moneylender and the head of the Zionist in Palestine, who is actually waiting for his victim. Abdullah signed a contract with Shyluk that the latter will lend Abdullah money under the guarantee of his lands. Later Abdullah has wasted his money carelessly and fails to repay the money on time, and legally Shyluk has the right to cut his lands from the Palestinian body.

Another kind of conflict is that between the Zionists and the anti-Zionist Jew who want to live peacefully with the Arab in Palestine; this leads to the enmity and the conflict within the Jews themselves.[200] This is exemplified in the play

[200] Al-Sufiany, N. *Shakespear's impact on Bakathir's Drama: A comparative study*, 1994. P. 229

through the sour relationship between Shyluk and Abraham. As a result, all these troubles cause the conflicts to come to their climax,[201] and the Palestinians come to the decision that the only way to restore their lost land is the revolution. Kadhem al-Fayadh with a group of patriotic Palestinians (Muslims and Christians) decide to join the warriors, even Abdullah joins them after losing all his lands and money. In the last act of the play, the Jews put the plans to win their case and 'to block all the ways in front of the Palestinians'[202]. There are several meetings in the dark between Shyluk and his terrorist groups to evaluate their current position and plan for the coming period. They decide to spread chaos and terrorism everywhere not only in Palestine, to show their case to the west portraying the Arab as terrorists.

Bakathir has divided this play into two sections: the *problem* and the *solution*. He invents a wise but imaginative solution to oppose the born state of the Jews in Palestine. He aims at warning Arab and awakening them from their deep sleep to encounter that terrible danger which starts growing on a dear part of their own nation. In this part, he imitates most events in the trial scene from the play of Shakespeare *The Merchant of Venice*, but he adds his touch and adapts it according to his view and his big problem; Palestine matter. This part of the play begins with a scene in a court in al-Quds.

In the court, the jury which consists of twelve international judges and the representatives of the sides involved in this case; General Surds of the UK, Faisal of Arab League, Shyluk of the Zionist Jews with his assistant, Cohen, Mikail Jad of Palestine with his assistant Abdullah al-Fayadh and Abraham of the anti-Zionist Jews. As the discussions begin, there are two things that recall

[201] Orabi, M. *Shylock al-Zadeed: Al-moghamarahwa al-hatia al-tarikhia,* Islamic literature journal, no. 10

[202] Al-Tamami, M.N, Basamad, O.M, *The Impact of Shakespeare on Ali Ahmad Bakatheer: An Analytical Study of Shylock al-Jadid,* Hadramout University, 2012, p. 34

Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*; the first is the remark of Jabotinsky:" We want our pound of flesh", and the name of Shyluk who represents the new extremist trend in Judaism: Zionism. Also, the way used to solve the problem between Shyluk and Antonio as well as the differences between Shyluk of Shakespeare and the new Shyluk are included in the discussions.[203] In *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio is forced to sign the contract with Shyluk to provide his dear friend, Bassanio, with money in spite of the deep enmity between them. Antonio puts himself under the mercy of the Jew, and then Surds warns Shyluk, the new, against the fate of his predecessor with the implication that the former is going to be defeated. Shyluk, on his side, refuses all these comparisons under the excuse that Shylock of Venice is just the portrayal of the "sick imagination of Shakespeare"[204]. He claims that the true Jew will never be defeated in such a way he will get his right not by killing Antonio but by enslaving the man alleging that since he owns the part, he owns the whole! The implication here is fearful for Shyluk means that the Zionists will not be satisfied by Palestine. They want the whole Arab body; not only "to cut out Palestine, the heart of Arab world"[205] but also to spread their alleged state throughout the whole Middle East. Cohen, the assistant of Shyluk in the court, alleges that the Jews have the religious and historical right in Palestine according to their holy books: the Old Testament. This false justification is rejected by the fact that the Jews are cursed in the New Testament and in the holy Quran.

At this point, Faisal finds it suitable to start arguing. First, he assures the Jews that "Palestine will not be enough for them all and it will be abnormal to be

[203] Al-Tamami, M.N, Basamad, op.cit., pp. 35-36

[204] Ibid, p. 36

[205] Ibid, p. 36

scattered in different countries while they have one".[206] Then he suggests that they ask the United Nations to guarantee their rights in the countries where they live or ask for a bigger area like Australia. The Jews turn deaf ears to these suggestions! As their habit, they try to accuse the UK of being partial with Arab people against them by supporting and acknowledging Arab League of States, the thing that causes unrest for the Zionists from the first part.

Then Bakathir turns to another line that coincides with and supports the main line of the play. The ring story between Nadia and Abdullah is similar to that of Shakespeare between Portia and Bassanio. Nadia Fawzi who attends the court in disguise comes from Egypt to Jerusalem to save Palestine, like Portia who comes from Belmont to save Venice from the Jew in both cases. Here Bakathir highlights the fact that Arab countries are one; therefore, the problem and suffering of one is that of all.[207] Faisal asks Abdullah to give him Nadia's engagement ring pretending that he is going to marry her and it will be against the traditions for Abdullah to keep her ring. Abdullah tries not to part with the ring because it reminds him of his mistakes and sins and motivates him more to expiate. However, he gives the ring to Faisal finally. This is actually a test imposed by Nadia to check Abdullah's true repentance. Fortunately, he succeeds. In this act, the jury puts some main points to control the discussions and to find reconciliation that suit each side. These terms are, first, Palestine is the rightful property of the Arab, the Jews claim their right in it after Balfour Declaration and each insists on its right; second, all the attempts of the mandated country to find compromises fail; third, the issue of Palestine is universal and it must be solved without suspension for World Peace.[208] Bakathir puts these terms

[206] Al-Tamami & Basamad, op.cit., p. 37

[207] Ibid. p. 37

[208] Ibid. 38

to show that the Palestinians have the main right in their land; however, they are ready to live in peace with the Jews. This is similar to the problem of Antonio and Shyluk in *The Merchant of Venice.*

Then he renews the offer of establishing the Jewish state in Australia but it is also refused by the Jews. The judge tries to display all the dangers of establishing the Zionist being in the heart of Arab world threatening the Jews of the economic disaster that might fall upon their heads later, the thing that is encountered with total indifference by the Jews as usual. When all his tries fail, the judge gives the chance to Faisal to try. Faisal starts summarizing the main points discussed previously. He assures the attendants that as being a part of Arab world, any decision about Palestine must be taken by all Arab, and Faisal, on behalf of them all, declares that Arab are ready to cede Palestine to the Jew, but under some conditions: "first, Israel must be independent from the mandate; second, Arab are not obliged to normalize their relationships with the Jew; third, all the Jew must go to Palestine and all Arab must leave it".[209] Actually, this causes a shock for all attendants except Shyluk. However, Faisal warns them that this is not good for them in the long term. This is misunderstood by Shyluk as threaten that Arab are going to fight them, and he boasts having all kinds of modern weapons and ready to fight. This indicates the extent of the Jews' danger in the area and that they are ready to break all barriers to reach their illegitimate goals. Then Faisal clarifies his warnings which are the same as those of the judge; the economic disaster that will fall on them. This implies warning the Jews that they should not accept this offer. This recalls to the minds Shakespeare's play in the trial scene. Shyluk of Venice is given chances to cancel the bond. The noticeable point in this act is that Shyluk appears stronger and victorious and this is indicated through his speech and through his

[209] Al-Tamami, M.N, Basamad, op.cit., p. 39

indifference to the public opinion, i.e., they will do anything (even immoral!) to get their alleged rights.

Then Nadia and Abdullah are engaged again. This also may reflect that the unity of Arab, as that of Nadia and Abdullah, is crucial in the coming period, i.e., when the Jews occupy Palestine, to defeat and isolate the foreign Zionist being. Here Bakathir reflects his belief that Arab will be united one day. The idea of Nadia who comes in disguise as Faisal instead of her uncle the doctor of law, Mr. Arabi Basha, is like that of Portia who enters Venice court as Dr. Balthasar, who comes on behalf of the sick Dr. Bellario. The idea might be considered, at first, as mere interpretation by Bakathir. However, its importance is deep and twofold: first, Nadia's presence and her role, though in disguise, prove the abilities of Arab women and that they are not less in cleverness and skills than the Western ones. This recalls to our minds **(**highlights the contrast with) the role of Jewish women represented by Rachel; second, the idea of disguise itself highlights the problem of accepting or believing in women abilities which is universal. In all, every single incident from *The Merchant of Venice* is employed skilfully by Bakathir to serve his goal. In the previous act, Bakathir predicts that Israel will not stand in Palestine and they will regret sooner or later. This shows that Bakathir is acquainted with the historical, political, social and even the psychological situation of the Jews, and this makes him sure that their plans will be destroyed.

In the act three, after seven years of the last one, the court is held again with the same attendants. There are two changes: the first is the presence of Arabi Basha as a member of the jury and the second is that Nadia comes without disguise as Abdulla's wife and Faisal's mother. This session is held under the request of the Zionists who suffer a lot and their plans fail in Palestine, so they come for help and assistance to save them from that miserable situation;

therefore, they plead for mercy. There are voices that insist on sentencing the Zionists in the same way of sentencing Shyluk of Venice, because these are "two cases in which the crime is the almost the same with that of Palestine to be more serious because it is against a whole nation, the Palestinians, not one person, Antonio".[210]This means that they must be denied of the price they have alleged to pay to get Balfour Declaration. Also all their wealth must be confiscated and divided between the Palestinians and World Peace Organizations, and they must pay to compensate the losses of the Palestinians and to build al-Quds. Furthermore, the leaders of the Zionists must be killed, and the Jews must convert to Christianity**.** Arabi Basha refuses these last two punishments totally because they are against Islamic teachings and Arab traditions saying: "since we follow the way of Shakespeare, we have to forgive them"[211]

The creativity of Bakathir is reflected clearly through his deep knowledge of different cultures and civilization and how he inspired other's ideas and portrays them according to his purposes in order to address issues of his society and to find a typical solution for them.

[210] Juma'a, N. *The Image of Jewish character in Ali Ahmed Bakathir's plays,* 2003, p. 105

[211] Bakathir, A.A. *Shyluk al-Jadid,* Maktabti Misr, Cairo, 1944. P. 250