CHAPTER- 2

Verse drama in modern Arabic literature origin and development.

Verse drama

Verse drama is any drama written as verse to be spoken; another possible general term is poetic drama. In poetic drama the dialogue is written in verse, which in English usually means blank verse. (Blank verse consists of lines of iambic pentameter which are unrhymed) and in French is the twelve syllables lines called an Alexandrine. For a very long period verse drama was the dominant form of drama in Europe and was also important in non-European culture. Greek tragedy and Racine’s plays are written in verse, as is almost all of Shakespeare’s drama and Goethe’s Faust.

Verse drama is particularly associated with the seriousness of tragedy, providing an artistic reason to write in this form, as well as the practical one that verse lines are easier for the actors to memories exactly.

Before discussing Arabic verse drama we have to know Arabic drama properly. Because both are co related with each other. Actually it is a mix combination of drama and poetry.

Drama and Arabic drama :

The theoretical beginnings of the European dramatic tradition which Idris is confronting in his comments are generally agreed to be found in the Poetics of Aristotle where he tells his readers that drama is based in the principle of
'representation' (mimesis), a process that involves impersonation. An expansion, indeed a corollary, of this classic definition is represented by the notion that, in order to fulfill its dramatic function to the full, a play needs to be acted, performed; such a process requires a place where the drama may be presented a theatre of one kind or another and an audience who will engage themselves in the performance with both their eyes and ears. For the most part, the 'action' will involve actors performing on stage by using gestures and dialogue as means of representing the deeds and emotions of characters in order to 'show' the import of the play being presented.

Within the context of that broad concept known as society the history of drama shows that the genre has managed to fulfill a number of functions, including those of liturgy, entertainment, and education. In origin the genre was connected to religious or communal festivals, as in the case of much Greek and Roman drama. In a more popular vein, the drama was co-opted by medieval Christianity through the often lengthy cycles of plays recorded in the archives of such English cities as Chester, Wakefield, and York, or in the Oberammergau Passion play. Above all, the very fact that drama is the most public of all literary genres, a performance, an act of impersonation and showing in front of an audience, has also made it in many, if not most, cultures and historical periods the focus of political oversight - in a word, censorship.

Within the Western tradition of drama the performance element gravitates towards the formalities and conventions of the theatre as structure, something that led Brecht to frame part of his own dramatic theory in terms of the effect of the theatre's 'walls' on audience response to the performance. In the same way
the script of the play has assumed the status of a text. The works of Sophocles, Racine, Shakespeare, Goethe, Pirandello, and Chekhov are regarded as major contributions to the literary heritage and have joined the list of canonical works of Western culture, a status confirmed in numerous ways, not least by their presence on the reading lists of national school curricula.

European travelers have provided us with accounts of these types of public performance from all parts of the Middle East; in certain areas, the genre of shadow play has lasted well into the twentieth century. Alongside these accounts we encounter - particularly during the period of Western colonial expansion into the region - descriptions of performances by Western troupes for residents from European countries and the local cultural elite who could, at least partially, understand performances in one or other European language. Thus, the Egyptian historian, `Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, apparently a somewhat bemused member of the audience, gives us his own account of a performance in 1800 by a French troupe during the French occupation that followed Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798.

Maran al-Naqqash (d. 1855), a member of a prosperous family of Lebanese businessmen, returned from a visit to Italy in 1847 and put on a performance of his play, *Al-Bakhil* (The Miser), in his own home in the following year. As the title suggests, the theme of the play shares much in common with Moliere's play of the same name, but the script was no mere slavish copy. The majority, perhaps all, of the play was sung, in that, to cite al-Naqqash, the presence of singing would make the new genre more palatable to its audience. This linkage between dramatic performances and music has
remained a predominant feature of much modern Arabic drama. Spurred on by the success of his initial experiment al-Naqqash adapted a tale from the Thousand and One Nights for his second and most successful play, *Abu al-Hasan al-mughaffal aw Harun al-Rashid* (Abu al-Hasan the Simpleton or Harun al-Rashid, 1849-50).

Al-Naqqash had to obtain a decree from the Ottoman authorities before he could perform plays in his home. Just how sensitive the situation was can be illustrated by the career of another pioneer, the Syrian dramatist, actor, and troupe manager, Abu Khalil al-Qabbani (d. 1902). In the early 1870s he was encouraged by the Ottoman governor, Subhi Pasha, and later by Midhat Pasha (d. 1883), the famous reformer, to put on some plays - in particular yet another piece inspired by the tales of Harun al-Rashid to be found in the Thousand and One Nights. The conservative religious establishment in Damascus, already deeply suspicious of the permissibility and probity of this new medium, was aroused to a fury by the appearance on stage of Harun al-Rashid the caliph in disguise and obtained a decree from Istanbul ordering the theatre to close. In 1884 al-Qabbani emulated the al-Naqqash family by moving his troupe to Egypt. There he enjoyed a very fruitful two decades of work, directing numerous plays by himself and others until his theatre was burned down in an act of arson in 1900.

The Egypt to which the troupes of al-Naqqash and al-Qabbani traveled provided a much more conducive atmosphere for these and other pioneers in Arabic drama. The Khedive Isma‘il, who had ruled the country since 1863, had set himself to replicate within Egyptian society as many aspects of Western
culture as possible. The city of Cairo had been extended to the banks of the Nile, and where this new city adjoined the old, a large square had been opened up to accommodate the new Cairo Opera House. Just half a mile from the site of the opera house, foreign acting troupes regularly performed plays on an open-air stage in the newly refurbished Ezbekiyya Gardens. It was among these troupes that another pioneer of modern Arabic drama, Ya`qub Sannu` (d. 1912), obtained his early practical experience in the theatre.

Like al-Naqqash, Sannu` had previously encountered the genre at first hand in Europe. Born into an Egyptian Jewish family, he had been sent to further his education in Liverno, Italy. In the early 1870s he determined to gather together a troupe of actors to perform in Arabic on stage. Details of the particular plays have not come down to us, but they appear to have combined dialogues with episodes of music and singing in much the same way as al-Naqqash had done, although in Sannu's case the dialogue was composed in the colloquial dialect of Cairo something that marks an important shift in the communication between stage and audience. News of these performances attracted the Khedives's attention, and Sannu` was invited to perform a set of plays before a large and prestigious audience in the Khedive's private theatre in Qasr al-Nil. The plays presented on this occasion were all relatively brief comedies, and initially amused the ruler, until, that is, he realized that he himself appeared to be the butt of some of the humor. In spite of warnings, Sannu` seems to have been unwilling to tone down his satirical attacks, and his theatre was closed down in 1872; the Khedive exiled him in 1878.
Within the Egyptian context, mention must also be made of another important figure, Muhammad `Uthman Jalal (d. 1894), who managed to produce a remarkably accomplished transformation of Moliere's Tartuffe into an Egyptian version, *Al-Shaykh Matluf*, published in 1873 but not performed on stage till 1912. What is so important about this and other translation efforts by Jalal (including three other plays by Moliere published in 1889) was not merely the authenticity of the resulting texts couched in the Arabic poetic genre of zajal and the colloquial level of language into which the original text was transposed, but also the highly successful process whereby the characters and scenario were 'Egyptians'.

As the brief account above makes clear, Egyptian audiences 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. 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.

**Birth of Arabic verse drama:**

Before presenting some definitions of poetic drama, we have to state clearly the difference between the word ‘verse’ and ‘poetic’ which are frequently used in order to introduce specific meaning. The word ‘verse’ is
mainly linked to metrical form; whereas the word ‘poetic’ in modern literature is not necessarily connected with meter. Besides, the word ‘poetic’, according to Jones, means certain themes or lyrical and musical style. In this concern, the poetic is an attribute whereas verse is a technical form.

Poetic drama is not poetry itself but the inability of poets to use poetry in a play.

The relation between verse and drama remained organic and unified through many experiments in various stages of time. If Auden believes that poetic dramas are truer to human nature than prose plays, Eliot favours the inclusion of both verse and prose particularly in his famous play Murder in the Cathedral (1935). Eliot seems to hold a part of revolt and a part of tradition because the language is only one manifestation of the original image of the play conceived in his mind.

We can finally point out that poetic drama is still rich independent genre despite the use of some prosaic forms of it. Poetry therefore reconciles extensively with poetic prose which serves the embodiment of this art through various evocative devices such as imagery, metaphor and rhythm.

At the very beginning some neo-classical poets were started writing verse drama, a genre totally unknown to their predecessors. This was due, at least in part, to the growing popularity, in the decades of the nineteenth century, of theatrical troupes. Many of these troupes were staging semi-operatic plays, whose texts combined prose and poetry. Although Egypt was teeming with such dramatic activity at the turn of the century, the beginnings of Arabic drama,
including versified plays, are to be found in Lebanon. As early as 1876 we find a play by Khalil al-Yaziji entitled *al-Muruah wal-wafa* written entirely in verse. This play, which deals with the manners and custom of pre-Islamic Arabs, is noteworthy in that its verses and even its hemistiches are often divided between two or more speakers. This practice facilitated the use of classical Arabic verse on stage and was to become the hallmark of the verse dramas of Shawqi and his followers.

Verse drama was introduced in modern Arabic literature through the works of the prince of poets, Ahmad Shawqi. The culmination of the neo-classical verse drama is the five versified plays written by Shawqi in the last two decades of his life. In fact, he had made an attempt to write a verse play as early as 1893, when he published the first version of his *Ali-Bey al-Kabir*, however he completely revised this play.

Ahmad Shawqi was a prolific poet, he has written more than any of his successive writers in the field of verse drama and poetry. He is the pioneer of modern Arabic verse dramas. In fact he is a person who paved the way for others to write dramas in verse form. Before him Marun Al-Naqqash and his nephew Salim and al-Qabbani also included works in verse or in a mixture of verse and prose, but it remained as like rhyming prose. Their verse however was of an indifferent quality and was often meant only to be sung on the stage. Although it has been shown that his first play *al-Bakhil* (The Miser 1847), is an original work and not an adaptation of Moliere, Marun al-Naqqash is in general, clearly influenced by the French writer.
It was commonly accepted that Shawqi was under the influence mainly Racine and Corneille as well as Shakespeare. His secret passion, the theatre was thus given a powerful impetus. Ahmad Shawqi, who wrote within the classical Arabic tradition, turned to writing verse drama during the last four years of his life (1928-32) helped to render drama an acceptable form of literature. He had written his first poetic play in Paris in 1893 when he was studying in France, under the title of *Ali Bey al-Kabir* (Ali Bey the Great). By this play Shawqi did not receive sufficient encouragement from his patron to enable him to continue along that way. But after few years he completely revised his play, republishing it in 1932 under the same title.

Shawqi wrote seven plays according to M.M. Badawi, Alen Roger, V.P. Abdul Hameed and many more. Among them three are on Egyptian historical subjects-

(i) *Masra Kilyubatra* (The Fall of Cleopatra, 1929)

(ii) *Qambiz* (Cymbyses, 1931)


Three more on ancient Arab themes-

(i) *Majnun Layla* (The Mad Lover of Layla, 1931)

(ii) *Antara* (Antara, 1932)

(iii) *Amirat al-Andalus* (Princess of Andalusia, 1932).

The seventh was a verse comedy, *Al-Sitt Huda* (Lady Huda 1890). Besides these one more comedy verse drama *Al-Bakhila* (The misery women
1907) which was also written by Ahmed Shawqi. But nobody mentioned anything about this play. This was also a master piece of Ahmed Shawqi. That means Ahmad Shawqi did not only wrote one comedy play but also wrote two comedy verse plays in his life.

**Development of Arabic verse dramas:**

The history of Arabic drama is still controversial. But it is known that it began around the middle of the nineteenth century, more specifically in 1847. Arabic drama can therefore be seen through two main periods: the first is before the mid 19th century including pre and post Islamic period. The second is after it.

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, a notable change in drama took place. Three main playwrights tended to present dramatic representations: the Lebanese Marum Al-Naqqash (1817-1855), the Syrian Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani (1833-1902) and the Egyptian Yaqub Sannu (1839-1912). The three playwrights were rather interested in adaptation or Arabization of the play and translation. They tried mainly to adapt dramas by Moliere and Racine and present them according to the taste of the Arab audience.

Al-Naqqash’s first play was in verse form. Various lyrical poetry was involved in his style whereas his technique in writing drama lacked some dramatic conventions. Al-Naqqash’s speeches indeed were rather narrative and prosaic. He also varied his speeches with some comical or satirical requirements and with colloquial language and dialect:
The dialogue is so rich and musical that can be sung. Despite all the gaps in language, Al-Naqqash established an important attempt of forming an independent Arab theatre.

The second dramatist is Abu Khalil al-Qabbani (b.1833). The Syrian playwright seems to deal with rather Arabic tradition in his plays. He shared the two playwrights, Naqqash and Sannu, the interest in adapting and translating plays. He performed more than fifteen plays including translated plays by European dramatists as Corneille and Racine.

Al-Qabbani’s first play was Nakir al-Jamil (The Ungrateful Man) (1870). He was stressing on some historical characters as the poet Antarah Bin Shaddad (ca.525-615) or on modified figures of past stories from Alif Layla wa Layla (The Thousand and One Night). His next play was Hiyal al-Nisa (The Trickeries of Women) (1871) which based on European plays.

The third famous playwright was Yaqub Sannu (b.1839). The Egyptian dramatist studied music and painting. During his various visits to Europe, he
learned many languages such as French, Spanish, Italian and English. He was very much interested in journalism and his satirical style was well known. Some of his newspapers that he established were “ابو نضارة” and “ابو زمراء” in full caricatures.

Sannu tackled in his plays some political themes in comic sense which did not only cause his theatre to be closed but to be exiled for satirical issues. Most of his themes deal with the conflict between the simple farmer and cruel rulers. His characters are drawn from common people who represent classes of people rather than individuals. Some of his representatives are of two types ‘المحاورات’ and ‘الألعاب’ which contain specific episodes of social and political contents.

In his dialect he affected the audience and created intensive scene of how people are deceived and badly treated by the Turkish rulers in Egypt.

Consequently, the three playwrights ‘Naqqash’, ‘al-Qabbani’ and ‘Sannu’ formed important foundation of Arabic drama though they lacked some depth and dramatic conventions in their plays. In addition, they all dealt with didactic and moral function of drama. Their plays also held a mixture of verse and rhyming prose using classical style with spoken terms and dialect. Despite this, they gave rich sources of inspiration for next Arab playwrights.

In the beginning of the twentieth century the classical verse line in Arabic poetry remained with its two hemistiches (Sadr and Ajiz) including the lyrical mode of expression. Various poets wrote in this form as Al-Yaziji who wrote his verse play *al-Muruwah wal wafa*(1884).
One brilliant poet insisted on achieving distinguished verse plays in developed language. He was the Egyptian poet ‘Ahmad Shawqi’ who acquired and enriched his dramatic experience through frequent visits to some European countries. Obviously Shawqi responded to different Shakespearean plays and to Corneille. The Arabic famous critic M. Mandur says that Shawqi was a tremendous operatic dramatist. He achieved clear success in refreshing his traditional subjects as in his play *Masra Kiyubatra* 1929 (Murder of Cleopatra) though it rather echoed Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra. We have to mention that Shawqi’s plays imposed certain traditions on other dramatists, in verse form, in choosing historical characters or in including much lyrical poetry to express tragic situations:

Like in his play *Masra Kliyubatra* (the death of Cleopatra)-

`كاتبة` مكاتب قيس ندذب
ولا تبرح القصر، أهلك أسي

`انطونيو` 
ذريني اعبي للقتال كاتاني
فلي في غد شبانا في البر والبحر
ذريني أهيب للأحاديث في غد
فان غدا يوم سبقي على الدهر
ذريني أزد تاجيك غار وقائعي
وأقرن بثعباني جلالهما نسري
ولست آخاف الدار عين وانما
أخاف فجوات الخيانة والغدر
As a lyricist, Shawqi’s images in his speeches are carefully portrayed and his sentences are well expressed whereas rhyme seemed artificial in some of his lines:

أنتوني (الأخيل)

في قائد الاستول هل من مكيدة

In fact, Shawqi’s scenes lacked some dramatic conventions whereas the main heroes of his verse plays were mostly kings, leaders and lovers. The playwright’s descriptive style dominated his classical form of poetry. In addition, his play Majnun Layla (The Mad Lover of Layla 1931) echoes Romeo and Juliet in its romantic love story, in the suffering and death of his characters. As a matter of fact, Shawqi represented the bridge between the nineteenth century verse drama and the next dramatic experimentation in the sixtieth of the twentieth century.

The popular traditions of farcical comedy and melodrama and the performance of translated versions of European dramatic masterpieces, there still remained a void within which an indigenous tradition of serious drama could develop. Al-Hakim's desire to replicate the European tradition was thus timely in the extreme, and it is for that reason that the publication and
performance of his play, *Ahl al-Kahf* (The People of the Cave, 1933) is such a significant event in Egyptian drama.

Though Ahmed Shawqi introduced verse drama in modern Arabic literature, but his contemporary writers also help him to development it and successfully occupied an important position in the history of Arabic drama literature. The followers like Aziz Abaza, Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi, Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir and salah Abd al-sabar etc. were following Shawqi’s writing skill, theme, and style, all everything. But Ahmad Shawqi wrote more than any of his successive writers; it may be poetry or verse drama.

Concerning the form of language, new generation of poets followed nearly the same technique of Shawqi especially Aziz Abada and Ali Amhed Ba-kathir who progressively used certain dramatic devices as soliloquies and monologues. The impact of the European drama was significantly important on Ali Ahmed Ba-Kathir who intended to escape out of the classical hemistiches of Arabic poetry. If Aziz Abada wrote an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar, Ba-Kathir intendedly composed his famous *Akhnatun and Nafartiti* (1938) depending on Egyptian historical characters. He called for using what is called the pure Arabic meters in addition to abandoning the single repeated rhyme in favor of many rhymes. He used long and short tensile sentences as well.

**Aziz Abaza**:

Born on August 13, 1898, at a country village in Al- Sharqiya Governorate, he joined the School of Law, where he graduated in
Successively he works as a lawyer, member of the General Prosecution, Member of Parliament, Director of Identification Department, Ministry of Interior (1923) and Deputy-Governor of Al-Behaira (1935). In 1939, he was the Governor of Al-Qalyoubiya and Al-Fayoum and Governor of the Canal Zone Region. Member of the Senate (1947). Member of the Arabic Language Academy, the Supreme Council for the Welfare of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, and correspondent member of the Iraqi Science Academy. He was granted State Award of Appreciation (1965).

He was the only one who followed in the footsteps of Shawqi. Abaza wrote eight poetic dramas in his life. They are – Qays wa Lubna (Qays and Lubna), al- Abbasa (1947), Al-Nasir (1949), Shajarat al- Durr (1951), Ghurub al-Shams (Sunset 1952), Qafilat al-Nur (The Caravan of Light, 1959) and Awraq al-Kharif (Autumn Leaves, 1957) and Zahra (1969). Although poetic drama was a new genre to Arabic Literature, Abaza proved an extraordinary ability at satisfying the essential dramatic prerequisites, in terms of rendering, action and characterization, while mentioning a high level of poetic language. He insisted on the use of Classical Arabic in order to enable all Arabs with their varying dialects to enjoy his plays.

Abaza published his first poetic drama by his deep grief over the loss of his wife. Qays wa Lubna was deals with a theme similar to that Shawqi’s Majnun Layla. Here Abaza changed the starting portion as Qays Ibn Dhurayh’s love for Lubna, was able to marry, but was later 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 save his dynasty as he is the only son. Qays finally gives in, but he tried again and again and at last his success to convince Lubna’s second husband to divorce her, and he is once more reunited with the woman he loves. In the play of Shawqi, he shows the ultimate grief but Abaza end the play with a happy ending. Both the writers want to show the inner pain of Egyptian woman’s life.

*Al-Abbasa* (1947) was a historical drama deals with tragedy. The subject matter was tragic love of Harun al-Rashid’s sister, al- Abbasa’s love for his friend and minister. This was a social drama mixed with political issues. As like *Al-Abbasa*,

*Al-Nasir* (1949) is about the reign of the Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Rahman al- Nasir (912-961) in Andalusia, its glory and achievements as well as its corruption at the court, the conflict between his two ambitious sons and love and violence, intrigues and betrayals by female slaves.

*Shajarat al-Durr* (1951) deals roughly with the same period as Ibrahim Ramzi’s the reign of the astute Queen of Egypt, in the thirteenth century, and her struggle to maintain her power. It was clearly showed by Abaza, in that period women were suffered she may be a slave or Queen. They always fight for their rights.

*Gurub al-Sams* (1952) depict the collapse of the Muslim empire in Spain, due to moral corruption and political disintegration. Abaza wants to support as well as inspired Muslims by his writings. Abaza derived his inspiration from the Arabia Nights story of Shahrazad.
*Qafilat al-Nur* (1959) is set in the early days of Islam with the struggles of the first secret converts in the province of Hira against the Persian Empire. This drama is full of adventure and love, violence and vengeance, intrigues and treacheries. By this type of dramas we can understand the present condition of that period. These poetic dramas, with all the moving, lyrical poetry some of them contain, cannot in all fairness be described as constituting any real advance on Shawqi’s work. In all these plays Abaza also shows the same basic dramatic weakness as Shawqi.

Abaza introduce his last two verse dramas with interesting attempts to treat modern subjects in verse, *Awraq al-Kharif* (1957) and *Zahara* (1969). Both are domestic love dramas: in the former a woman, after twenty years of marriage, meets again the man she used to love but was not allowed to marry, by her guardian uncle, because of his poverty.

**Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sharqawi:**

The best result of such new change was the birth of real poetic drama by an Egyptian poet dramatist ‘Abdul Rahman Al-Sharqawi’ who wrote in flexible speeches some successful plays in modern blank verse such as *Masat Jamila*, 1962 (The Tragedy of Jamla), *Al-Fata Mihran*, 1966 (The Young Mihran), *Al-Hussein Thairan wa Shaidan*, 1969 (Al-Hussein the Revolutionary and Martyr), *Watani Akka*, 1970 (Acre, my Homeland) and *Salah al-Din, al-Nasar al-Ahmar*, 1976 (Saladin, the Red Eagle)

Al-Sharqawi’s plays were rather influenced by Eliot and other French dramatists. But he followed the right beginning in applying the Aristotelian
conventions of drama especially in his play *Al-Fata Mihran*. It actually included some theatrical devices though his characters lack formality.

The *Masat Jamila* is a modern ‘chronicle’ play of inordinate length. In this drama Al-Sharqawi gives a panoramic picture of the Algerian resistance against the French, giving expression to his Arab nationalist and socialist sentiments: the heroes, although capable of heroic deeds, are painted as ordinary men and women, inspired by their great ideal of independence. The tragedy of Jamila contains many moving scenes, and much dramatic suspense, but unfortunately it lacks essential requirement of drama, namely dramatic structure or plot. Al-Sharqawi command of this new verse form, been more selective in his material and concentrated on one or two themes in half the length of his work, he would have produced a very good.

*Al-Fata Mahran* has the same revolutionary content as Jamila, although the struggle in it is not against a foreign army of occupation, but against the tyranny of the local Mamluk Prince. Because of its excessive length, the author places between square brackets bits of the dialogue which he recommends should be omitted from stage performance, due to lack of time. It is set in fifteenth-century Mamluk Egypt and depicts the struggle and subsequent downfall of Mahran, a popular heroic figure, a cross between a medieval knight and Robin Hood, who stole from the rich to give to the poor and with the help of his supporters acted as the watchdog for the interests of the poor and needy. Although the hero dies and the prince succeeds in his diabolic ambitions to become Sultan by plotting with the external enemy to have his predecessor
murdered, the play ends on a note of hope for the future and the unshakeable faith in the common people.

*Al-Husayn Thairan wa Shahidan* (al-Husayn, Revolutionary and Martyr, 1969): it consists of two plays or parts, each of which is the size of Mahrān. It relates in great detail the events leading up to the martyrdom in 680 of the Prophet’s grandson, whose unsuccessful rebellion against the Umayyad rulers and ill-fated struggle for justice are still commemorated annually by the Shiite Muslims. Al-Sharqawi is unrepentant about the extraordinary length of his plays, claiming that it is dictated by the nature of his subject and demanding that his plays should be judged not by traditional criteria of drama but by different, new rules of dramatic aesthetics.

*Watani Akka like Jamila* it deals with a modern subject: namely the Palestinian resistance against Israel and the struggle for justice against powerful forces of oppression and deceit in the wake of the Arab defeat in the war of June 1967. It is basically a propaganda play, glorifying the Arab resistance and positive action instead of passive suffering. As drama, despite some interesting features, such as its use of flashback, it is rather disappointing: it is too diffuse and repetitive and lacks a clear structure or plot: its message is stated far too directly and its characters are mere types without much complexity or psychological depth. The poetry, much of which is lyrical and declamatory, does not seem to arise organically from the nature of the action, but is often superimposed upon it and therefore does not seem to add an extra dimension to the play.
Salah al-Din, al-Nasr al-Ahmar (Saladin, The Red Eagle, 1976) is vaguely set in the times of Saladin and the Crusades. It is marathon work, consisting of two plays, al-Nasr wal-Ghirban (The Eagle and The Crows) and al-Nasr bwa Qalb al-Asad (The Eagle and The Lionheart): the first ends at the time when Saladin became Sultan of Egypt and the second with the conclusion of peace between him and Richard and Lionheart. Saladin is painted as the champion of the people against all forms of oppression, and in his fight against the Crusaders, as the embodiment of all the noble ideas of chivalry inspired by his Islamic faith. In his brotherhood of men to all his people, especially the simple folk such as the shepherd and the woodcutter. Like the other plays, Saladin contains many stirring incidents, several conflicts, but its excessive length, its episodic form, its novelistic technique of showing several long scenes taking place simultaneously, makes it suffer from a serious structural defect, on account of al-Sharqawi’s growing neglect of plot and his excessive self-indulgence and lack of dramatic discipline. In fact al-Sharqawi does not seem to have advanced much beyond his first play, Jamila.

Ali Ahmed Ba-kathir:

Ali Ahmad Bakathir was one of Egypt's most famous playwrights during the forties and fifties. He was a great author and poet. He was born on 21st December 1910 in Surabaya city in Indonesia from two Arabic parents from Hadramwt. On 5th April 1920; when he was ten years old; his father traveled with his to Siyoon city in Hadramwt to be raised in an Arabic and Islamic way with his brothers and sisters. He got his education in The Scientific Renaissance School. He has been taught Arabic and Islamic law by many great sheikhs such
as his uncle the judge, poet, linguistic and grammatical Mohamed Bakathir. When he was thirteen years old, he started writing poetry. He then taught in the same school, The Scientific Renaissance School, and he became its manager while he was in his twentieth. While he hails from Indonesia, he is originally from Hadramout in Southern Yemen. A large Arab community of traders from Hadramout in South Yemen had immigrated to Indonesia and settled there for a very long time. It was thanks to these traders that Islam was spread in those far away lands. Among his famous plays one could mention "The Caliph's Jester" which was staged at the Royal Opera House in Cairo in 1954, and the "Hodja's Nail" also staged at the Opera in 1955. Bakathir’s wife and his adopted son Fawzi often visited the Eltahers and vice-versa.

An exciting adventure has linked Bakathir and Eltaher when the latter escaped from prison and hid in various parts of Egypt between 1940 and 1941. The friendship that linked the two men went back to 1933 when Bakathir came to Egypt from Indonesia via the Hedjaz and his ancestral homeland Hadramout to enroll at Egyptian universities. He was admitted at Cairo University from which he eventually obtained his B.A. degree in literature. He then obtained a teacher’s diploma from the Teachers’ Higher College. Once he had completed his education, and while getting ready to return to his native country Indonesia, the Second World War erupted and he found himself unable to travel to the Far East.

He remained in Egypt and worked as a teacher while authoring a number of successful historic and literary novels. Every time the Ministry of Education or one of the cultural organizations announced a competition for a novel or a
play, Bakathir participated in it. And every time he did that, he not only won the prize, but also got his work recommended for printing at no cost to him. His outstanding output reached a point where in 1947 the Ministry of Social Affairs launched a competition for six novels covering predetermined subjects and announced an appreciably high financial prize. The ministry received five hundred submissions. After it had reviewed this mountain of novels, the evaluation committee chose six out of them. When the envelopes containing the names of the winners were opened, it turned out that Bakathir had amazingly won two of them.

He married earlier, but his wife died so young. In 1931, he left Hadramawt and went to Eden, Somali, and Habersham and then went to Al Higath. He settled in Al Higath for while, where he wrote his first poem The borda's order and his first poetic play Hamam (published later in 1934): it was inspired by his dissatisfaction with life in underdeveloped Hadramawt and the ignorance of Arab women; on his own admission it could only loosely be called drama, as it was deficient in action, characterization and dialogue. In 1934, he came to Egypt and joined the Cairo University. During his study, he translated the Shakespeare's play Romeo and Joliet and he wrote his poetic play Nefertiti and Akhenaton. In 1939, he took The License of Arts from English Department. After that he joined The Educational Institution for teachers and in 1940 he got the diploma. In 1954, he traveled in a free scholarship to France. He lived in Egypt after he finished the scholarship where he married an Egyptian woman who had a daughter from a previous marriage; he raised the girl as his own. He liked the life in Egypt where he met the great authors such as Nagib Mahfouz,
Taha Hossien and Tawfik Al- Hakim. He worked in teaching for fifteen years, ten of them in Al- Mansora and the rest in Cairo. Then in 1955, he moved to work in The Ministry of culture and National Guidance in Art Techniques Department. Then he moved to The Department of The Supervision on The Artistic Works where he remained working until his death. He got a free fellowship for two years from 1961 to 1963 to accomplish The Great Islamic Poetic Myth about the orthodox caliph Omer Abn Al- Khatab in 19 parts. He was the first author in Egypt whoever was given the free fellowship. He took another free fellowship to accomplish three plays about Napoleon's invasion on Egypt which were: The Larva and The Snake, The Dreams of Napoleon and Zeinab's Tragedy. He knew many languages such as English and French. He wrote many poetic plays such as: The Odebic's Tragedy which was translated into English, The Chain and Forgiveness, The River's Night, The Secret of the Governor Al- Hakim Beamr Allah and The Secret of Shahrazad and the two last plays were translated into French. He wrote many novels such as: Wa Eslamah, The Pretty Night and The Red Rebel. He took the Egyptian Nationality on 22nd August 1951 by a royal order. His poetry was never published in books during his life; it was left as rough copies. In 1987, the doctor Mohamed Abu Baker published Bakathir's first collection of poems The Flowers of Refine in the Poems of Youth about the poems which he wrote in Hadramawt. In 2008, the second collection of poems Eden's Magic about the year which he spent in Eden was published from The Library of Knowledge's Treasures in Gada. Now his third collection of poems Naged's Youth about the year which he spent in Saudi Arabia was prepared to be published. He visited many Arab countries such as:
Kuwait, Lebanon and Syria. He also visited many foreign countries such as: France, Romania and Turkey where he was planning to write a poetic myth about conquering Kostantinaya but he died. He traveled to Hadramawt a year before his death. He shared in many cultural and artistic conferences. He was chosen a member in the comity of Poetry and Story in the Great Council of Guardianship of Literature and Art Technique. He was also a member in the Story's club. He took a prize from the Ministry of Knowledge from Egypt in 1949 on his poetic play "The Chain and Forgiveness". He died on 10th November 1969 because of a heart attack and he was buried in his Egyptian wife's family cemetery.

Salah Abd Al-Sabur:

Salah Abd al-Sabur (1931-81) was probably the leading Egyptian poet of his generation when he turned to writing dramas: his first play, Masat al-Hallaj (The Tragedy of al-Hallaj) appeared in 1965. He wrote four other plays: Musafir Layl (A Night Traveller, 1969) Layla wal-Majnun (layla and the Mad Man, 1970), al-Amira Tantazir (The Princess Waits, 1971), and Badan Yamut al-Malik (When the King Dies 1973). Of these, two, A Night Traveler and The Princess Waits, are really one-act plays while the other three are longer works, even though The Tragedy of al-Hallaj barely qualifies as a normal full-length play.

The play begins from the end, so to speak: in the opening scene we see the body of al-Hallaj already hanging from a tree and three characters, a Merchant, a Peasant and a Preacher. The tragedy of al-Hallaj belongs very much to the Egyptian dramatic movement of the sixties, in which a sense of political
commitment is, as we have seen, a fairly common feature. This of course does not mean that al-Hallaj, the only real character in the play (the other being shadowy figures, more mouthpieces or caricatures) is merely a political or socialist revolutionary: his refusal to escape or to allow his associates to save him, his almost gleeful welcoming of martyrdom betray his yearning for death as the ultimate fulfillment of his mystical destiny and of God’s divine decree.

Abd al-Sabur’s Night Traveller, which he describe not as a ‘tragedy’, but as a ‘Dark comedy’, differs widely from his first play in technique, but in it his preoccupation with question like political justice and coercion of the individual by the authorities is much more pronounced. The action takes place after midnight in a railway carriage with constant rhythmic noise of the engine in the background. There are only three characters: the Narrator (Rawi), the Passenger and the Ticket Collector. The Narrator introduced the characters, draws the attention of the audience to the action and provides a running commentary on the behavior and even the feelings and the thoughts of other two characters, in a manner more in keeping with narrative than dramatic poetry. The play ends with the Narrator obeying the Ticket collector’s order to help him remove the body and the Narrator apologizes for watching what has happened in silence all the while without lifting a finger to help the Passenger, on the grounds that there was nothing he could do vis-à-vis the Ticket Collector who was armed with the dagger, that like the Audience, he is unarmed and he has nothing but words of commentary at his disposal. Night Traveler is designed by its author to be presented as a black farce.
Layla and the mad man is an interesting play in which can be heard, albeit faintly, echoes of T.S. Eliot’s The Cocktail Party. The events of Layla and the Mad Man take place in Egypt before the 1952 Revolution. A group of committed young men and women work on a revolutionary newspaper under the general editorship of their older leader, who decides on the welcome diversion of preparing an armature stage production of Shawqi’s play The Mad Lover of Layla. When the King Dies is clearly a symbolical work in which, as has been noticed, 28 many of the ideas ‘Abd al-Sabur expressed in his other plays are brought and freshley and concisely stated: the tyranny of power, the abuse of individual freedom, the need to assert the value of life in face of the irrational and destructive forces of death and the crucial rule of the poet in defending social justice and civilization; a role which must be positive and militant. Again, the Queen, clearly a development of the Princess in The Princess Waits, stands for Egypt. The Poet will appear again to play an important role in ‘Abd al-Sabur’s last play, When the King Dies (1973), one of the two longer works, the other being Layla and the Mad Man, published in 1970, a year before, The Princes Waits. These two full length three-act plays differ widely from one another from in theme and in techniques: Layla and the Mad Man deals directly with politics in a somewhat realistic fashion with a modern setting, while When the King Dies is an experimental play, in the absurdist mode, more akin to the world of The Princess Waits.

All these dramatists could not embody the requirements and conventions of poetic drama. They dealt according to Badawi with rather poetry in theater. Yet, some of them enriched the modern technique of poetic drama in translating
European plays or in adapting their themes in favor of blank verse. Obviously, they would prepare another generation who would achieve a great deal of success in using contemporary syllabic poetry which *al-Malaeka* and *Sayyab* experimented around 1950.

Before speaking of the new experiments, Khalid Al-Shawaf, an Iraqi poet dramatist, wrote in the same classical form of poetry some verse plays such as *Al-Aswar* (1950) and *Shamsu* (1952). In Iraq were immensely evaluated though they were rather written in a kind of Shawqi’s manner of asserting on episodic structure and in classical Arabic poetry.

However, after 1950 new cultural and political changes took place in Arabic countries. In this period new poems were published in dramatic technique as mask poems and fragmentary poetry etc. various theatrical attempts have been exhibited either by clubs or by other groups of playwrights to encourage this art in every country.

In 1965 the prominent poet Al-Sabur presented, in developed metrical technique his famous play *مأساة الخلاج* (The Tragedy of al-Hallaj 1965). He obviously experimented verse drama after discarding the classical form of poetry. His poetic plays such as *مسافر ليل* (A Night’s Traveller) 1969 and *بعد ان يموت الملك* (After the King’s Death) 1973, which were rather considered real examples of Arabic poetic drama in our age. His originality in Arabic literature is quite clear despite the influence of Eliot on him.

We can conclude that there was no poetic theatre in Arabic literature according to Aristotelian convention except certain dramatic features and
representations. These aspects were based rather on social and religious traditions and folklore. While many Arab contemporary dramatists have managed firmly to present their dramatic models in order to constitute their identities through intersection with world drama especially after the sixties of the twentieth century. Poetic drama, therefore, cannot “only excite us but also reveal the significance of the action” which our community needs.

Shawqi’s plays are important historical documents since many poems are said relating to many events. He was also careful and perspective observer who occupied an important position among the descriptive poets of all eras.

Najib Surur, was one of the most notable and complex participants in the Egyptian theatre scene during the 1960s and 1970s. Surur had been trained by his previous writers. Surur brought to drama his talent as a poet and his training as director and would be actor. In 1964 the Cairo experimental theatre presented his painful verse play *Yasinwa Bahiyyab*, where he depicts all the touching moment of love. From the premature up to full grown men and women. In this play Surur described the all critical stages of man and how the man fights with the unbearable situation shown by Surur. The mention of Surur here brings back into focus the issue of verse drama in Arabic.

Regarding the language of drama, it is now clear that a large number of highly accomplished Arab playwrights compose their contributions to drama in the colloquial dialect of their own region. If the myriad political and social factors involved in theatre production are working in their favour, they have a reasonable expectation of popular success. As we have shown in the sections above, every region of the Arab world can provide examples of dramatists who
fit this category. However, the linguistic boundaries of each colloquial dialect virtually guarantee that any such success will be a local one. Any aspiration that the playwright may have to broaden the audience to the pan-Arab level will involve willingness to compromise on the question of language. Some experiments in this area have clearly been declared failures, mostly because they did not represent linguistic reality; thus, early attempts to vary language level according to class. But, between the efforts of Shawqi at finding a median level of language and Wannus's recommendation that his text is intended as a blueprint for a script in the local dialect, there is clearly plenty of room for continuing experiment.

The institution of the theatre itself has become a part of the literary and cultural milieu of the Arab world, bringing with it from the West the large number of theoretical issues that impact upon the performance of drama and adding to them a further collection of questions that are intrinsic to the Arabic environment. With Arabic drama we witness a genre in a continuing process of adaptation and development, one that, by its very nature, must confront the political, social, and cultural problems of the day. In the Arab world that can be a dangerous role, but within that broad and variegated space the struggle for creative change is a continuing process.

Poetic drama in other Arab countries does not seem to have progressed as far as it has in Egypt, with the possible exceptions of Syrian and Palestinian drama. In Syria, as in other Arab countries, attracted by the Shining example set by Shawqi in Egypt.
The end of this chapter we may say Arabic drama with the mention of Ahmad Shawqi, easily the best known and most important figure in the history of Arabic verse drama, for although his career as a dramatist really belongs to later and more sophisticated stage in the development of the genre. Shawqi had his first experience of the Egyptian theatre during this period.

Drama through the path of poetic excellence of Shawqi which he paved for his followers in verse drama the treatment of modern subject is verse by Aziz Abaza, Abd Rahman al-Sharqawi, Abd al-Sabbur, Najib Surur etc. By the early seventies the dramatic movement of the previous two decades began to lose its momentum. Govt. Interest in drama seemed to be wreaked and the commercial theatre once more reasserted Drama was speedily moving towards its catastrophe which could be measured by the changing test of the commonplace audience, reader class, the listening lies for verse drama in the contemporary magazines and newspaper etc. but in the year of 1967 Egypt which affected each and every class of the native country. Thus the shattered dream of the national vision the height of polite, the absence of basic freedom, lives last in words. Now Egyptian drama touch as achieve the tip point of Arabic literature, through its famous playwright. But in verse drama Ahmad Shawqi’s contribution was remarkable.