CHAPTER- 4

Elements of comedy in the verse dramas of Ahmad Shawqi: an analytical study.

Aristotle wrote about drama in the poetics, a work providing one of the earliest and most influential theories of drama, he began by explaining it as the imitation of an action. Those analyzing his work interpretation are that drama imitates life on the surface; such an observation may seem simple, even obvious. But on reflection we begin to find complex significance in this comment. The drama of the Greeks, for example: with its intense mythic structure, its formidable speeches and its profound actions. Often seems larger than life or other than life. Yet we recognize characters saying words that we ourselves are capable of saying, doing things that we ourselves might do. The Greek tragedies are certainly lifelike and certainly offer literary mirrors in which we can examine human nature and the same is true of Greek comedies.

Tragedy and comedy:

Tragedies usually end in death and mourning, comedies in marriage and happiness. That difference accounts for the two familiar masks of drama, one expressing sorrow, the other joy, one provoking tears, the other laughter. That difference also accounts for the commonly held notion that tragedy is serious, and comedy frivolous. But when we consider that both modes are probably descended from primitive fertility rites- tragedy from ritual sacrifice, comedy from ritual feasting –we can recognize that they dramatize equally important dimensions of human experience. Tragedy embodies the inevitability of individual death, comedy the irrepressibility of social rebirth. So, like autumn
and spring, tragedy and comedy are equally significant phases in a natural cycle of dramatic possibilities. Indeed, like the seasons of the year and the nature of human experience, they are inextricably bound up with one another.

Every comedy contains a potential tragedy - the faint possibility that harmony may not be achieved, that the lovers may not come together to form a new society. And every tragedy contains a potential comedy – the faint possibility that disaster may be averted, that the hero or heroine may survive. This in turn should remind us that we must be concerned not only with the distinctive endings of tragedy and of comedy, but also with the means by which each brings about its end. Catastrophe in and of itself does not constitute tragedy. Nor does marriage along make for comedy the unique experience of each mode is produced by the design of its plot and the nature of the characters who take part in it.

Comedy should have the view of a “comic spirit” and is physical and energetic. It is tied up in rebirth and renewal, this is the reason most comedy end in weddings, which suggest a union of a couple and the expected birth of children. In comedy there is absence of pain and emotional reactions, as with tragedy, and a replaced use of mans intellect. The behavior of the characters presented in comedy is ludicrous and sometimes absurd and the result in the audience is one of correction of behaviors. This correction of behaviors is the didactic element of comedy that acts as a mirror for society, by which the audience learns don’t behave in ludicrous and absurd ways. The types of comedies can vary greatly; there are situation comedies, romantic comedies, sentimental comedies, satirical comedy, dark comedies, comedy of manners,
and pure farce. The comic devices used by playwrights of comedy are: exaggeration, incongruity, surprise, repetition, wisecracks, and sarcasm.

The Tragic and the Comic fade into each other by almost insensible gradations, and the greatest beauty of a poetical work often consists in the harmonious blending of these two elements. Not only in the same drama may both exist in perfect unison, but even in the same character. Great actors generally have a similar quality, and frequently it is hard to tell whether their impersonations be more humorous or more pathetic. This happy transfusion and interchange of tragic and comic coloring is one of the characteristics of supreme art; it brings the relief along with the pain; it furnishes the reconciliation along with the conflict.

**Satire:**

Term applied to any work of literature or art whose objective is ridicule. It is more easily recognized than defined. From ancient times satirists have shared a common aim: to expose foolishness in all its guises—vanity, hypocrisy, pedantry, idolatry, bigotry, sentimentality—and to effect reform through such exposure. The many diverse forms their statements have taken reflect the origin of the word satire, which is derived from the Latin satura, meaning “dish of mixed fruits,” hence a medley.

**Irony:**

Figure of speech in which what is stated is not what is meant. The user of irony assumes that his reader or listener understands the concealed meaning of
his statement. Perhaps the simplest form of irony is rhetorical irony, when, for effect, a speaker says the direct opposite of what she means. Thus, in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, when Mark Antony refers in his funeral oration to Brutus and his fellow assassins as “honorable men” he is really saying that they are totally dishonorable and not to be trusted. Dramatic irony occurs in a play when the audience knows facts of which the characters in the play are ignorant. The most sustained example of dramatic irony is undoubtedly Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, in which Oedipus searches to find the murderer of the former king of Thebes, only to discover that it is himself, a fact the audience has known all along.

**Satirical Comedy:**

Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire derides; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual (in personal satire) or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation or even the entire human race. The distinction between the comic and satiric, however, is sharp only at its extremes. Shawqi’s play *Al-Sitt Huda* is a comic play presented primarily for our enjoyment; its most of the part are comic but has aspects of satire directed against the type of the fatuous and hypocritical.

Satire has usually been justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly; Alexander Pope, for example, remarked that “those who are ashamed of nothing else are so of being ridiculous.” Its frequent claim has
been to ridicule the failing rather than the individual, and to limit its ridicule to corrigible faults, excluding those for which a person is not responsible.

Satire occurs as an incidental element within many works whose overall mode is not satiric— in a certain character or situation, or in an interpolated passage of ironic commentary on some aspect of the human condition or of contemporary society.

Satire is comedy without punch lines. Often human error is poked fun at albeit in a very serious manner. Often mistakes made by those in power and celebrities are made fun. Very sophisticated and requires much knowledge on the situation at hand. The subject of satire is human vice and folly. Its characters include con-artists, criminals, tricksters, deceivers, wheeler-dealers, two-timers, hypocrites, and fortune-seekers and the gullible dupes, knaves, goofs, and cuckoldeds who serve as their all-too-willing victims. Satirical comedies resemble other types of comedy in that they trace the rising fortune of a central character. However, in this case, the central character (like virtually everybody else in the play or story) is likely to be cynical, foolish, or morally corrupt. Shawqi’s poetic play *Al-Sitt Huda* also a satiric comedy where he paints Lady Huda with the colour of thagedy and comedy. Satirical comedy spills over into so-called Black comedy—where we're invited to laugh at events that are mortifying or grotesque.

**Romantic Comedy**

It is a commonly found form in modern comedy. These comedies are made as real and down to earth as possible and the plays often involve adventure. Unlike comedy of manners, the humour is derived from the
characters and their situations. These comedies traditionally have happy endings. Perhaps the most popular of all comic forms both on stage and on screen is the romantic comedy. In this genre the primary distinguishing feature is a love plot in which two sympathetic and well-matched lovers are united or reconciled. In a typical romantic comedy the two lovers tend to be young, likeable, and apparently meant for each other, yet they are kept apart by some complicating circumstance (e.g., class differences, parental interference; a previous girlfriend or boyfriend) until, surmounting all obstacles, they are finally wed. A wedding-bell, fairy-tale-style happy ending is practically mandatory. These qualities are clearly shown in the verse drama of Ahmah Shawqi: \textit{Al-Bakhila}. Though this is a comedy play but the love of Jamal and Hosna make it a romantic comedy. At the end of the play Jamal got married to maid Hosna although she was a girl from a poor family. Shawqi wants to reduce the classification of rich and poor through his play. Every play has a massage to reform the society and this is the best way to show the real picture of the society of that period.

Shawqi’s poetic devices reflect his conscious dramatic art in verse dialogue, relations of characters, rhythm of iambic or in the rhythmic stresses. In the course of action, most of his characters are brought to critical test in delicate and effective use of figurative language. He offers us a picture of life as it is with all its contradictions and incoherence and his individuality asserts itself on the form of the plays, on their style and verse.

A comedy in the day of Shawqi had a very different meaning than the comedies of today. It usually meant the play had a happy ending, such as a
marriage, and not a tragedy as most stories of Shawqi’s time had. Some characteristics of Shawqi’s comedies are they had greater emphasis on characters, a struggle of young lovers to overcome difficulties and separation, and re-unity. They also had clever servants, disputes between characters and multiple, intertwining plots. Characters tended to live pastoral lives, and the happy ending is a given in the end.

A Shawqi’s comedy always ends with a happy ending. In such, the plot is usually driven by mistaken identity and it is also complex. It has a lot of twists and turns compared to Shakespeare's tragedies and histories.

Shawqi seems to have taken a special delight in its employment. No principle of his procedure is better known or more fully appreciated. His tragedies never fail of having their comic interludes; his comedies have, in nearly every case, a serious thread, and sometimes a background with a tragic outlook. Life is not all gloom or all delight; the cloud will obscure the sun, but the sun will illumine the cloud — at least around the edges. Still, the Comic is not the Tragic, however subtle may be their intertwining, and however rapid their interaction. They rest upon diverse, and in some respects opposite, principles. Criticism must seek to explain the difference between them for the understanding, and must not rest content with a vague appeal to the feeling of beauty. Tragic earnestness springs from the deep ethical principle which animates the individual. He, however, assails another ethical principle, and thereby falls into guilt. The tragic character, moreover, must have such strength and intensity of will that it can never surrender its purpose. Reconciliation is impossible; death alone can solve the conflict. In Comedy also there is a
collision with some ethical principle on the part of the individual; he intends a
violation, but does not realize his intention; he is foiled through external
deception, or breaks down through internal weakness; to him wants that
complete absorption in some great purpose which is the peculiar quality of the
tragic hero or heroin. The common realm of Tragedy and Comedy, therefore, is
the ethical world and its collision. Their essential difference lies in the different
relation of the leading characters to this ethical world.

Here we are brought face to face with the first point which must be settled
— what constitutes the Comic Individual? But a single person does not make a
comedy; it requires several who are in action and counter-action; hence the
second part of the subject will be the Comic Action; thirdly, a termination must
be made which springs necessarily from the preceding elements; this gives the
Comic Solution. Each division will be taken up in its natural order.

**The Comic Individual:**

He is, in one form or another, the victim of deception. He fights a
shadow of his own mind, or pursues an external appearance; his end is a nullity,
his plan an absurdity; he is always deceived; he really is not doing that which he
seems to be doing. His object may be a reasonable one, his purpose may be a
lofty one, but he is inadequate to its fulfillment; the delusion is that he believes
in his own ability to accomplish what he wills. His object also may be an absurd
one; he pursues it, however, with the same resolution. It may be called a foible,
a folly, and a frailty — still the essential characteristic is that the individual is
pursuing an appearance, and thus is the victim of deception, though he may
even be conscious of the absurd and delusive nature of his end.
The two limitations of this sphere are to be carefully noticed. The Comic Individual must not succeed in violating the ethical principles which he conflicts with; these are the highest, the most serious, interests of man, and cannot even be endangered without exciting an apprehension, which destroys every comic tendency. Successful seduction, adultery, treason — in fine, the violations of State and Family — are not comic; nor is villainy, which attains its purpose. Such an intention of wrong-doing may exist, but it must never come to realization; it must not only be thwarted, but also punished. The delusion, therefore, ought not to go so far as to produce a violation of ethical principles.

We are now to take a glance at the instrumentalities of Comedy — at the means which renders the Individual comic. Shawqi’s deceptions can arise from two sources — from the senses and from the mind. It thus may have an external cause, namely, the situation in which he is placed; or it may have an internal origin, namely, his caprice, his imagination, his understanding. Here we have the two essential kinds of Comedy — that of Situation and that of Character. The former seeks its instrumentalities outside of the individual; he is determined by them externally; hence freedom almost disappears in this form of the drama. But, in Comedy of Character, the Individual is self-determined; his situation, in its essential points, is the consequence of his own action — of his own folly or weakness; he is not plunged into it from without, by fate or by accident. In this sphere the Individual will find a realm of freedom.

For example in his play *Al-Sitt Huda*, Shawqi point out the general characteristic of a women who always hide their age through the Character of Huda-
In Comedy of Situation, therefore, a person is placed in circumstances over which he has little or no control, and is made to pursue absurd and nugatory objects without any direct fault of his own. His deception is brought about through the senses; his mistakes arise from false appearances which hover around him — in general, that which is phantom seems reality. He now follows up his delusions as ends; he meets and collides with others who have similar ends, or with others who have rational ends. The result is an infinite complication of mistakes and deceptions, which is the peculiar nature of Comedy of Situation, or, as is more commonly called from its intricacy, Comedy of Intrigue.
The special forms of this sensuous deception ought also to be classified. In the first place, things may be disguised. The natural and artificial objects which ordinarily surround a man may be so changed that he imagines himself a different person, or in a strange world; sudden transition into a new country, or into a new condition of life, may be made to appear actual, though wholly unreal.

The second, and chief, instrumentality of Comedy of Situation is the mistake in personality, or, as it is sometimes called. Mistaken Identity. One person is taken for another; thus two persons lose their relations to the society around them, and this society loses its relation to them. The effect is wonderful. The whole world seems to be converted into a dream — into fairyland; the natural order of things is turned upside down; the ordinary mediations of life are perverted or destroyed. A man with a strong head, it is true, may preserve his equilibrium in the confusion; such a one, however, is not a comic character.

The mistakes of identity are produced mainly in two ways — by Natural Resemblance and by Disguise. The first is an accident, and lies outside of the knowledge of the individuals who happen to be like one another. They are, therefore, the unconscious victims of an external influence; they are involved in a confusion of which nobody knows the origin. But Disguise is intentional — at least on the part of one person, namely, he who has disguised himself. All the other characters of the play may be victimized by the mask, and take the appearance for the reality; or a part of them may be in the secret, and enjoy the sport with the audience.
One individual, however, is not deceived — is free; has a conscious purpose of his own, which he is realizing. Disguise has a thousand shapes; it is the most common artifice, not merely of Comedy, but of the Drama generally. It may run through a whole play and constitute the main point of interest, or it may be employed for a subordinate object in a single scene. Its manifold forms show the originality of the writer of Comedy. Here is his province — the creation of play disguises and situations. They all, however, have the one common characteristic — deception through a false appearance.

But Disguise has its limits, which will be manifested often beneath the most adroit concealment. The person in mask is usually supposed to be the master of the complications which he weaves around himself, and so he is ordinarily portrayed. But an unsuspected resemblance may come in and disturb his plans. Like Shawqi’s play *Al-Bakhila*, where al-Sayyidah Nazifah wants that her grandson Jamal get married with the rich girl Zainab. But Jamal got married to her maid Hosna although she was a girl from a poor family. The true dissolution of Disguise is manifest when character reveals itself beneath the mask, and the internal nature of man shows itself stronger than any external covering. Then the Disguise becomes nothing — it quite disappears. The same may be said of many other relations of life. This has a supreme comic effect; it is the climax of Comedy of Situation, and, at the same time, the transition into a deeper principle. The external Disguise has melted away before the internal Character.

It will thus be seen that Comedy of Situation is logically incomplete, and is inadequate to express the more profound comic elements of human nature.
Moreover, it is wanting in freedom. That man should be represented as placed in a world of deception and appearance, which cajoles him and leads him astray without any fault on his part, does not satisfy reason or true Aesthetic feeling. Mistakes through sensuous delusion may be very laughable, but they lack the highest comic principle.

Here Shawqi tried to focus one of the general characteristics of women who always busy to makeup her body from head toe. They always too much conscious for their beauty and health like Huda says…

لاست هدي: ما الصوت؟ ما أسمع؟ من يا ترى؟
ما هذه الضجع في السلم هذا خطوطاً و كحلى و تلك صبغة شعراء
وهذا الثوب وما أبيى! وهذا الخف ما أحسن!
ومند ياى على رأسى ما أحلى! وما أزين!
وهذه خوااتمي بها يدى مرصعه
وهذه قلابد يفى لبيى ملمعه

We all think that a person ought not to be responsible for that which is external and accidental. Such is sometimes the reality, however, though by no means the deepest and truest reality of human existence. Man must be reached by his own act; he must himself be the cause of his own difficulties. Thus he is moved from within, is self-determined, and is to blame for his follies. Anything short of freedom will not completely satisfy us; it conflicts too strongly with our rational nature.
Thus we arrive at the necessity of the second grand division of Comedy, as manifested in the Individual. From its essential principle it will be best named Comedy of Character. Now, the Individual has truly an absurd end; his deed is internal in its origin; it springs from himself, and cannot be laid to his surroundings. His purpose is still a delusive appearance, which, however, is the product of his own brain. He may even be aware of its insubstantial nature, and yet pursue it; or, he may not be aware of that fact. Here rise up at once before us the two leading phases of Comedy and Character — the Involuntary and the Voluntary.

In the first of these spheres the Individual loses sight of his true relations to the external world, to other individuals, to society. This delusion is not brought about through any disguise of what is real, but through his own folly or infatuation; it does not result from any external deception, but from self-deception. The objects and persons around him have not been changed; the disguise has now gone into his mind — has become internal, and casts its shadow upon his judgment. The mistake, therefore, is not of the senses, but rather of the understanding. This phase of comic development is thus seen to be quite different from Comedy of Situation, though the latter ultimately may reach the judgment through sensuous deception.

These absurd ends are pursued in earnest; the character is not usually conscious of their nature. Still, he ought to know better; his conduct deserves to be punished with shouts of laughter. But he may be quite aware of the ridiculousness of what he is doing, and nevertheless do it, and do it seriously. It is possible to be indifferent to the jeers of the world; or, a man may be driven by
a passion which is stronger than the fear of ridicule. In this case, however, the result is almost the same as if the comic quality of the act were not known to him. In fact, there is almost every shade from a naive unconsciousness to complete consciousness. With the latter stage a new realm begins to make its appearance.

It is manifest that, in the phase just considered, the Comic Individual has not yet attained perfect freedom — he is still ignorant of a certain element of the nature of his deed; or, he is forced to do what he knows to be ridiculous in order to accomplish his deeper purpose. There is a chasm between his will and his action which is not yet bridged over. Now comes the last and highest development of Comedy — the Comic Individual is not only conscious, but voluntary. He pursues his delusion, knowing that it is a delusion, and because it is a delusion. His purpose is absurd; he intends it to be absurd, and enjoys its absurdity. His delight is in his own tricks and follies; he makes a comedy for his own amusement.

The tinge of seriousness in the character now disappears; the earnest pursuit of a false appearance or delusion has been left behind forever. He performs his own play and is his own audience at the same time; he knows and wills himself to be deceived, and then he steps back, as it were, and laughs at himself, as a spectator would do. Who can assail him? He is complete, for he takes into himself all sides; he is free, for he realizes everything which lies in his intention, and his deed has nothing in it which is alien to what he purposes. Here is the climax of Comic Art; only the greatest geniuses have been able to
reach such an elevation. The nicest balance must be maintained; the least swerving to the right or to the left causes a rapid descent into lower regions.

But the highest point is the termination; Comedy can go no further. Its very excellence pushes it beyond its limits, and into dissolution. When the Individual becomes conscious that his action is absurd and contradictory, every effort of the mind is usually directed to getting rid of the contradiction. That rational man can be consciously and purposely irrational, is the supreme absurdity, and, hence, this is just the absurdity upon which the supreme comic character reposes. But the logical process cannot stop at such a fine point of transition. When a person has sense enough to find out that he has no sense, he is already quite sensible.

A famous sage of antiquity may be cited. The great saving of Socrates was that, while previous philosophers thought they knew something, but did not know anything, he knew that he knew nothing. This he justly considered to be quite an advance upon former wisdom. To be conscious of our ignorance is much better than to be simply ignorant; such a consciousness already goes far towards lifting us beyond the assault of folly. At this point, therefore, the comic form begins to dissolve; men will no longer pursue a delusive purpose when they become aware of its true nature.

Let us now recapitulate the various principles which have been elaborated. Comedy exhibits the external or internal deception of the Individual, who, however, must not proceed in his delusion to a serious ethical violation, nor transgress the limits of sanity. To bring about his deception there are two instrumentalities — Situation and Character. The first lies in the senses, the
second in the mind. Furthermore, Situation has two elements — the relation of the Comic Individual to the physical world on the one hand, and his relation to the persons therein on the other hand; both these relations become false appearances through Natural Resemblance and Intentional Disguise. Comedy of Character has also two main forms — the Involuntary and the Voluntary; the former exhibits man as the unwilling, and for the most part unconscious, victim of some whim, delusion, contradiction; while the latter shows a similar conduct as proceeding from conscious volition.

The relation of the Comic Individual to his audience is also worthy of mention. In the pure Comedy of Situation the audience is always presupposed, and must fully comprehend the nature and cause of the deception; it thus stands entirely above the persons in the play, to whom the matter is of the most serious import. The laugh belongs to the man who is not caught in the dilemma. There is thus between the hearer and actor a chasm which gradually becomes smaller, as we approach Comedy of Character, till, finally, it is wholly filled up and smoothed away in the highest form of the latter. For the Voluntary Comic Individual knows and laughs at his own absurdities — he is both actor and spectator. He has reached the serene height of the happy gods, which can be disturbed by nothing from without. Here is seen the true plastic element of Comedy, as far as such a term can be applied to this realm of art.

The Comic Action:

This has the essential elements of every dramatic action, which may be analyzed into the Thread, the Movement, and the Collision. The Comic Individual is driven to act by his delusion; he has an end which he is seeking to
realize. He does not usually stand alone, but is surrounded by his instruments, his friends, his enemies, as in real life; there are connected with him a number of persons who have to perform for him certain mediations. This constitutes the Thread. There is, generally, the one central figure around which the others gather, and which the bearer of the leading principle is; the rest may aid, or also may thwart, the main purpose. Often characters pass from one Thread to another in the course of the play. Shakespeare has never less than two of these Threads, often three and, sometimes, a nice analysis might find more. But there is a proper limit which ought not to be exceeded. There must be neither too few nor too many Threads, and there must be neither too few nor too many characters in a Thread. The genuine dramatic instinct will avoid dearth on the one hand, and undue complexity on the other.

These Threads — or groups, as they may also be called — stand in mutual relation; they run alongside of one another; they also have some common principle of harmony, of contrast, of opposition. They move together through one phase of the action — this is called a Movement of the play. Then there follows a transition into a new stage, which must be directly evolved from that which goes before. These transitions are the great joints of the work, and are to be carefully noted. Such is the Movement — binding together all the Threads, and sweeping forward into a new phase of the play. The comparison may be made with a river which rolls onward as a whole, with all its parallel currents, eddies, and counter-currents, while it passes from one country into another. Of these Movements every drama written by Shawqi has two or three, and some times more. The critic may here be reminded of his duty. He should
state in a general form the essential principle of each Movement, point out its limits, and show the ground for the transition into the next Movement.

But the Individual must not merely act, he must also collide. Thus arises the third and principal element of the dramatic action, namely, the Collision. A quiet, unopposed development is not life — is not the drama — and would be very tame in representation. A person who undertakes to carry out his purpose must fall into struggle with those who maintain an opposite purpose. The Comic Individual pursues his delusion, and thus he may become involved in a conflict with the institutions of the world — as Family, State, and Church; or may disregard the moral elements of society — as Honesty, Truthfulness, and temperate Gratification of the senses. The latter are, however, subjective traits of character rather than real ethical principles, which are always the basis of institutions, and from which the genuine dramatic collision springs.

The Family is, perhaps, the most common sphere of the comic conflict, particularly on the side of sexual love. In *Al-Bakhila* also shows the upcoming happy married life between Hosna and Jamal in the absence of plenty of wealth and the happy lovers are united at the end of the play. This is, perhaps, Shawqi’s favorite theme — the right of choice against the will of the parent. But Law, Religion, Business — all the social relations of life, may become entangled in the delusion of Comedy. A complete classification of the possible dramatic collisions cannot be given here; it belongs to the Introduction, where there is also a fuller discussion of Threads and Movements.

**The Solution:**
This means that the appearance is dissolved and the reality be restored. That which has caused the delusion in the Comic Individual must vanish, because it is not actual — is untruth. Since the action rests upon some deception, internal or external, this deception must be discovered and brought home to each character; thus the source of the mistakes and complications becomes known. The Solution, however, will vary according to the instrumentality employed. In the case of Natural Resemblance, the persons who are alike are at last brought together, and the similarity which has caused so much trouble is detected. Everybody then can account for the mysterious occurrences which have just transpired. In the case of Disguise, since the whole entanglement rests in the mask, this is torn off and the plotter is caught, or, at least, is revealed. Here, too, a touch of retribution may enter for the deception practiced by the contriver. It is satisfactory to see that disguises are not without danger.

But in the case of Comedy of Character the retributive nature of the Solution becomes more prominent, since responsibility for the deed can now be assumed. The subjective delusions and absurdities of a rational man must be brought home to him; his act must come back with a logical rigor, and the drama should show just this return upon the doer. He must be forced to see the folly of his end; he must be made to behold his plan breaking to pieces, as it were, in his very hands, and its consequence visited upon him.

Still, he ought not to lay his whole being in his purpose, for thus he becomes tragic; nor must he be too serious in the execution of his design, else its failure makes him wretched and not comic. He ought to be able to give a
free, jovial look, or even laugh, at the disappearing phantom of his brain. The Solution, therefore, for the unconscious, involuntary comic character is to be made conscious of its folly through the consequences thereof; while for the voluntary comic character there is really no solution, since it carries its solution within itself all the time. Conscious of its own absurdity, and the results thereof, from the beginning, how can it be made more conscious?

But Comedy inflicts not punishments merely; it has also a system of rewards. For instance, in the sphere of the Family, true love usually finds its recompense, and reciprocal love must inevitably unite its votaries after the struggle. Note the requited affection in a play; against it raises the conflict, but it is always successful in the end. This constitutes the happy conclusion so necessary to a comedy. The like recompense must be shown in the other departments of human action. The same general principle lies at the basis of both reward and punishment — the deed must return upon the doer. To this end, full time is to be given for the natural and complete development, both of the Situation and the Character; hence the Solution cannot be precipitated at any moment, but only when it is forced by the logical necessity of the action, and cannot longer be withheld.

The Comic Solution, therefore, ends in the destruction, not of the Individual, but of his deception. He is restored to his senses, and the world is freed of its contradiction; thus all is as it was before. The comic character cannot perish, for it violates no substantial principle, no ethical institution. Herein it differs from the tragic hero on the one hand, and from the villain on
the other. The former is both a violator and supporter of the right in the same deed. Guilt results and is followed by death, yet he is not without justification.

But the villain is purely a violator without logical motive; his fate cannot properly be dignified with the name of Tragedy; nor is he a comic character, since Comedy will not allow any ethical element to be destroyed. In fact, the mere villain, without relief, approaches the realm of the Ugly, and begins to transcend the limits of art. In this sense of the word it may be questioned whether any such character is to be found in the works of Shawqi. The outcome of Comedy, therefore, is mainly the dissolution of the whims, absurdities, and delusions of the rational individual.

The facts about Shawqi are interesting in themselves, but they have little to do with his place in literature. Shawqi wrote his plays to give pleasure. It is possible to spoil that pleasure by giving too much attention to his life, his times, and the problem of figuring out what he actually wrote. He can be enjoyed in book form, in the theater, or on television without our knowing any of these things. Some difficulties stand in the way of this enjoyment. Shawqi wrote many years ago. The language he used is naturally somewhat different from the language of today. Besides, he wrote in verse. Verse permits a free use of words that may not be understood by some readers. His plays are often fanciful. This may not appeal to matter-of-fact people who are used to modern realism. For all these reasons, readers may find him difficult. The worst handicap to enjoyment is the notion that Shawqi is a “classic,” a writer to be approached with awe. The way to escape this last difficulty is to remember that Shawqi wrote his plays for everyday people and that many in the audience were uneducated. They looked
upon him as a funny, exciting, and lovable entertainer, not as a great poet. People today should read him as the people in his day listened to him. The excitement and enjoyment of the plays will banish most of the difficulties. Most of the dramatists whom we have considered thus far write on the assumption that the question of language use has been resolved in favor of the colloquial. However, for those playwrights who wish to continue al-Hakim's efforts by carrying Arabic drama to a broader Arab world audience, the problem of language remains.

The pioneering work of Ahmad Shawqi and his analogues in other regions of the Arab world has now ensured that verse drama has come to be regarded as a literary genre in its own right. The texts of plays written by Shawqi across the length and breadth of the Arab world are generally available, and in many areas these texts will include works written in the colloquial dialect.

It is in the complex area of stage performance that many of the thorniest problems connected with modern Arabic drama continue to lie. The issues involved have changed surprisingly little from those which confronted the genre at the outset. There is first the major problem of censorship. While certain countries in the region - specifically Egypt between 1956 and 1967 - seem to have permitted a good deal of freedom of expression with the theatrical medium, the general principle has been one of the closest governmental control over drama, as both text and performance. When scripts have been rejected or continually blue-penciled, when entire seasons or individual performances have been officially cancelled, and when new plays have been inadequately rehearsed
or performed, the response of many dramatists has, not unnaturally, been disillusion and despair; the consequence has often been a resort to silence, another literary genre, or even exile.

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 al-Hakim and Faraj 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.

If the world of Arabic drama shows signs of creative energy today, then that is a tribute to the amazing resilience of practitioners of the theatre in the face of considerable odds. Many of the more political and social problems involved have already been discussed. However, recent decades have introduced a further factor which may be the most powerful of all: what in the
West are known as 'the media'. Arabic drama has a modern performance tradition that in certain countries is barely thirty years of age, and the process of creating an initial space for itself within a cultural environment that is daily bombarded by modern media in the form of soap operas and films that can be watched in the home is nothing less than daunting.

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.