'Ali Āhmad Bā-kathīr, a Contemporary Conservative Arab Writer -
An Appraisal of His Main Plays and Novels

Presented by

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Finally, I am grateful to the man who inspired, directed and sustained my work on this thesis, Dr. P.J.E. Cachia. On many occasions I must have stretched his responsibility beyond that expected of an academic supervisor. I deeply appreciate his kindness, and that of Mrs. Cachia.

Any shortcomings in this thesis are attributable to my own failings.
Many times during the last three years I was questioned as to the wisdom of spending so much time on a writer such as Bā-Kathīr who is not highly regarded by most critics of Modern Arabic Literature. At one point I almost gave up, but I am glad that I did not. This is because drama still raises the most basic questions in Arabic Literature. These questions have not been adequately answered by critics of Arabic Literature. The reason for this is partly because the writers they consider highly made their reputations in some other genre of literature and only wrote a number of plays as a sideline. Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm, who can be pointed out as an exception to this statement, begs the question by stating that his plays are to be read and not performed on the stage. There is no Arab writer, then, who has made his reputation wholly by the plays he wrote. The nearest person to such a writer is Bā-Kathīr. No critic has shown any interest in examining the type of reputation Bā-Kathīr has made through his plays.

The more of Bā-Kathīr's plays I read, the more convinced I became that some basic questions which Bā-Kathīr faced are not unlike those faced by any other Muslim conservative writer using the drama genre. One of these basic questions is the conflict between form and content with specific reference to drama. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a better criticism of drama in Arabic Literature and save future Arab dramatists from the mistakes which Bā-Kathīr could not avoid.

It will be noticed that there is very little textual criticism in the thesis. This is because the questions raised by the thesis are more basic than can permit of such detailed textual criticism in a
genre which has still to attain maturity in Arabic Literature. Detailed textual criticism is already possible in poetry and the novel, but in drama there are still basic questions to be settled by both critic and playwright.

Each chapter in Part Two of the thesis is introduced by a discussion of the general basic characteristics of the particular form of drama with which the chapter deals. The reason for this is, in fact, one of the reasons for undertaking research into the works of Bā-Kathīr. An aspect of this study is an examination of Bā-Kathīr's failure to produce convincing tragic drama. Bā-Kathīr was conscious of the use to which he wanted to put his literary talent. He was conscious, too, of the fact that he was using literary forms which were foreign to past Arabic Literature. What Bā-Kathīr did not seem to have been conscious of is the fact that literary forms do limit the content which they can successfully convey. This situation is more so in the drama form than in, say, the novel form. A short introductory section dealing with the basic nature of each form followed by the productions of Bā-Kathīr in that particular form help to pinpoint Bā-Kathīr's understanding of the form and how his use of it, as he understood it, falls short of the Western model defined.

Necessarily, the conclusion to the thesis restricts itself to Bā-Kathīr alone. But it is not unlikely that a study of the plays of other Arab writers attempting to do what Bā-Kathīr tried to do without solving the problems which Bā-Kathīr failed to solve, will come to the same conclusion.
ABSTRACT

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the history of drama in Arabic Literature since the first plays were produced. Furthermore, it deals with the history of the theatre in Egypt, tracing its development and especially its relationship with different governments at different times. Lastly, this part of the thesis deals with the history of dramatic writing and the reasons which led to the development of the play for reading as against the play for the stage.

The second part deals with selected works of Bā- Kathīr. His first attempts to write plays are dealt with as an attempt of his to find a medium through which to express himself. Because the emphasis here is on language, there is some detailed textual criticism. When Bā- Kathīr rejects poetry as a means of expressing dialogue in plays but still finds interest in historical subjects, we come to his historical novels. These are dealt with in their relationship to Bā- Kathīr's ideas. Then follows the section on the comedies, which are both social and political and the most successful works by Bā- Kathīr. In the next section, his tragedies are treated as religious plays because this is what they are. The last section of this part of the thesis deals with the epic of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb, which is the most glaring failure of Bā- Kathīr.

Part Three deals with Bā- Kathīr's ideas and how these relate to his use of the Arabic language.
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* in the construct
* otherwise

- Fatha
- Kasra
- Shadda
- Doubling
ABBREVIATIONS

FM  Fann al-Masraḥiyya min khilāl ṭajārib al-shahādiyya

M.E.J.  Middle East Journal

M.E.S.  Middle Eastern Studies

TLS  Times Literary Supplement
To live is to fight with fiends
That infest the head and heart
To write is to summon oneself
And play the judge’s part

— Henrik Ibsen
CHAPTER I

DRAMA IN CLASSICAL ARABIC LITERATURE
After more than one hundred years of theatre in Egypt it would seem natural that researchers into this genre of literature should ignore discussions on basic issues such as the fact that Classical Arabic Literature had no theatre. But this is not the case. The debate comes up every time somebody undertakes a study of an aspect of Arabic drama. The main reason for this may be that while other genres introduced from the West into Modern Arabic Literature, such as the short story and the novel, have matured, the theatre still lags behind. This situation is the more surprising when one knows that there was in Pharaonic Egypt, besides the shadow theatre,  a form of religious drama prior to the coming of Islam. \footnote{1} The beginning of the novel proper is usually fixed, in Egypt, at the publication in 1913 of Zaynab written by Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1833 - 1956). \footnote{5}

An awareness of this situation of the theatre in Egypt prompts questions and attempts to supply answers. No attempt is made here to consider the answers given for the absence of

1. This point is discussed, for instance, in the unpublished thesis The Drama in Arabic 1843 - 1956, by El-Tayib; books such as al-Masrafriyya fi al-Adab al-'Arabi al-Hadith, by Najm, and articles such as those in the special number of al-Majalla, March 1966.


4. Freedley and Reeves, A History of the Theatre, first chapter 'Egypt, the Beginning of Theatre'. Also Etienne Drioton, Le théâtre égyptien, which has been translated into Arabic as al-Asrar al-Misri al-Qadim.

theatre in Classical Arabic Literature except in as far as they throw light on theatre art and play-writing in Egypt. A more relevant question is: why has the theatre not matured in Egypt as have the short story and the novel? A possible answer to this question is the fact that whereas the short story and the novel are produced through the process of an individual author working far away from his readers, theatre evolves in a communal atmosphere with the author and all the personnel of the theatre working together to put on stage the creation of the playwright. Writing and publishing the short story or the novel need no immediate audience participation. A play may not be complete without an audience.

One of the implications of these modes of working is that the novelist and the short story writer have to wait for their readers' reaction long after they have completed their writing.1 Because the reaction to the playwright working in the theatre is immediate, it may be said that he is under greater constraint to conform and not offend his audience's sensitivity. This type of constraint does not apply to the novelist in the same degree. Thus the novelist can set his own values for his works,

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1. Cf. Gerald Moore, Wole Soyinka (Modern African Writers) 'A young novelist may hear the work of years launched with a little plop into the great indifferent sea of the month's new books. Anxiously he awaits the few, pitifully inadequate reviews he may be lucky enough to get. The dramatist who is able to get his play on to the stage at all has the opportunity to assist in the imaginative realization of his work from the text and then to witness night after night the actual process of its communication to a diverse, constantly varying audience.' pp. 10 - 11.
values which may not necessarily be representative of the values of his society. Although the playwright can do the same thing, unfavourable reaction is more immediate than in the case of the novelist.

In most cases both the novelist and the playwright address the same audience. But the audience of the novelist would seem to be more Westernised than the rest of the community. These Westernised Egyptians could be called cultural-mulattos. They are prepared to accept plays and novels which challenge long-held concepts. The people who watch plays do not necessarily have to be literate in Western languages. To address them successfully the playwright must present to them in his plays concepts which their cultural background makes familiar to them. Generally speaking the playwright in Egypt working in the theatre has been able to satisfy the masses of the people in the cities with comedies, farces and melodramas. To the cultural-mulattos who know of other standards of theatre, these productions are inadequate. More serious plays are demanded. This demand is satisfied to some extent through translations of masterpieces of world drama, through adaptations, and arabizations of plays from other cultures; and finally through plays written by cultural-mulattos who have themselves been influenced to a great extent by Western examples.

1. This term here is meant to refer to Egyptians who have had a Western education imposed on their Islamic background and upbringing.
To conclude - the dual nature of cultural backgrounds in Egypt (the Western educated and the Muslim educated) leads to a duality of Literature and the Arts. The short story and the novel may ignore one section of this society and address themselves to the other, usually the Western educated Egyptian. It would be good for the society at large if the short story and the novel could address both sections of the society. The theatre, on the other hand, cannot without danger to itself ignore either section of the society. The major problem of the theatre in Egypt would seem to be how to write and produce plays which would satisfy both the cultural-mulatto and the rest of the community.

Various reasons have been adduced as to the absence of drama in Classical Arabic Literature.¹ These reasons are usually grouped around three main issues, these being Language, Environment and Islam.

At this point, it has to be said that the working definition of drama accepted here is that of Karl Young.² He rejects recorded dialogue in favour of impersonation as the essential manifestation of drama.

1. One of the strangest must be that of Tawfiq al-Ḫakīm in the introduction to his play Malik Údīb where he accepts Hugo's contention that the main stages of mankind's development are the primitive, the ancient and the modern with poetic moods being the lyrical, the epic and the dramatic.

Some Arab critics have claimed, on the evidence of recorded dialogue found, for instance, in the majāmat, the presence of drama in Classical Arabic Literature. For the purpose of this chapter, a difference is made between recorded dialogue and theatre whose essential manifestation is impersonation. With this in mind, it is not necessary to waste space on the apologists of Classical Arabic Literature who pick on Language and Environment as well as Islam as the deterrents to drama in Arabic.

The third reason adduced, the religion of Islam, is the most interesting of the deterrents to drama in Arabic. But it must be borne in mind that it is not as a religion per se that Islam has prevented the maturity of drama in Egypt. Rather it is the world-view which Islam has given to the society, which has made it impossible to produce a mature theatre in Egypt.

Western drama grew outside Christianity, not within it. It developed out of the ability of the theatre to give an alternative explanation to the life of the people, an explanation different from that offered by Christianity. Drama in the West did not develop as an expression of Christianity. When the

1. Or dialogues in the Qur'ān as instanced by Ahmed Abdul Wahhāb in his A thesis on Drama in Arabic Literature, p. 64.

2. For instance Mahmūd Taymūr's introduction to his play Shalṭer No. 13. See also 'al-Islam wa al-Masraḥ' in al-Hilāl, Jan. 1971, pp. 112 - 149.

theatre challenged the world-view created by Christianity, that was the point at which drama as an independent genre came into its own. This may be carried on to the case of Islam. Just as there was a drama of some sort associated with the church, so also is there in Islam the ta'ziya. But as in Christianity the ta'ziya served merely as a function of religion. It was not drama. It is necessary to make this distinction between the role of a particular religion in connection with drama and the role of the world-view the religion imposes in relation to the development of drama.

According to Safran, a world-view does three things for a community: it 'interprets' the world they live in to them, it 'justifies' the institutions under which they live, and it 'helps regulate' relations among them. If this world-view is theologically oriented, separation between religion and the resultant world-view is not recognised by those who live under this world-view. But this is not to say that a separation is not possible. In Islam every aspect of the life of the society is seen in the light of the religion. On the other hand, society in the Christian world has always been able to 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's'. Because of the impossibility of making this separation, it has been easy for Arab critics to see Islam

1. This is not even wholly Islamic. See Dr. P.J.E. Cachia's article, 'Themes related to Christianity and Judaism in Modern Egyptian Drama and Fiction', Journal of Arabic Literature, vol. ii, 1971, p. 11.
4. Ahmad Amin, for instance.
the religion as being a deterrent to the development of drama, rather than the unchallenged world-view which the religion has evolved for Egyptians.

Since the people living under this theologically oriented world-view do not recognize a separation between their religion and the world-view which the religion has evolved for them, there is no possibility of challenging this world-view by offering a different interpretation of life, a different justification of their institutions and a different regulation of relations among them. This is true not only of Islam. It is also true of any theologically oriented world-view. Such a challenge is seen as an attack on the religion rather than an attempt to create conflict by an imaginative use of the world-view created by the religion.

Drama, more than any other literary genre, is the vehicle of such an imaginative conflict. A world-view which gives answers to all the questions raised by those who live under it rather than permit them to seek alternatives, does not provide the type of conflict out of which drama developed in the West. But a theologically oriented world-view could also produce a form of drama, rooted in its own world-view. It is the attempt of writers such as 'Ali Ahmed Bā-Kathīr to create this form of drama which makes their works interesting. Their failure or success is of great importance to our understanding of the history of drama in Modern Arabic Literature.

If critics are to get anywhere near solving the problem of drama in Modern Arabic Literature, it is necessary that they consider each Arabic-speaking country separately. It would be
necessary, for instance, to consider the existence of theatre in
Roman Syria, of religious drama in Pharaonic Egypt, and find out
how these were superseded by the coming of Islam. In connection
with the religious drama in Egypt before Islam, little is known as
yet of it in as far as it forms part of the history of world drama.
Some texts which are being worked upon are virtually manuscripts
for dramatisation, such as 'The Abydos Text', for instance.¹ The
existence of this religious drama would point to the possibility of
a development akin to the Greek one if it had been allowed to run
its natural course.²

This development has not been possible because the establish-
ment of Islam brought the establishment of a new world-view, a
world-view which provides answers rather than permitting questions,
Islam has all the answers to man's problems. The new world-view
saw Allah as being responsible for the unseen order of man's life
and Allah's revelation to Muhammad as man's only guide in his
endeavour to adjust himself to that order. The ideal life is to
follow the 'straight path' already charted by the Prophet. To

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1. Freedley and Reeves, op. cit. This is the only text-book
    on the history of world theatre which mentions Egypt as the
    possible origin of world theatre and at least suggests that
    religious drama in Pharaonic Egypt pre-dates the Greek
    religious drama generally accepted as the origin of
    Western drama.

2. Hunningher, op. cit. 'As soon as the participants in the
    rites no longer believed in the practical purpose of those
    rites ... the greater part of the community which had
    originally danced the rites lost the enthusiasm that had
    once inspired them to take part: they became spectators
    and the dromenon performed for them became drama.' p.43
present in writing or on the stage deviations from this 'straight path' only helped faint-hearted men to go astray. The concept of the good man who falls as a result of the machinations of the gods or circumstances or faults of his personal make-up, or the combination of all these machinations, has no place in this theologically oriented world-view.

A direct development from this world-view is the orthodox Islamic theory of history. The best of times was the time of the Prophet. The present and the future can only gauge their success in as far as they approach that past of the Prophet. This theory of history forms the basis of Bā-Kathfīr's epic drama whose subject is the Caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.
CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THEATRE IN EGYPT
The appearance of drama in modern Egypt has been made possible as a result of the contact with the West. There is yet no authoritative history of the theatre in Egypt. Each person, scholar or critic, who has dealt with theatre in Egypt has used his own period division, movements or classifications. The preference in this short sketchy history is to see the history of the Egyptian theatre under the following two headings:

1. The Period of Actor-Managers
2. The Period of Organised government-involved Theatre

The Period of Actor-Managers

This period can be fixed between the dates 1848 and 1930, the beginning of drama in Modern Arabic Literature and the date of the formation in Egypt of the Academy of Dramatic Art.

1. Yūsuf Najm's al-Masrahiyya fi al-Adab al-'Arabī al-Ḥadīth, 1848-1914
   at present the most informed study, stops at 1914. Najm makes two types of divisions: History of Theatre 1847 - 1914, the period of big well-known troupes of professionals, and Dramatic Writing 1847 - 1914. He further divides this last period into translations, adaptations, arabizations and original play-writing.

2. Ahmad al-Tayib in his thesis The Drama in Arabic 1848 - 1950 gives three movements: the Popular, the Classical (by which he means the period of poetical and historical plays) and lastly the Intellectual. He states in his introduction that the thesis 'does not deal with the work of the producer and actor' thus ignoring the live theatre and concentrating on dramatic writing alone.

3. 'Abd El-Nomem Ismail's Drama and Society in Contemporary Egypt dates the life of drama in Egypt from 1914 onwards.

4. Playwrights themselves hardly help the situation since their own accounts are more often personal and interesting only because of the details they give. Mahfūd Taṣwīrīs Tulu' al-Masraḥ al-'Arabī is a classic example of this type. Also Bā-Kathīrīs Fann al-Masraḥiya.
It is easy to understand this period if one takes the Syrian Marün al-Naqqaşh (1817 – 1855) as being at the beginning of a line of actor-managers who handed over, willingly or otherwise, their experience of the theatre to their apprentices who continued the chain in their own turn.

Salīm Khalīl al-Naqqaşh (1825 – 1894) took over from his uncle. One of those who worked with him was another Syrian, Yusuf Khayyat, who was active in the theatre between 1876 and 1899, the year of his death. Khayyat formed his own troupe when Salīm al-Naqqaşh branched off to journalism. Unfortunately the choice of his first play for production, al-Zalūm, produced in 1873, put him in trouble with the Khedive and he had to leave Egypt.

Another Syrian, Sulaiman al-Qardāhī, active between 1882 and 1909, ‘reorganised the remnants of al-Khayyat’s band’. Al-Qardāhī was the first actor-manager to introduce women to the stage by making use of the talent of his gifted wife Layla. Al-Qardāhī had in his troupe two other future actor-managers: Iskandar Farah, active between the years 1891 and 1909, and Salāmah Hijāzī (1852 – 1917). Hijāzī was active between the years 1905 and 1914. Iskandar Farah broke away from al-Qardāhī to form his own troupe. He had for his singer Salāmah Hijāzī who worked with him for eighteen years before he, too, broke away.

So many factors helped towards the success of Hijāzi. He was a good singer, a Muslim, the first great Muslim to be associated with the modern theatre, and he had enough initiative to start the practice of touring other Arabic-speaking lands with his troupe. Ill-health put a stop to the activities of Hijāzi; he was paralysed from 1904, and died in 1917.

The success of these actor-managers encouraged other individuals to form troupes of their own. James Sanua (1839 - 1912) was active in the theatre for two years. But his political involvement with the 'Urabi Revolt (1832) and his subsequent deportation from Egypt ended his interest in the theatre.

Another individual who was lucky because he had the help of the Khedive was the Syrian Christian Jūrj Abyād who trained in France and returned to Egypt in 1910. Abyad's career is important in that he was forced by financial considerations to abandon his attempt to introduce serious theatre into Egypt in the way it is known in European countries. He bowed to the demands of the audience which wanted either plays with a lot of music or light comedies.

Najīb al-Hāfīnī (1891 - 1949) influenced Egyptian theatre too as an individual with a good voice. The comic series 'Kish Kish Bey' owes its inception to al-Hāfīnī.

It has to be said that it was during this period of actor-managers that the conditions which would lead to the publication of plays without first putting them on the stage were established. These actor-managers were forced to pander to the tastes of their audiences and in so doing missed the chance of establishing a
highly critical audience for serious plays. For the writers who could not work for this popular theatre, publication of their plays was the alternative. Those who still thought it possible to make the theatre realise better possibilities than it was doing started to found organisations that would encourage theatre groups which would not stick to comedies and melodramas alone.

The Period of Organised Theatre

The first attempt to produce a unified front in the Egyptian theatre was in March 1914 when the Jāmi‘at Anqār al-Tamthiliyya was formed under the leadership of Muḥammad Abd al-Rahīm to further the interests of 'an independent and national theatre'. Another attempt to follow this was the formation of the Actors' Union (Ittiḥād al-Numaththilīn) at the beginning of the 1933 theatre season. But this was dissolved at the end of that season.

There seems always to have been government interest in the theatre in Egypt. On rare occasions it was a censorious type of interest such as Yūsuf Khayyāt's exile by the Khedive Ismā‘īl after Khayyāt's production of a play written by Salīm Khalīl al-Naqquš, titled al-Zalum, in 1873.

More often, government interest in the theatre was in an attempt to encourage actors, producers and writers. For instance, 'Abbās Ḥilmi sponsored Jūrj Abyād's stay in France from 1904 to 1910 to study drama.

A more systematic form of support for the theatre was established in 1930 when the Academy of Dramatic Art was founded under the direction of Zakī Tulaymat who had enjoyed a government scholarship for his study of drama. This patronage and direction of the theatre increased after the Revolution of 1952. The theatre came under the control of the newly established Ministry of Culture and National Guidance. From the same time, 1952, each province in Egypt has been autonomous in the sense that each provincial governor sets up his own provincial theatre. There is a co-ordinating body in Cairo.

The practical result of this government activity in the theatre has been the disappearance of the independent theatres of the actor-managers. In their place, government theatres under the direction of government producers put up government-sanctioned plays. This situation has led to the growth in Egypt of a conflict between the playwright who in most cases is not an employee of the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, and the director of his play who is an employee of the Ministry. This conflict, which in other countries leads to nothing more than heated arguments and the possibility of the director giving in to the playwright's interpretation of his work, has led to violent confrontations on the Egyptian stage. 1

1. The most recent, to the knowledge of this writer, is the one between Yusaif Idris and Sa'ad Adrash in connection with Idris' play al-Jina al-Thālith which was on at al-Masraḥ al-Qaumi in Jan. and Feb. 1971. See the following dailies for details: al-Akhbar 13th Feb. p. 20; al-Abrām 17th Feb. p. 10; al-Akhbar 17th, p. 13; al-Abrām 16th, p. 10.
As is to be expected, when the government becomes the sole arbiter of what is and what is not worth being shown to an audience, some playwrights are likely either to publish their plays without first putting them on the stage or getting them produced in translation abroad, or both.¹

¹ Many of Tawfiq al-Hakim's plays such as The Tree Climber have been produced in England. Heinemann are to publish soon a collection of his one-act plays in their African Writers series.
CHAPTER III

HISTORY OF DRAMATIC WRITING IN EGYPT
There are two main characteristics in the practice of playwriting in Egypt. There are those dramatists who accept that drama, as it exists in Egypt, owes everything to Europe. This attitude to drama as an art form is born out of fascination by the genre. The playwright who exemplifies this characteristic is interested in using the form for specific aims. These aims are not unrelated to his immediate background socially, politically and intellectually. Such a dramatist is oblivious of new movements in European countries although such movements determine the future of drama. This playwright accepts the long-established features of the play-form as basic. His is not the preoccupation with experimental theatres. The content of plays which exemplify this characteristic is usually Egyptian, Arab, or Islamic as in the works of Ahmed Shawqi (1868 - 1932).¹ Some of Tawfiq al-Ḥakim's plays can be put in this category.²

This is not to say that Tawfiq al-Ḥakim accepts the drama form as it is handed over from Europe. After his earlier plays, written before he went to France and while in France, he has experimented more and more with form.³ This brings in the second main characteristic in the practice of play-writing in Egypt. The dramatists who exemplify this characteristic do not take the drama

1. The titles of Shawqi's seven plays are pointers to their themes - Masra' Kliyūbātī, Majnūn Laylā, Cambīz, 'Alī Bay al-Kabīr, 'Antara, and al-Bakhīla and al-Sīṭt Hūdā, the last two both published after his death.
2. For instance, Ahl al-Kahf and Muḥammad.
3. Muḥammad, an impossible play to put on the stage for many reasons, is an example of this experimentation.
form as cut and dry and ready for use. They experiment with it not only on the stage but also in plays published for reading.

One of this group has in fact questioned the assumption that drama is restricted to a particular people and a particular culture and, by implication, closed to others. In a series of three articles entitled 'Towards an Egyptian Theatre', the Egyptian playwright Yusuf Idris denies any connection between Western drama and Egyptian drama. On the basis of his claim that man has a natural drama consciousness, and on the evidence of Pharaonic religious drama, Yusuf Idris says that there is an Egyptian drama independent of outside influence. The beginning of this drama he sees in the nightly entertainments al-sānāfīr which he sees as the seed of theatre in Egypt. This assertion comes in the second of these articles. One gets the impression, in this particular article, that Yusuf Idris is not just against Egyptianized European drama but also against the concept of wholesale and unquestioned imitation of Europe and America in everyday Egyptian life.

In the third article, Yusuf Idris makes a comparison between the hero in Greek tragedy and the hero in an Egyptian tragedy. The Greek hero is a victim of circumstances which he cannot control. On the other hand, the hero in the Egyptian

1. al-Kātib, Jan., Feb., March 1964, pp. 67, 109, 89 respectively.
4. al-Kātib, March 1964, p. 86.
tragedy is not a victim of circumstances beyond his control. He is very much in command of his destiny. He makes his own choice. His tragedy is in the choice he makes. Yusuf Idris concludes that belief in Allah reinforces the desire of the hero to get what he wants. His tragedy is that, having got what he wants, having made a choice, he is ruined by it.

A nodding acquaintance with the plays of Yusuf Idris refutes all this theory. As Dr. Louis `Awād says, Yusuf Idris has a 'romantic view of culture' and his own works owe nothing to the background he propounds. 'Dostoievsky and Chekhov are his literary fathers.' Rājā' al-Naqāsh goes further in his criticism of Yusuf Idris' claim to write plays which owe nothing to the Western theatre. He says:

The concept of something being Egyptian in its essence does not lie in one of many shapes. Rather it is a spirit which fills a work and colours its content in thought and feeling. A true Egyptian theatre will not be born until such a theatre expresses the problems and preoccupations which fall to the lot of man in Egypt.

This case of Yusuf Idris shows how far some playwrights in Egypt are prepared to challenge what others take for granted.

1. al-Thawra wa al-`Adāb, pp. 335 - 336.
2. ibid., p. 336.
4. ibid., p. 112.
These two characteristics of Egyptian play-writing coincide with the two streams of cultural and intellectual movements. Those who accept the drama form and use it without thoughts of experimentation deal with themes related to Arab and Islamic ideas. Those, on the other hand, who either experiment or question the European origins of drama seem to work on a larger canvas dealing with universally proclaimed ideals of Freedom, Justice and the Rights of Man.

What conditions have led to the publication of plays without such plays ever appearing first on stage as one would expect? One of the causes must be what has been mentioned above about the government control of the theatre. For political reasons too, it might be difficult to put a play on the stage when it would raise less uproar if it were published. There are also technical problems with which the theatre in Egypt cannot cope. Also, the theatre audience lacks sophistication. Thus some plays, such as the intellectual plays of al-‘Yakim, cannot be staged successfully except for a Western-type audience. Even the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, through its award-making committee, seems to accept the fact that some plays must of necessity be published rather than put on the stage.

While the committee described Bā-Qathīr’s play Hārūt wa Mārūt as not producible, they gave it the first prize for plays in the 1962/63 theatre season.

1. This is dealt with at length in Chapter X.
2. Even al-‘Yakim’s plays which do not deal with abstract ideas are difficult to produce; for instance, Muhammad, which has been mentioned, and Rihla ilā al-Chad. See introduction to Malik Īdib.
Other reasons may be added which have predisposed a section of the Egyptian public to play-reading. One is the fact that most Egyptian playwrights came in contact with plays on the printed page instead of the lighted stage. They had read plays by Shakespeare, Shaw, Ibsen, Chekhov and others before they ever saw some of these plays in the theatre. Naturally it is easy for them to conceive of the play as published as well as staged. By doing this they also follow the examples of Ben Jonson, Milton, Tennyson and others to raise the play into a permanent work of art through publishing it. This is necessary especially in a place like Egypt where the theatre was looked down upon even until the first quarter of this century. Mahmūd Taymūr says in this connection:

'It was a wonder at that time - the beginning of the twentieth century - to find a young man from a decent family getting involved in the cultural life (of the time) and not only that but also playing lead rôles in plays. This was because the society of that time viewed the theatre with contempt and saw it only as a place for portraying inanity and degradation.'

1. Dā-Kathīr's first experience of the theatre, for instance, was a play by Shawqī which he read. When he wrote his first play Ḥumāān, he had not seen a play on the stage before.

A second consideration is the fact that mature intellectuals with enough sophistication to encourage serious drama were too few to supply an audience within the catchment area of any one theatre. Books, on the other hand, would have wider circulation. Another reason for this predisposition to publish plays may be a hangover from the times of Classical Arabic Literature where the writer is a master of words in the written form. To see his words in print would then be reassuring and would put him in the tradition of Arabic Literature.

A major fault in these published plays is the way in which the stage directions are written. Because these plays are meant for 'mental performances' all the paraphernalia of writing for the stage - dialogue, division into acts and scenes, stage directions - ought to be used so that we can put on in our reading minds as good a production as that put up on the stage. The relevant question to ask is: what does one expect of a printed play to make it readable?

In the preface to The Dynasts, Hardy says that some critics feel that 'to declare a drama as being not for the stage is to make an announcement whose subject and predicate cancel each other'. He goes on to show that this is not necessarily the case. But it is Bernard Shaw who has been credited with being the pioneer of the printed play. Shaw distinguishes between a play which must be made intelligible to a reader and a play which must be made intelligible to a spectator and a listener. Ignoring content, he

3. TLS, May 10, 1923.
4. TLS, May 17, 1923.
says that two issues are to be considered: the dialogue of the
play, and the stage directions.

Shaw quotes a line from Macbeth:

"No, this my hand will rather

The multitudinous seas incarnadine,"¹

and comments that this is 'such a polysyllabic monstrosity as
was never spoken anywhere but on the stage; but it is
magnificently effective and perfectly intelligible in the
theatre'.² Even if one thinks that this speech is readable,
one still has to concede that short-handed, cryptic notes as
stage directions are not convenient in a play meant to be read.
A stage direction such as the following blends easily with the
body of the play being read: 'Sartorius, greatly troubled,
turns again to the fire with a heavy sigh'; while the same
stage direction given as follows: 'Sartorius, R.C. Business'
reads like swallowing a pill without a drink of water.³ 'The
safe rule is,' writes Shaw, 'to write nothing in a play that you
would not write in a novel.'⁴

This injunction has been followed to its logical
conclusion by some of Shaw's contemporaries such as Granville-
Barker in The Madras House and Sir James M. Barrie in

1. Macbeth, Act II Sc. 11.
2. TLS, May 17, 1923.
3. TLS, May 10, 1923.
4. Shaw on Theatre, p. 95.
Echoes of the War. Granville-Barker writes, in a stage direction on the entrance of a female character in The Madras House:

'Philip's wife is an epitome of all that aesthetic culture can do for a woman. More: she is the result - not of thirty-three years - but of three or four generations of cumulative refinement. She might be a race horse! Come to think of it, it is a very wonderful thing to have raised this crop of ladyhood! Creatures, dainty in mind and body, gentle in thought and word, charming, delicate, sensitive, graceful, chaste, credulous of all good, shaming the world's ugliness and strife by the very ease and delightsomeness of their existence etc., etc.'

This is an extreme instance the like of which can be found even in Shaw's Man and Superman. As for Barrie, he pretends to be a story-teller who has never written a play. 'He does not use italic type; the speeches of his characters are enclosed within inverted commas.' The question one may ask is: must stage directions be an intrusion of the methods of the novel or the comments of a lecturer as his slides are flashed on to the

1. TLS, May 10, 1923.
2. Beginning from Act III there follow four pages of stage direction.
3. TLS, May 10, 1923.
screen? To quote Shaw again:

'The fact is, the actor and the reader want exactly the same thing, vivid strokes of description, not stage manager's memoranda of impertinent instructions in the art of acting from literary people who cannot act.'

It has been necessary to go into some detail about the form a printed play should take to make it readable because most Egyptian playwrights seem not to be conscious of the fact that a play to be read has to be at least slightly different from a play to be staged. Moreover, it would seem important that a playwright should be familiar with some aspects of the technique of the novel as well as that of the theatre. The following two passages, one from Ḥajjūd Taymūr's *Shelter* No. 13, picked at random, and the second from Bernard Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, will show what is meant here:

'Affāf: (her eyelids closed, says to Bahjāt al-Nā‘īm)

What time is it now?

Bahjāt al-Nā‘īm: (he had directed his glance to his wrist watch)

Midnight . . .

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1. *Shaw on Theatre*, p. 94.
Shakib: (shouting with all his strength) Midnight . . .
   Impossible!

Nabil Bey: (looking at his wrist watch) Midnight exactly . . . that means we have forty-eight hours more in this shelter.

Shakib: Impossible . . . impossible . . .

Bahjat al-Na‘im: Do we still have any hope?

Shakib: Say forty-eight days . . . I would even say forty-eight years! (opens the front of his shirt forcefully and reveals his chest)
   I want to while away time little by little.¹

¹ Shelter No. 17, Act III, p. 166.
BURGE-LUBIN. Hallo, Barnabas!

BARNABAS. (without looking round) What number?

BURGE-LUBIN. Five double x three two gamma. Burge-Lubin.

Barnabas puts a plug in number five; turns his pointer to double x; nuts another plug in 32; presses a button and looks round at Burge-Lubin, who is now visible to him as well as audible.

BARNABAS. (curtly) Oh! That you, President?

BURGE-LUBIN. Yes. They told me you wanted me to ring you up. Anything wrong?

BARNABAS. (harsh and querulous) I wish to make a protest.

BURGE-LUBIN. (good-humoured and mocking) What! Another protest! What now?

When these two passages are compared, it is possible to say that the second one reads better than the first. But such comparison does not necessarily show that Shaw is a better writer than Taymūr. Rather it shows that Shaw is a better writer for the reader of plays than Taymūr is. The mutterings of Shakīb 'Impossible ... impossible' need the medium of an actor to fully communicate their meaning. On the other hand, Shaw is capable of by-passing the middlemanship of the actor and making his play intelligible for a mental performance.

IV

It would be difficult to find in the contemporary literary scene in Egypt a more neglected major writer than 'Ali Ahmad Bā-Kathīr. Books on literary criticism in Egypt and the Arab world either do not mention his works or else they dismiss him in a few words. When the Higher Council for Literature and the Arts was asked by the Russian Embassy in Cairo to provide them with a list of Egyptian writers, Bā-Kathīr's name was not included. When Sirr al-Jākima bi-amrillah was to be produced by the National Theatre at the beginning of 1971, al-Ahram published a short notice in which it said that the famous elderly Egyptian actor Yusuf Wahbi was going to take the lead part of al-Jākim; the producer and director was going to be an equally elderly man of the Egyptian theatre, Fattūḥ Mischātī. The notice made no mention of the fact that this play was written by 'Ali Ahmad Bā-Kathīr. This is in spite of the fact that Bā-Kathīr published no fewer than sixty plays, five novels and two volumes of poetry. He was awarded medals by President 'Abd an-Nāṣir for his literary works. A few of his plays also won first prizes at literary competitions organised by the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance.

1. None of the major critics mention him in their works, for instance Muhammad Mandīr and Louis 'Awād. Other playwrights such as Mahmūd Taymūr mention him in passing. See his Tulū' al-Masrah al-'Arabi, p. 139.
2. Interview with Bā-Kathīr's widow and confirmation from the Higher Council for Literature and the Arts.
4. One of these was awarded in 1963.
PART TWO

WESTERN LITERARY GENRES, ARAB-ISLAMIC CONSCIOUSNESS

AND THE LITERARY PRODUCTIONS OF BĀ-KATHĪR
CHAPTER IV

BIOGRAPHY
Lastly, a number of his plays enjoyed some measure of success on the stage and some popularity. Even if the bulk of Bā-Kathīr's production failed as theatre, an attempt to understand the nature of and reason for the failure must be a contribution to the theatre in Arabic. It would seem that few critics have recognised this fact.

‘Alī Ḥāfīd Ṣūrābajah, a town in East Java of Indonesia. He was the first child of Arab parents š who had come to Indonesia from the Hadramawt to trade. When ‘Alī was eight years old he was sent to Hadramawt (now the People's Republic of Southern Yemen) for his Islamic education. This was given by his uncle Ṣūrābajah. When ‘Alī was eighteen years old he married a girl two years his junior. While he was on a journey to the Hijaz his wife died giving birth to their first child. The pain of his loss was so great that he refused to go back to Hadramawt. Instead, he travelled around in the Hijaz and then on to Somalia and Ethiopia, all the time trying to get permission from the British to go to Egypt. In 1934 he was allowed to go to Egypt. He registered in the Department of English of the College of Arts where he obtained his degree in 1939. In the same year he married for the second time— an Egyptian widow whose two children he adopted. In 1940 he obtained his diploma at

1. Mīsīr Jūhā played throughout the season of 1951 with great success. Gulfīdān Rāhīm after a successful stage appearance has been filmed; see al-thrām 11th Dec. 1962.
2. The claim made by Professor Rizzitano in his article on Bā-Kathīr that he was born of an Arab father and an Indonesian girl was denied by Bā-Kathīr's family.
3. Also denied by the family is the claim of al-Māsā' that Bā-Kathīr came to Egypt to study agriculture.
the Teachers' Training College. From 1940 to 1955 he taught English at Mansūra and in Cairo. In 1955, he joined the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance. He had acquired Egyptian nationality in 1945. Although he expressed the desire to do so, he never went back to Hadramawt or Indonesia.

Between 1954 and 1968 Bā-Kathîr travelled privately or officially as a member of Egyptian delegations abroad to France, Roumania, Russia and Britain. He also travelled widely in the Arab world. He died in Cairo on the 10th November, 1969.

Poetry in the traditional Arabic style was the first literary love of Bā-Kathîr. He started to write poetry at the age of thirteen. He was influenced by his uncle 'Abd al-Şamad Bā-Kathîr who was himself a minor poet and owned a big library. 'Allî was encouraged to read every book in this library. Also 'Allî's uncle used to organise literary gatherings for his friends and he made his nephew attend these gatherings and read to them from works in his library.1

'Allî Aḥmad Bā-Kathîr published poems in many literary magazines such as al-Fath, al-Thaqāfa and Apollo. Some of his poems are included in an anthology of Contemporary Yemeni Poets collected by Hilāl Nāji and published in Beirut in 1966. But Bā-Kathîr was not satisfied with writing poetry in the traditional way. He wanted to use his poetic gift to express something, to plead a cause which at the beginning he could not identify. Then, while he was in the Hijaz, he came across a verse play by

1. Watâni, 9.7.61.
Ahmad Shawqi. This was a turning-point in the literary career of Bā-Kathīr. He read this play over and over again. He was surprised that poetry could be used to form dialogues which made up stories. It was under the influence of this reading that Bā-Kathīr wrote his first play Ḥumām aw Fī ḍāsimat al-Abgāf which was published in Cairo in 1934. Bā-Kathīr’s study of English gave him the opportunity to know the works of such English masters of the theatre as William Shakespeare and Bernard Shaw.

During an English lesson once, his English Literature lecturer, while discussing blank verse in the later plays of Shakespeare, made a remark to the effect that this form of poetry as used in English drama did not exist in Arabic and could not be successfully developed by any Arab dramatist. Bā-Kathīr agreed with his lecturer that such a form of poetry did not exist in Arabic, but he did not agree that it could not be done in Arabic. His lecturer then issued a challenge, which Bā-Kathīr accepted, to write a play in Arabic using blank verse (al-shīr al-mursal). Bā-Kathīr chose Romeo and Juliet for his first experiment with blank verse in Arabic. He translated this play and it was published in 1939. It received very little critical notice. This cold reception was to be a feature of the literary career of Bā-Kathīr. The only person who commended the experiment was Ibrāhīm al-Mīzīnī (1889 - 1949). Bā-Kathīr did not allow this reception to deter him. In 1940 he published his poetic drama Akhnātīn wa Nifīrtiti.

1. A third alternative title is Fī bilād al-Abgāf.
After the publication of this play, Bā-Kathīr's ideas on the whole question of drama and dramatic writing began to undergo a change. This was as a result of his contact with English and American plays and also his reading of English critics on the theatre. He found himself contemplating such questions as the stage in relation to dramatic writing, the limiting effects of poetry on dramatic writings which attempt realistic presentations. These were questions which had not before appeared of any importance to Bā-Kathīr. His conclusion was that if he was to use the stage for his ideas, for pleading a cause, prose was the most convenient form of language to employ.

At this time also Bā-Kathīr's nationalistic feeling as an Arab was roused to anger by the prospect of a national home for the Jews in Palestine. He studied the history of the Jews both in ancient times and in the modern period. Balfour's Declaration became for Bā-Kathīr comparable to the deceitful declaration of the Priest of Delphi, a declaration which Bā-Kathīr blames for the tragedy of King Oedipus in his Arabic version of this Greek play. The curse of the gods was not on Oedipus, Bā-Kathīr explains. Rather, his tragedy was the result of demoniacal plans set in motion from the beginning by the Priest of Delphi. But Bā-Kathīr's Ma'sāṭ Ūdib is a product of a later stage in the development of his personality as an artist and as an Arab. At the time when he was re-examining his attitudes to drama and dramatic writing, Bā-Kathīr was content to assuage his anger by writing satiric plays about Jews, Zionists and their imperialist sponsors Harry Truman and Winston Churchill. So, from 1940 to about 1953, Bā-Kathīr wrote many political plays, some of which were produced on the Egyptian stage and were popular.
Most of these plays dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the role of Britain and America in it. This period could be said to be the happiest period of the literary life of Bā-Kathir. He had left behind him the unhappy loss of his first wife, his early experiments in dramatic writing, and he saw in front of him a life of literary achievement which would establish him as a great Egyptian writer and playwright as well as an important leader of thought in Modern Arabic Literature. For many reasons Bā-Kathir was never to see this dream come true. In fact, the more he published after 1953 the more doubtful he became of ever being accepted as a writer of any importance in his adopted country.

After the Revolution of 1952, Bā-Kathir, like many other Egyptian writers, left off dealing with political and social subjects in his works in order to give the Revolution a chance. With the exception of al-Tha’ir al-Ahmar (1953) Bā-Kathir’s writing from this time to the end of his life dealt with historical themes as well as themes from Egyptian, Islamic and Hellenic mythology.

Bā-Kathir’s family believe that one of the reasons why he was never accorded the wide recognition which he thought he deserved was the fact that he was not originally an Egyptian. The fact that he took Egyptian nationality in 1945 is no more than an item of biographical information to many Egyptians. They considered him a foreigner living on the generosity of the people of Egypt.

More important than this belief, for which there might be no objective evidence, is the fact that the period after the 1952

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1. Najib Mahfūz, for instance, after the publication of his Trilogy published nothing from 1952 to 1957; see Sakkūt, The Egyptian Novel, p. 115.
Revolution was not a period in which Arab Nationalism prospered beyond government circles, as it did before. Egyptians paid lip service to Arab Nationalism but Egypt was still their first and primary concern. Bâ-Kâthîr was, on the other hand, a great Arab Nationalist throughout his life.

In the literary field, and more especially in the field of drama and the theatre, the important critics were those who had had Western education and who were either non-practising Muslims or non-Muslims. While Bâ-Kâthîr harped on themes and used ideas which gave pride of place to Islam and the Arab heritage, these critics were more interested in Western ideas as they took root in Egypt. They dismissed Bâ-Kâthîr as an inconsequential conservative for whose type there should be no place in Egypt.

The most important of the reasons for the neglect of critical attention to Bâ-Kâthîr was the accusation that he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brotherhood had at first been spared from the ban placed on political parties after the coup d'état of 1952. But little by little the leadership of the Brotherhood began to fall out with the aims of the Revolution as 'Abd an-Nâṣîr saw them. It was banned and the last of the leaders were condemned to death in a case of implication in an attempted assassination of 'Abd an-Nâṣîr. After their execution in 1964, the beard, which had been the sign of the Muslim Brotherhood, gave place on the face of most Egyptians, young and old, to the thin moustache of 'Abd an-Nâṣîr. It was no longer safe for anyone to be remotely associated with the Brotherhood.

Those who accused Bâ-Kâthîr of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood had at least one piece of evidence on which to base their
accusation. Bā-Kathīr first published his twelve one-act plays (later collected in one volume under the title of Masrah al-Siyāsa) in the official organ of the Muslim Brotherhood. Although Bā-Kathīr's family has denied this accusation, saying that he would have published his works in any newspaper or magazine that would take them, it is still widely believed in Egypt that Bā-Kathīr was a member of the Brotherhood.

Despite this lack of popularity among the critics and some sections of the public, Bā-Kathīr was popular with the government and, since Arts and Literature come under the government department in charge of Culture and National Guidance, he continued to enjoy government patronage. In 1962 he was granted a state pension to last for two years while he worked on what he considered his 'magnum opus' — a play in nineteen volumes based on the life of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, the second of the Rightly-guided Caliphs. This work owes its inspiration to Thomas Hardy's The Dynasts which deals with the Napoleonic Wars. A complete production of Bā-Kathīr's play would take a fortnight and it would have more than one hundred main characters.

For background material, Bā-Kathīr read over one hundred books of about twenty thousand pages in French, English and Arabic. He read a few in Italian too. Although he finished writing the volumes of plays in March 1965, only six of them have been published. The remaining thirteen volumes are likely to be published in Kuwait. This is because Bā-Kathīr became more and more disappointed, unhappy and worried about the attitude of Egyptian critics to his work; in fact, he took ill. Early in 1969, he carried all his unpublished
works with him to Kuwait. It is likely that he would have left Egypt to live in Kuwait if he had not died during the course of that same year.¹

Najib Mahfūz, who had been friends with Bā-Kathīr since 1942, is of the opinion that Bā-Kathīr's disappointment at the apparent failure of his literary career in Egypt might have contributed to his death at the early age of fifty-nine.²

1. There is an off-the-record conversation in which Bā-Kathīr confessed his disillusionment with ʿAbd an-Nāṣir and contemplated coming to settle in Cambridge, England - a letter from Professor Serjeant of Cambridge University.

CHAPTER V

The Novels:  Salāma al-Qass
           Al-Thā’ir al-Āhmar
           Wā Islāmāh
           Sfrat Shujā‘

If ancient Fabrics nod, and threat to fall
To patch the flaws, and Buttress of the Wall,
Thus far 'tis Duty; but here fix the Mark;
For all beyond it is to touch our Ark.
To change Foundations, cast the Frame anew,
Is work for Rebels who base ends pursue:

- John Dryden,
  Absalom and Achitophel
In all, Bā-Kathīr wrote five novels. These are *Salāma al-Qass*, published first as a serial in *Al-Thaqāfa* magazine from June 1941 until December of the same year and later published in one volume in 1944; *Wā Islāmāh*, which was published in 1945 and has been made into a film; *Sirat Shujā’*, which has no date of publication but may be placed after 1952; *Al-Thā’ir al-Ahmār*, published in 1953, and *Laylat al-Nahr* which is not available for this study.

The four novels under consideration are all historical novels. *Salāma al-Qass* is set in the Mecca of the Umayyads, *Wā Islāmāh* and *Sirat Shujā’* in Egypt just before the Mongol invasions and the Crusades respectively. *Al-Thā’ir al-Ahmār* is set in the rebel federation of Arabs and Nabataeans based on a communistic system organised in Lower Mesopotamia after the war of the Zanj from about 877 A.D. These novels are important in that they form a specific part of the themes which Bā-Kathīr deals with in his plays. In fact, these themes are more explicitly recorded in the novels than in the plays. Besides frequent quotations from the Qur’ān at the beginning of the plays and, in a few other plays, introductory notes, Bā-Kathīr never wrote prefaces setting out fully, as Bernard Shaw did, the ideas he tried to express in the particular play. It is left to the reader or the audience to distil from the plot of the play, from the fortunes of the protagonists, and also from the Qur’ānic quotation at the beginning of the play, what Bā-Kathīr’s ideas are. On the other hand, the novel has greater scope for

1. This novel is dedicated to *‘Abd an-Nāṣir.*
the expression, in full, of the author's ideas. Bā-Kathfīr makes maximum use of this advantage of the novel over the play.

One of the very few studies made of Bā-Kathfīr's work is the unpublished long essay entitled *A Comparative Study of Mythology in the Plays of Bā-Kathīr*, by Muhammad 'Iqmat 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd, in which it is pointed out that there are four main influences on the life and consequently the literary career of Bā-Kathīr. These are: the death of his first wife, his discomfort in the traditional Hadrami society, contemporary Arab Nationalist thinking and the Arab anti-pathy to imperialism especially as it is seen to work in the case of Israel. These influences are important. One has to note, though, that they are important only in as far as the content of the writings of Bā-Kathīr is concerned. What 'Abd-al-Ḥamīd disregards in his study is the source of the influence on Bā-Kathīr of the forms he employs in his writing. The main influence here is his contact with Western literary forms.

The ideas which are expressed in the writings of Bā-Kathīr can be divided into two main groups. First is his Arab-Islamic Nationalist thinking which sometimes reaches a point where it is difficult to defend him against the charge of being anti-Semitic.¹ As far as Bā-Kathīr is concerned, Arab and/or Muslim are the same thing. Those living in Arab lands from Morocco to the Persian Gulf who are not covered by the racial epithet 'Arab' are roped in with the religious one of 'Muslim'. Bā-Kathīr does not show any awareness

¹ See Dr. P.J.E. Cachia's article, 'Themes related to Christianity and Judaism in Modern Egyptian Drama and Fiction', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. ii, 1971, p. 168.
or he deliberately ignores the possibility of the interests of Arab non-Muslims or of non-Arab Muslims conflicting with those of Arab Muslims as may be instanced by the example of Copts in Egypt and Kurds in Iraq.

The second group of the ideas of Bā-Kathīr is his criticism of the leadership of the Arab world for its lack of unity and also for its neglect of social reforms on the lines set down by the Qur'ān and by the example of the Prophet. It is this neglect, Bā-Kathīr seems at pains to prove, which has led to the appearance of such human aberrations as Communism in the Middle East.

These two ideas are worked out with differing emphases in both the plays and the novels. When dealing with the first, Bā-Kathīr identifies all foreigners, be they Mongols, Crusaders or European imperial powers, as the enemies of 'Egypt specifically, and the land of the Arabs and Islam generally'. To these enemies are added Zionists and Arab leaders who agree deliberately or otherwise to 'betray' their 'country and religion'. In his criticism of the leaders of the Arab world, Bā-Kathīr maintains that the Qur'ān has provided the basis for human social organisations and that only the neglect of these leaders has led to the troubles in which they now find themselves.

It may be pointed out here that most Arab thinkers who have influenced modern Muslim thought from Ibn Taymiyya to Muḥammad ʿAbduh differentiate between ʿibāḍāt and muʿāmalāt in the Qur’ān, and concede that while ʿibāḍāt, which regulate the relationship of man with Allah,

1. ʿSirat Shujāʿ, p. 27.
cannot be changed, mu'āmalât, which regulate the relationship between man and man, must be changed according to the age in which each generation lives. Thus modern Islam is made to admit such ideas as interest on accounts with banks, to ignore regulations such as cutting off the hands of a thief and to foster the re-interpretation of the idea of jihād in Islam. Bā-Kathīr does not make this distinction. This is because his idea of historicism, dealt with below, does not accept the concept of history as man's progress towards ultimate good. Rather, he feels that the Qur'ān has laid down the basis for man's life here on earth and in the hereafter. Should the present desire guidance, Bā-Kathīr is of the opinion that the example of early Islam is there to inspire it. It is not surprising, then, that most of the writings of Bā-Kathīr through which he expresses his ideas are either historical plays or historical novels.

Georg Lukács (1885 - 1971) has given what might be said to be one of the best critiques of the historical novel and play in The Historical Novel. Lukács says in the preface that he is not writing a critique of the historical novel and play but 'a theoretical examination of the interaction between the historical spirit and the great genres of literature which portray the totality of history - and then only as applied to bourgeois literature;'. But, reading through the book, one cannot but gather how the historical novel and play started and how they have fared under different social (Lukács, being a Marxist, would say 'economic') conditions. He also provides a proper theoretical critique against which one can view any literary work which

deals with the historical past of a particular people. Lukács maintains
that the historical novel grew out of the social novel. The
historical novel cannot be termed an independent genre since 'there
is not a single, fundamental problem of structure, characterisation
etc. in . . . historical novels which is lacking in other novels and
vice versa.' The guide lines which the historical novelist has
to keep in mind while working are not too unlike what another novelist
needs to remember. First of all the historical novelist has to have
an attitude, discernible from his work, to history. His historicism
is important since it influences the way he writes his novel.

There are two main possible attitudes to history. The
historical novelist might look on history as a process of man's march
towards his ultimate millennium. This is the interpretation of
history which Lukács terms 'progressive'. He sees it in terms of
the Marxist theory of the class struggle. The second attitude to
history is the reactionary one in which history is looked upon
not as the pre-history of the present but either as independent
incidents and occurrences which have no significance beyond their
time or as the actions of a few specially gifted individuals. Whatev-
ever the historical novelist's interpretation of history, it is bound
to influence his style of writing.

A historical novelist whose historicism is progressive would
endeavour to provide a 'living interaction between the outer side
of history (great events, wars, peace treaties, etc.) and its inner
side (the life of the masses). He can do this successfully by

2. ibid., p. 247.
making the hero of his novel a non-historical figure. Lukács calls this type of character the 'world-historical individual' who has access to both sides in the conflict of the plot of the novel and thus provides for the reader a means of getting at a complete picture of what is going on. Historical figures are then introduced into the narration as they play their parts in the action of the novel. When this type of solution is not used in the historical novel, the novelist suffers the disadvantages of narrowing his subject-matter to what happens 'on top' or 'below'. These disadvantages are obvious in the novels of Ba-Kathir because he does not use the world historical individual.

The historical novelist whose historicism is reactionary is more likely to create characters against a background of ancient customs and costumes. It might also lead him to lapse into merely private human psychological interpretation since he refuses to see in history the dynamics of change. Whereas the writer's historical fidelity should consist of 'the faithful artistic reproduction of the great collisions, the great crises and turning points of history' the writer whose historicism is reactionary would see his fidelity to history as being the reproduction of all the linguistic and physical peculiarities of the time of his novel.

It is doubtful whether one can categorically state that the Arabic historical novel grew out of the Arabic social novel in the way Lukács states concerning the genre in European literature. This

2. Ibid., p. 197.
is because there was no Arabic novel prior to the historical novels of George Zaydan (1861 - 1914). El-Hazmi accepts the analysis of Lukács but goes on to say that nationalism rather than a development from the social novel was the main reason for the historical novel in Arabic literature. Lukács makes mention of nationalism, in this case German nationalism, as being a contributory factor in the development of the historical novel. Partly it is the re-awakening of past national greatness which gives strength to hopes of national rebirth. It is a requirement of the struggle for this national greatness that the historical causes for the decline, the disintegration of Germany should be explored and artistically portrayed. It is thus clear that Lukács recognises the part nationalism can play in helping to create the historical novel. But nowhere in the next four hundred pages of his book does he mention nationalism again. This is understandable since it may upset his main thesis. All the same, this comment on Germany is applicable to the Arab world. Contact with the West had exposed the decline and disintegration of this world. If it is to be re-awakened, and the greatness that once belonged to it is to be re-asserted, it is necessary to turn to the past and to play up its main positive aspects in order to encourage those who are likely to lose faith in themselves. Thus nationalism played a major rôle in the establishment of the historical novel in Arabic literature.


2. op. cit. Lukács, p. 19.

3. It is interesting to note how African writers, with no extensive written past to go back to, have resorted to writing socio-antropological novels rather than historical novels. An example is the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe.
As Bā-Kathīr's education was completely Islamic and traditional until he was almost twenty-five, it is not surprising that his interpretation of history is conservative. He does not make any distinction between the different regions of the Arab world even prior to Islam. He asks rhetorically:

'Is Egypt not an Arab country in the first rank of Arab countries? Is its ancient history not part of its whole history and so has to be part of the history of Arabs whose heritage ought to be dear to everyone: the Pharaonic civilization in Egypt, the Babylonian civilization in Iraq and the Phoenician civilization in Syria? What is the difference between these civilizations and the Sabean civilization in Yemen? Are all these not connected with the inhabitants of these ancient regions who are the ancestors of the Arabs of to-day in these parts?'

To prove his point further, Bā-Kathīr quotes al-Mutannabī:

'My forefather Ya‘rub is also yours when there is occasion for boasting; and through you your ancestor Pharaoh has become mine.'

For Bā-Kathīr, then, there is a unity in the whole history of all the parts of the Arab world before and after Islam.

Bā-Kathīr also believes in the traditional view of the history of Islam whereby the best part of the history of the Arabs was the

1. Fann al-Wasrahīyya, p. 38.
2. Introduction to Akhnāṭīn wa Nifirtit, p. 11; this translation is by Dr. P.J.E. Cachia.
period of the Prophet and the further away one gets from this period the worse off one is. The corollary is that the conditions which existed during the period of the Prophet should be reproduced in order to create a happy society now. The Prophet left behind the Qur'ān and his Ḥadīth and these must be used and followed in detail in order to achieve the desired end of man: happiness here and in the world to come.

As has been remarked above, most modern reformers in Islam divide the injunctions of the Qur'ān into two parts, viz. ḥāḍāt and muʿāmalāt. They further maintain that the former are given once and for all time and cannot be changed. As for the latter, each age must re-interpret the injunctions to fit its way of life. Bā-Kathīr does not make this distinction.

Bā-Kathīr's artistic use of history stems from this attitude to Arab Islamic history. The Arabs were great once. This greatness came as a result of the greatness of Islam. The Arabs can be great once again. But this greatness will come only as a result of their total commitment to Islam. Sometimes, while reading some of the works of Bā-Kathīr, one cannot fail to remember the punishment stories of the Qur'ān which were narrated for the sole purpose of teaching believers not to follow the way of, for instance, the people of ʿAd.1 Although he does not believe in the Marxist interpretation of the past being the pre-history of the present, he believes that the past has its relevance to the present in as far as it can provide examples either to be shunned or followed for the present. Moreover, Bā-Kathīr believes that the past provides more malleable material for the artist than the present does.2 The writer is free while using these

2. FH, p. 40.
historical materials to clothe the incidents and present the characters in any mode or guise he might choose.

Directly connected with Bā-Kathīr's historicism is his concept of his hero in his writings. Bā-Kathīr feels himself engaged in a war on two fronts: the home front and the foreign front. His hero, then, is the one who succeeds on one if not both of these fronts. But nowhere in the material under consideration does Bā-Kathīr have one man combine action on both fronts. His heroes are thus of two types. There is the Arab-Muslim who gets the better of colonialism, Western imperialism and Zionist machinations, restoring peace and prosperity to the Arab world. The second type of hero is the Arab-Muslim who at the beginning is misguided and so deviates from al-sirāt al-mustaqim, but then he miraculously realises his folly, repents and finds Allah again. It must be stressed here, and this will appear more clearly below, that Bā-Kathīr does not draw his characters into two groups of 'goodies' and 'baddies' in the fashion of the American western. Rather, the elements of good and bad in as far as they relate to the hero's attitude and action for or against the land of the Arabs are so mixed that until the very end of either the play or the novel, the reader does not know who is saved and who is not. These two types of heroes are found in both the plays and the novels. But it is in the novels that what the writer expects the reader to understand from what he is reading has become more apparent.

When Salāma al-Qass was published in book form in 1944, very few changes were made from the original which had appeared in al-Thaqāfa

1. EM, p. 41.
three years earlier. The only noticeable change made was to reduce the number of chapters from fifteen to fourteen, the last chapter of the novel combining the last two chapters from the serials.

Salāma al-Qass was the first attempt of Ba-Kathīr to write a long-sustained prose work. He decided, after the publication of Akhnātun wa Nifirtiti, that prose was the best medium of presenting dialogue in a work of art. All his published works up to this time, besides poems, were two plays written in verse and his translation into Arabic blank verse of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The two plays are Humām and Akhnātun wa Nifirtiti.

The story of Salāma al-Qass is a simple one. Salāma is a slave-girl who has a talent for singing. She turns every poem she finds into beautiful songs. Even the verses of the Qurʾān which her master teaches her she turns to songs. This naturally offends her pious master, who decides to sell her. She is sold to Ibn Suhayl, a rich man who enjoys the company of the best poets of his age. Very soon, Salāma falls in love with 'Abd-ar-Rahmān, a man so pious that he is known as 'al-Qass'. 'Abd-ar-Rahmān suffers for some time because he cannot reconcile his love for Salāma with his religious attitude. Also, he loves his appellation of 'al-Qass' which he would not bear if he were to marry Salāma. But as soon as he has concluded that it might be possible to love this girl and at the same time be religious, the lovers face separation. Ibn Suhayl, who has gone bankrupt, sells Salāma to a Medinan trader who gives her further training in singing. 'Abd-ar-Rahmān decides to work as a trader, save money and buy back his love. He teams up with Ibn Suhayl and they both save up almost two thousand dinars. They take this money with them to Medina. When they get to Medina they learn that the
Caliph Yazid b. 'Abd-al-Malik had sent messengers to buy Salâma for the exorbitant price of twenty thousand dinars and bring her to his court. With Salâma's departure for Damascus the lovers are separated for ever and the novel ends with both of them reciting the verse:

'Friends on that day shall be foes to each other, save those who fear.'

This short novel (170 pages) raises interesting points which, to the disappointment of the reader, are not worked out. It would seem that Bâ-Kathîr was preoccupied in writing this novel with the problem of the artist within an Islamic belief system. There is an attempt to question the fact that the house of Ibn Suhayl, where his companions gather to listen to singers and drink wine, is the antithesis of the mosque where 'Abd-ar-rahmân goes to pray regularly. When 'Abd-ar-rahmân falls in love with Salâma and their two names are linked, the people of Mecca are surprised, not at the fact that Salâma is in love with al-Qass, but rather that al-Qass could have fallen in love with a singing girl. Being one thing would seem to preclude being another. This seems to be Bâ-Kathîr's own stand. This view is reinforced if we look at the Qur'ânic quotation at the beginning of the novel:

'And she was anxious for him, and he would have been anxious for her, had it not been that he saw the demonstration of his Lord.'

Although Bâ-Kathîr ends his quotation at this point, it is interesting to read what the rest of the verse says:

'thus did we turn evil and fornication from him; verily, he was of our sincere servants.'

It is natural to assume that 'Abd-ar-Rahmân will go back to Mecca and resume his religious life going from his house to the mosque and thence to his teacher's house. This is made explicit enough. For instance, both lovers agree at their parting that their place of meeting next would be heaven. 'Abd-ar-Rahmân would have to continue his pious way of life if this is to be. He has gone through his period of trial and, now strengthened, he would live in a greater appreciation of Allah. But Bâ-Kathîr also describes the heroine very sympathetically and it is difficult to decide to whom his final sympathy goes, to 'Abd-ar-Rahmân or to Salâma. When the lovers part, Salâma promises to recite the verses of the Qur'àn which 'Abd-ar-Rahmân has taught her. During their last meeting when 'Abd-ar-Rahmân says that their greatest hope of meeting was in heaven, Salâma wonders if her type, used to the singing sessions and places where wine is consumed, could hope to go to heaven. 'Abd-ar-Rahmân tells her that as long as she says her prayers, fasts and takes care of her soul, then she has nothing to fear since singing was her profession. ¹ From this it would appear that Salâma embodies what would be the healthy attitude of a Muslim to art and the artist in society. Conversely, 'Abd-ar-Rahmân's cutting himself off from the mosque during the time of his love for Salâma would seem culpable.

Whatever interpretation one might wish to impose on this novel, it is not very important in the over-all appraisal of the main ideas of Bâ-Kathîr. It is an interesting, simple, straightforward love story which stops too abruptly. Moreover, the novel has faults of construction which the other novels do not show. This is not to say

¹. Salâma al-Qâsî, p. 163.
that the novels which followed Salma al-Qass did not have their own faults. In this particular novel, characters, in whom we have been made to take interest, suddenly drop out and nothing is heard of them again. This is what happens to the shepherd boy who gave Salama her first singing lessons in exchange for kisses. As a minor character it would have been enough for the reader to learn that he teaches Salama how to sing. But Bā-Kathir gives further details which would have been relevant if the shepherd boy had shown up in the later life of Salama. Also, as soon as Salama has been sold to Ibn Suhayl, we cease to hear of her former master and his wife who were so good to her and treated her like their own child.

It is not unlikely that the serial form in which the story first appeared has to do with this feature of forgotten characters. Each chapter of the novel begins by either mentioning the fact that time had elapsed since the last chapter was written or published or else the writer directly intervenes with the narrative and takes the reader either to the mosque or to the house of Ibn Suhayl where the next episode takes place. This leads to fragmentation.

In an interview with a reporter from Al-Jumhuriyya in 1963, Bā-Kathir said that he selected the period of history with which his novel Wā Islāmāh deals because it resembled the political situation of Egypt in 1942 when there was 'a king who was betraying his country and selling his father-land ... and aiding imperialism'. Also, the story contains what the novelist calls 'our hopes of the future'.

1. Al-Jumhuriyya, 1/7/63.
2. Ibid.
Wā Islāmih was written in 1942 and published in 1945.

The court-astrologer says that a boy shall be born in the family of Jalāl-al-Dīn who will conquer the Tartars and drive them out of the lands of Islam. Jalāl-al-Dīn's wife is expecting a child and he naturally assumes that the child is to be the boy who shall fulfil this prophecy. But his wife gives birth to a baby girl whom they call Jullanār. On the other hand, a boy is born to the wife of the chief minister, who is married to the sister of Jalāl-al-Dīn, and they call the boy Maḥmūd.

The Tartars come and they defeat Jalāl-al-Dīn and he escapes, without the two children, to Lahore in India. Meanwhile his sister and his wife give the children to one of their servants, an Indian who takes them to Lahore. It is noteworthy that although Jalāl-al-Dīn is not happy at the thought that his kingdom is to pass to his nephew, he does not attempt to kill Maḥmūd. When the children are reunited with him in Lahore he brings them up together as if both of them were his children. Once more the Tartars come under Changhis Khan; Jalāl-al-Dīn is killed and the children taken as slaves. They are both sold in Aleppo to the same master who takes them to Damascus. He is good to them but he has a good-for-nothing son who sells Jullanār to an Egyptian trader and thus these two are for the first time separated. Maḥmūd grows up and joins the Syrian army where he serves with distinction. He comes to Egypt with his master who sends him from time to time to the palace of the Sultan. It is here that Maḥmūd discovers that his beloved Jullanār is in the service of the wife of the Sultan. When the Sultan dies Maḥmūd's master marries the widow and Maḥmūd is allowed to marry Jullanār.
In the constant, persistent and continuous squabblings which went on amongst the Ayyubite rivals, Maḥmūd's master is killed. Once again Islamic lands are threatened by the Tartars. Maḥmūd decides to take action. The fifteen-year-old son of the former Sultan is arrested and put away and Maḥmūd assumes the title of King al-Muẓaffār. Within a year of his assumption of power in Egypt, he reorganises the army and with it the state finances so that it can support the coming contest with the Tartars. He clamps down on the nobles and the rich and prepares for his campaign. One of his generals is Baybars, who had been a fellow slave with him in Damascus. The two become close friends.

During the course of one of the battles, Jullanār, who had insisted on coming to the battle-field with her husband, is killed. Al-Muẓaffār is sad about this and even contemplates giving up public office and retiring. Meanwhile, Baybars, who had performed bravely in the war with the Tartars, expects that Maḥmūd will reward him with the governorship of Aleppo. Maḥmūd does not do this and in anger Baybars kills him. Baybars then becomes Sultan, the first of the line of the Mamlūk rulers of Egypt. It is under Baybars that the final blows against the Mongols are dealt.

In the introduction to the novel, Bā-Kathīr states that the problem of Egypt is that of leadership. Whenever Egyptians were ably led, they performed 'miracles'. The ideal situations for the creation of Bā-Kathīr's usual hero exist in this novel. Internally, the state is sick. Externally, it is threatened by war and destruction. Maḥmūd is chosen to lead Egypt and the lands of Islam into

1. Bā-Kathīr uses the word 'muʿajizāt', Wā Islāmāh p. 3.
peace and prosperity. Not only does the court-astrologer foretell it, but Maḥmūd also dreams and sees the Prophet who says to him:

'Arise, Maḥmūd, take this road to Egypt and you will rule over it and defeat the Tartars.'\(^1\)

The life of Maḥmūd is thus to be lived in obedience to the words of the Prophet and as a condemnation of those against whom the Qur'ānic quotation at the beginning of the novel can be applied:

'Say, 'If your fathers, and your sons, and your brethren, and your wives, and your clansmen, and the wealth which ye have gained, and the merchandise which ye fear may be slack, and the dwellings which ye love are dearer to you than God and His Apostle, and than fighting strenuously in His way — then wait awhile, until God brings His bidding, for God guides not a people who work abomination.'\(^2\)

To a great extent, Maḥmūd succeeds in his aim. But the reader is not told why such a man would want to retire from active public life further than that the death of his wife had saddened him. Maḥmūd has been dedicated all the time and the problems facing Egypt are not yet at an end. Moreover, the reader is made to feel that Baybars' takeover has the blessing of Maḥmūd since we are told that he had been contemplating handing power over to Baybars. This does not conform with the historical facts.

A feature of this type of hero which again is seen in the novel *Sirat Shujā* is the fact that he pays for his heroic action with his life. Just as Shujā is killed at the end of *Sirat Shujā*, so also does Ṣahmūd fall in Ġaʿr Islāmān. When Ṣahmūd dies we do not know if the ideas for which he has sacrificed his life will survive him.

*Sirat Shujā* was written early in 1953. This is the most interesting of the four novels under consideration because of Bā-Kathīr's ease of expression, and the clearness of his own motives for writing. The story centres around Shujā, the son of the chief minister of the Caliph. Shujā attempts in vain all through this novel to reconcile two conflicting loyalties, loyalty to his father and loyalty to his father-land. These two, he saw, rarely coincided. The novel is divided into three parts. At the beginning of the first part, the two rivals for the ministership of the state, Shawir, father of Shujā, and Ṣahgān are involved in a struggle for power. It is the period of al-ʿAḥād (1160 - 1171) the last of the Fatimid Caliphs. The Caliph, as he is wont to do, plays one side against the other, and supports Ṣahgān from behind the scenes. So Ṣahgān wins and becomes the minister. Shawir escapes to Syria to seek the help of Nūr-ʾal-ʾDīn who sends his son Ṣalāḥ-ʾal-ʾDīn and his brother Āṣād-ʾal-ʾDīn. With their aid Shawir is victorious over Ṣahgān and resumes his post as minister to the Caliph. But there is no peace. Shawir is suspicious of the Caliph who might ally himself to foreigners in order to retain his throne. Nor does the Caliph like Shawir. He keeps in contact with both the foreign powers and Nūr-ʾal-ʾDīn.

Shujā is in love with Sumayya, the daughter of his uncle Abū-al-Faŷl. At the end of Book One the two young lovers marry.
The battle lines are drawn as follows: the foreigners, i.e., the Crusaders, who have occupied parts of Syria and are threatening the whole of the Islamic world; the rival candidates for office in Cairo and, lastly, the army of Nur-ad-Din in Damascus. The warring groups are constantly in contact either with the foreigners or with Nur-ad-Din or with both of these at the same time. In one battle Shawir joins the foreigners to fight against the Caliph and the Muslim soldiers of Nur-ad-Din. It is not surprising that Shujâ‘ does not go along with his father in this 'betrayal' of the interest of Egypt, the Arabs and the religion of Islam. But it is not always so easy for Shujâ‘ to decide on which side he should fight. In this particular battle, Shawir has the help of the foreigners and so he is able to defeat the combined armies of the rival faction and Nur-ad-Din. Abâ‘-al-Fâ‘îl, the father-in-law of Shujâ‘, is in one of the factions and so he has to flee when Shawir wins the day. He goes to Syria to seek the help of Nur-ad-Din. Shawir becomes unpopular. The foreign forces withdraw, leaving a garrison behind to protect their trade after a treaty has been negotiated. The foreign soldiers begin to molest the population. Once more, war is inevitable. This time, Shawir orders the inhabitants of al-Fusâ‘a to come over to Cairo and has the town burnt so that it should not fall into the hands of the foreigners who are coming to avenge the ill-treatment of their men in the garrison. When Cairo is besieged, Shawir agrees to pay some money if they will withdraw. After part of the money has been paid the foreign army withdraws. The army of Asad-ad-Din (messenger of Nur-ad-Din) comes to Cairo and Shawir is reconciled to its leadership through the good offices of his son Shujâ‘. Once more, Muslims are fighting on the same side. Shawir's
The image improves in the eyes of the people since he is again fighting alongside other Muslims against their common enemy, the foreigners. The problem of the refugees from al-Fustat is still unsolved.

It is clear at the beginning of part three that the reconciliation of the Muslims is not to last. Those in Cairo interested in reforms now come to power. They rebuild al-Fustat. Shawir is replaced by Asad-ad-Din as minister. The Caliph is virtually powerless. So Shawir plots with him to invite the foreigners to help to drive Asad-ad-Din and his army out of Egypt. Shujah discovers this plot and informs Asad-ad-Din of it, using his wife as his messenger. An invasion is beaten off and once more Shujah makes his father's peace with the reformers. Shawir openly declares that he is retiring from public life, but he does nothing of the sort. In a last desperate bid to get back to power, he plans the assassination of Asad-ad-Din and a number of the reformers. He invites them to attend a dinner he is giving in his house to mark their reconciliation. Shujah once more discovers his father's evil plan and confronts him with the evidence. Shawir orders his son to be killed, and Shujah is stabbed. He dies hoping that the child Sumayya is carrying would be a boy and would grow up to lead Egypt and gain victory for the Arabs and for Islam.

One main weakness in the novel is the lack of explanation for the actions and decisions of Shujah. We do not know, for instance, what both his father and his father-land mean to Shujah. Bā-Kathir does not specify. It would seem that he expects the reader to assume that ties between father and son are always sacred and not to be tampered with; that ties between a citizen and his country, between a devotee and his religion are always absolute and need no further analysis. Because of this assumption, when these different ties
clash in the novel, it is difficult to give reasons why Shujā' goes one way rather than another. Shujā' becomes merely an automaton who does whatever the writer pre-arranges that he must do, no matter what are his own personal feelings which we do not know anyway.

And he does it without considering the implications for himself and for others. Thus when at the end of the novel Shawir asks for his son to be executed the reader's reaction is not so much a lack of sympathy for Shujā' but surprise at the awkwardness of the novelist in the handling of his characters. To suggest, as Bā-Kathīr seems to do all through this novel, that Shujā' loves his fatherland (without saying what that fatherland means to him) more than he loves his father (without establishing any relationship between them) is to suggest nothing important as far as the art of the novel is concerned.

Once, Bā-Kathīr was asked by a bookseller in Cairo what he thought of Communism and of Communists. He answered with another question: 'Have you not read my book, al-Thā'īr al-Ahmar? That is what I think of them.' The novel, published in 1953, is the most ambitious and, of the four novels dealt with here, the poorest literally. The novel is divided into four parts and each part has a Qur'ānic quotation at its beginning. Book One is prefaced with the following quotation:

'And when we desired to destroy a city we bade the opulent ones thereof, and they wrought abomination therein; and its due sentence was pronounced; and we destroyed it with utter destruction.'

1. Interview, staff of Maktabat al-Mīr, Fajjālā, Cairo.
2. Sakḥāt (op. cit. p. 67) gives a subtitle which does not appear in the edition used here. It is 'The Story of the Conflict between Capitalism and Communism in al-Kufa'.
It tells of Hamdân living with his mother, his wife and his two sisters 'Aliyya and Rajiyya. He works on the estate of al-Ḥāthîm, a wealthy land-owner. Thumâma, a member of a gang of hooligans, comes to ask for the hand of Rajiyya but Hamdân refuses. 'Aliyya is kidnapped and Hamdân joins Thumâma’s gang and finds out that his sister was kidnapped by Thumâma for his master al-Ḥāthîm. He raids al-Ḥāthîm’s palace in Kufa and liberates 'Aliyya who soon after disappears again for no apparent reason. ‘Abdân, to whom 'Aliyya is betrothed, takes up trading in the capital. Al-Ḥāthîm sacks Hamdân and Hamdân goes to stay with ‘Abdân. Once, when some of al-Ḥāthîm’s men come to take away ‘Abdân from his shop, ‘Abdân kills the three messengers with the help of Hamdân. ‘Abdân flees the capital.

Book Two is prefaced with:

'Read to them the declaration of him to whom we brought our signs and who stepped away therefrom, and Satan followed him, and he was of those who were beguiled. Had we pleased we would have exalted thereby, but he crouched upon the earth and followed his lust, and his likeness was as the likeness of a dog, whom if thou shouldst attack he hangs out his tongue, or if thou shouldst leave him, hangs out his tongue too. That is the likeness of the people who say our signs are lies. Tell them then these tales - haply they may reflect.'

‘Abdân spends two years studying in Baghdad; and soon he loses interest in his traditional studies and becomes more and more involved

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in questions relating to social justice. Ja'far b. Ahmad al-Karamâni recruits him as a follower of his dream of establishing 'absolute justice'. This group under al-Karamâni spread fear and terror in the society and they are hunted down. Al-Karamâni and 'Abdân escape to Syria. One of the greatest weaknesses of this section of the novel is reminiscent of what has been observed above about Ba-Kathir's treatment of the character of Shuja' in Sirat Shujâ'. Here again Ba-Kathir does not say what the social problems of this period are and why they particularly catch the attention of the people who are later known as the Karâmatians. He seems to be satisfied with his quotation from the Qur'ân.

The Qur'ânic quotation for Book Three reads:

'Verily, God bids you do justice and good, and give kindred (their due), and He forbids you to sin, and do wrong, and oppress. 

This part takes up the story from the end of Book One. Hamdân's wife dies. For some time he repents and gives up his life as a brigand. Soon, al-Karamâni, still fleeing from the justice of the Umayyad Caliph, comes to the town where Hamdân lives. He falls ill. Hamdân brings him to his house and Rajiyya looks after him. Al-Karamâni confesses to Rajiyya that he is working for the Imami Movement which will establish absolute social justice in the world. Rajiyya becomes pregnant by al-Karamâni but her brother does not know until al-Karamâni has fled the town to avoid arrest. Hamdân is prevailed upon by 'Abdân, who by now has become a disciple of the Imami Movement, not to kill Rajiyya but to accept her situation as part and parcel of their liberation movement. The bulk of the organising duty now falls on

1. Qur'ân, 16:92.
the shoulders of Hamdān. He contacts the leader of the Zanj so that
they may work together. The government clamps down on them severely.
Then al-Muwaffaq, the brother of the Caliph, who had been responsible
for state security, dies. A new Caliph takes over and a one-time
militant who had been in prison is released. He confers with the
Caliph as to what welfare measures should be taken for the betterment
of the poor and the destitute. Meanwhile a Jewish trader named Samuel
is arrested and his private papers reveal that he has been supporting
both the movement of al-Karamānī and the insurrection of the Zanj for
the sole object of making money out of the ensuing trouble. Judging
the opportunity ripe, Hamdān declares his insurrection.

Book Four opens with the quotation:

'And God preferred some of you over others in providing
for you; but those who have been preferred will not
restore their provision to those whom their right hands
possess that they may share equally therein:— is it
God's favours they gainsay? God has struck out a
parable: an owned slave, able to do nothing and one
whom we have provided with a good provision and who
expends therefrom in alms secretly and openly:— shall
they be held equal? Praise be to God, most of them do
not know! And God has struck out a parable: two men,
one of them dumb, able to do nothing, a burden to his
lord; wherever he directs him he comes not with
success; is he to be held equal with him who bids what
is just and who is on the right way?'

1. Qur'ān, 16:73, 77, 78.
The model state is now set up. There are no king and no subjects, no strong and no weak, no rich no poor. But the system does not work. Prayers which were first fixed as fifty times a day are later reduced to the orthodox five and then to one on Fridays alone. At last prayers are dispensed with altogether. When complaints start to come in, Hamdān meets some of the workers to listen to their complaints. Worse for the model state also is the fact that the Caliph in Baghdad starts much-needed reforms on orthodox Islamic lines. People in the state of absolute justice begin to decamp and escape to Baghdad. Hamdān decides to send ‘Abdān to the Imam to ask for instructions in these difficult times. ‘Abdān had, before this, received a letter from the Imam urging them to declare war on the Caliph after decrying the so-called reforms. The Imam, to the surprise of ‘Abdān, is no other than the son of al-Karamānī. He compels ‘Abdān to betray Hamdān and then chooses another person to head the state. Hamdān repents and allows the people of the state to emigrate and join the true religion in Baghdad. Left alone, Hamdān discovers that those who worked around him were all the time putting large sums of money by so that they could retire and spend it when everything had fallen apart. He is disillusioned. His old teacher turns up and takes him back to Baghdad.

It is soon obvious to the reader that this novel deals with the great movement for social reform and justice based on equality which swept through the Muslim world from the ninth to the twelfth century and more specifically with the insurrection of Hamdān in the neighbourhood of Wāsiṭ and the dār-al-hijra (an entrenched place of retreat) which he set up in 890 A.D. east of Kufa for his partisans. The

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1. Encyclopaedia of Islam, p. 767 (1927 Ed.)
importance of the content of this novel within the ideas of Ba-Kathir is that his solution for the internal problems of the countries in the land of Islam and in the Arab countries is very plain to see. Like the Caliph of that period of Islamic history, the accredited leaders of the land must go back to the Qur'ān. While they must not have such flights of fancy as the setting-up of a state of absolute justice, those who are rich must be generous to those who are poor. Besides this general guideline, one finds no details of the working-out of this injunction.

Ba-Kathir does everything possible, even falsifying history, to make his point. It is true that hardly any information exists as to how Hamdān spent the last days after his break with the Imam. But it is difficult to understand why Ba-Kathir makes him go back to Baghdad and join Sunni Islam once more except to show that there is no stage at which a man who has gone astray may not repent. Hamdān is the second type of hero, the one who sees wrong in Muslim society and does something about it. But when his action generates a positive action in the right quarters, he is ready to give up his illegal position and allow the legitimate government to make amends.

The historical novels of Ba-Kathir discussed above are relevant both to his ideas and to the development of his art form. What has gone before has been an attempt to evaluate the novels in as far as they relate to the exposition of his ideas. The next few pages are to deal with the relevance of these novels to his artistic development. El-Hazmi's study of 'The Modern Arabic Historical Novel' divides the development of the Arabic historical novel into three parts, viz. the period of the emergence of the historical novel, 1870 - 1914; the period of decline, 1914 - 1938, and the period of revival, 1939 - 1963. The

2. "The Modern Arabic Historical Novel".
historical novels of Bā-Kathīr are placed in the third period. This third period is further divided into three groups. This grouping is determined by the style of the different novelists discussed in this section of the study. Bā-Kathīr, along with Najib Mahfūż and others, is grouped among the analysts.¹

After the publication of Sirat Shujā', Bā-Kathīr did not write any other historical novel. He turned his attention wholly to writing historical drama. The main reason for this shift is bound up with the problems raised by the historical novel as a genre. Writers on the historical novel from Butterfield² through Sheppard³ to Lukács⁴ all agree that major historical characters cannot be fully portrayed if they are the main characters in a novel. If their lives and their careers form the central theme of the novel, difficulties arise. The formula then is to introduce historically fictitious characters and allow their lives to be influenced by the great men of the period in which the novel is based. This is the practice of the great historical novelists such as Sir Walter Scott and Leo Tolstoy.

It would seem from the amount of historical novels written in Arabic that critics of Arabic literature have not come round to this basic requirement of the historical novel. Historical drama, on the other hand, is better suited to the treatment of single historical figures. This is because the novel in its basic form is concerned with society seen through the lives of those in the society while drama deals with the collisions, struggles and turning-points in the life of the society. Bā-Kathīr's preference for historical drama was a product

1. 'The Modern Arabic Historical Novel', pp. 285 - 287; 324 - 347. The other groupings are the 'stylistic' and the 'antiquarian'.
4. Lukács, G. The Historical Novel.
of experience, rather than the result of an awareness of characterisation in both the historical novel and the historical drama.

Another reason why the historical drama was more convenient for Bā-Kathīr derives from the forms of both the historical novel and the historical drama. Bā-Kathīr, like many other Arab writers, was interested in historical figures, characters and personalities rather than historical periods. Disappointed with those who could be referred to as the heroes of the present, Bā-Kathīr turned to the heroes of the past, writing about them in such a way as to point a lesson to the men of the present age. His interest, then, was not in re-creating for his readers a time past which would be possible within the covers of a novel. The presentation of single personalities is much easier in drama. It is obvious, then, why Bā-Kathīr turned to the historical drama after five historical novels.

In this case the relationship between content and form, the way the content dictates the form most convenient for writer and subject, is also obvious.¹ Bā-Kathīr's historicism influenced his style in that, having decided to weave his own stories around historical figures in an attempt to provide a human psychological explanation for their actions, he has no need for the facts of history in the lives of his heroes. Therefore he does not have to explain the reasons, background, etc., for these historical facts. The characters in his historical novels are tied to their age and time as a result of what Bā-Kathīr saw them doing rather than as a result of social customs and costumes of the period. To do this well, Bā-Kathīr had to turn to the historical drama.

1. It is interesting that Najīb Mahfūẓ turned away from the historical novel after writing three. See 'The Novels of Najīb Mahfūẓ: An Appraisal', Somokh; The Egyptian Novel and its Main Trends 1913 - 1952, Sakkāt.
CHAPTER VI

THE POETIC DRAMA OF BĀ-KATHĪR,

THE SEARCH FOR A MEDIUM

Humān

Rāmyā wa Jūlyīt

Akhnātūn wa Nifirtiti
VI

The aim of Bā-Kathīr in Ḥumām, Rūmīyā wa Jūlyīt and Akhnātūn wa Nifīrtītī is to discover the possibilities for poetry in Arabic drama. For this reason, comments here will be concentrated on Bā-Kathīr's evolution of al-Shī' r al-Nurānī, blank verse, his perfection of it in Akhnātūn wa Nifīrtītī, and his discarding it for prose after the same play. While the aim stated above was not a conscious one in the writing of Ḥumām, it is deliberate in the other two plays, the translation of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and Akhnātūn wa Nifīrtītī. This aim is nowhere stated explicitly in the critical writings of Bā-Kathīr. But when one realises that he wrote Ḥumām under the influence of Aḥmad Shawqi, did the translation of Romeo and Juliet as a result of a challenge from one of his English lecturers, it will be clear that there was a deliberate desire to find a medium within the limits of Classical Arabic Literature for the use of poetry in drama. Akhnātūn wa Nifīrtītī is the triumph of this search. Unfortunately Bā-Kathīr abandoned poetry for writing drama for reasons which will be made clear later. This had disastrous effects on his drama, especially the epic of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb.

Ḥumām was published in Cairo in 1934 but it had been written in al-Tayf two years before this time. In a long introduction, Bā-Kathīr introduces to his Egyptian audience the country of his youth, Ḥadramawt. The plot of the play is weak. It hinges on the restless character of the hero, Ḥumām. He is a member of a group of young men and women who declare that 'the old must die and the new must live'. They are opposed by a group of older men led

1. The other two alternative titles are In the Capital of al-Ḥaqāf and In the Country of al-Ḥaqāf.

by Wall Allāh. This opposition manifests itself in Ḥumān's wish to marry his fiancée, Ḥusnā. He is forced to flee the country when he can no longer live with this opposition.

He returns secretly and marries Ḥusnā, but goes away again. He makes the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is while he is here that he learns that his wife has died. He finds consolation only in prayers to Allah.

Ḥumān is like a series of poems rather than a play. There are places where only one character speaks in a whole scene. This is so in Act vi, scene ii, a part of which is quoted below to illustrate the chance this play offers Bā-Kathīr to demonstrate his poetic talent. There is nothing wrong with a single character in a play holding the stage for five minutes or more if what he has to say is dramatically relevant to the progress of the play. But Ḥumān's outburst here, on returning to his country once again after his exile, gives the playwright an opportunity to celebrate the countryside of Ḥadramawt:

1. Ḥumān, p. 97.
The above lines also show that while Bā-Kathīr had some play of Shawqī as his example, he did not follow its versification in his own play. While Shawqī’s is 'an irregular use of rhyme and metre', Bā-Kathīr uses here rhymed verse of two hemistichs. The extent to which this verse form cripples his art and takes over his subject-matter may be seen in the last line above:

'Or like the horns of the one bearing the earth on his two horns as they say.'

The last part of the line 'as they say' contributes nothing to the over-all sense of the line. Moreover, in fulfilling the need of the rhyme it still has to do so by a poetic licence whereby īn may replace īn.

When Bā-Kathīr arrived in Egypt in 1934, he arrived in the midst of raging arguments and counter-arguments about free verse and blank verse in Modern Arabic Literature. Naturally he got involved and he thus continued his search for a medium of expressing himself in drama. This search led him to attempt his translation of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet into blank verse in Arabic.

The circumstances which led Bā-Kathīr to do this translation are too well known to bear repetition. This translation was not published until ten years after it had been done. Bā-Kathīr has pointed out in the introduction to Akhnāṭīn wa Mīritīfīṭī that his contribution to the blank verse movement in Modern Arabic Literature

2. See article referred to above and also 'Blank Verse (al-shi‘r al-mursal) in Modern Arabic Literature' by S. Moreh, BSOAS vol. 29, 1966.
4. Rūmīyū wa Jūlyīṭ, p. 3.
has not been acknowledged by any literary critic. While this might be true of 1940 when *Akhnātūn wa Ḫifirtīf* was published, it is no longer true to-day. Because of this situation it is no longer necessary here to deal with this aspect of Bā-Kathīr's work. It is certain that more work on the lines of Moreh's will in the near future sort out the confusion as to who first used free verse and blank verse in Modern Arabic Literature.

There were a few reasons which made Bā-Kathīr attempt this translation. He was interested in seeking new horizons for Arabic poetry. He was concerned with finding a proper form of dialogue for his new-found love, the drama form. His national pride was hurt that while blank verse existed in English poetry, it did not exist in Arabic poetry. Lastly, he felt that Arabic is a compliant language and would easily adapt to attempts to incorporate blank verse into it.

Bā-Kathīr then made studies of all the traditional verse forms. He came to the conclusion that the verse forms which would be best for narrative poetry as well as dialogue in drama are those which are repeated single foot forms such as al-kāmil, al-rajaz, al-mutaqārib, al-mutadārik and al-rāmal, rather than those composed of two different feet such as al-sarf, al-khaff, al-basf and al-ṭawil.

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1. Moreh's two articles particularly make references to Bā-Kathīr's contribution, defining his place within the movement for blank verse in Modern Arabic Literature.

2. Dr. A.M.K. as-Zubaidi, at present at Edinburgh University, is working on blank verse in Modern Arabic Literature, and one may hope that the day is near when critics will refrain from labelling every poet 'pioneer' who wrote free verse in recent times.

3. All these four reasons are given in FM p. 8.
Ba-Kathir's translation of Romeo and Juliet can be placed in the second period of translations from Shakespeare into Arabic literature in the Arab world. 1 The first period, which started with the second half of the nineteenth century, was marked, among other defects, by the refusal of the translator to stick to the text of the plays of Shakespeare. 2 Najib al-Haddad's translation of Romeo and Juliet, despite all its merits and the resultant popularity, represents the defects of the first translations of Shakespeare available in the Arab world. In the second period, which did not begin in Egypt until the thirties and especially with the establishment of the English Department of the Cairo University, where some Egyptian men of letters were educated, the emphasis was on the text of the play. Shakespeare was no longer the playwright whose works provided outlines for stories which could be mutilated to the delight of audiences little acquainted with drama. Instead, he was seen as the greatest poet who ever lived. This attitude made it possible to appreciate an aspect of Shakespeare's works which had been lost to the earlier period of translations.

In his translation, Ba-Kathir uses the five single foot metres mentioned above, thus producing a mixture of blank run-on verse and free verse where the paragraph, and not the line, is the unit of sense. To make comparison possible the long speech of Friar Laurence at the end of the play (Act v scene iii) has been selected.

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1. See two articles, K.M. Badawi: Cairo Studies 1964/65 'Shakespeare and the Arabs'; S.B. Bushrui: Ibadan No. 20, Oct. 1964 'Shakespeare and Arabic Drama and Poetry'.

2. Besides the two writers cited above, others have noted this; Shawqi Dayf in Contemporary Arabic Literature in Egypt, J. Lendau in Studies in the Arab Theater and Cinema.
and the first eleven lines quoted below:

Friar Laurence: I will be brief, for my short date of breath

Is not so long as is a tedious tale.

Romeo, there dead, was husband to that Juliet

And she, there dead, that Romeo's faithful wife.

I married them; and their stol'n marriage day

Was Tybalt's doomsday, whose untimely death

Banished the new-made bridegroom from this city,

For whom, and not for Tybalt, Juliet pined.

You, to remove that siege of grief from her,

Betrothed and would have married her perforce

To County Paris.

The Arabic text of Bâ-Kâtîr’s translation goes thus:

1. Ùumayyâ wa Jûlît, p. 162.
What is obvious from these two quotations is the shift of emphasis in the Arabic translation, and the missing-out of important words which lead to the less effective speech of Friar Laurence in the Arabic. For instance, 'and their stol'n marriage day' is barely suggested by the translation 'bi-yadyI zawajtu-huma sirran'. Also, 'whose untimely death
Banished the new-made bridegroom from this city,' is inadequately translated as merely 'fa-kāna bihi nafy'āhā al-'arīs al-jadīd'. Bā-Kathir misses out completely the title of Paris. He does not even give a footnote to indicate the meaning of this title as he does, for instance, in places where there are mythological references in the play.¹

With this translation behind him, Bā-Kathir went on to write his poetic drama Akhnātūn wa Nifirtiti. This play takes its story from that of the heretic King Amenophis IV (1370 - 1352 B.C.) who is better known as Akhnātūn. He tried to challenge the power of the priests of Amon-Ra but failed in his attempt.² The historical characters are reproduced in the play with little or no alterations. There is Amenophis III, the father of Akhnātūn, who had lapsed into the lethargic and voluptuous existence of an oriental despot and could not understand why his son should mourn for so long the death of one woman when there were many other women living. There is Ty, his second wife, a commoner. There is Horemhab the military leader and Akhnātūn's main support in his struggle. If Akhnātūn had listened to

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1. For instance the mythological ref. in p. 44 to Diana, Bushrui mentions the difficulty created for Arab translators of Shakespeare by 'the rich reservoir of European mythology' in Shakespeare's plays. Even an eminent poet like Khalil Mutrān misunderstood the ref. to 'a golden fleece' in Merchant of Venice op. cit. p. 10.

Horemhab's advice about using force to subdue the opposition of the priests of Amon-Ra to his revolution, he could have carried it through. But violence was against his ideal of peace and love.

The play is in four acts, each act having its own title. In the prologue some priests of Amon-Ra discuss the relative danger posed by the Queen and her son Akhnatun. They are agreed that Akhnatun is more dangerous since he resembles the snake about whom it has been prophesied it would bring them to grief.

Act I, entitled 'The Resurrection', deals with the substitution of Nefertiti for Tadu, the dead wife of Akhnatun. After Akhnatun has been mourning his dead wife for some time, his mother gets a girl, has her made-up to resemble Tadu, brings the priests of Amon-Ra to 'resurrect' her with music and songs. Nefertiti comes to life and Akhnatun takes her for his dead Tadu.

Act II is entitled 'Faith'. Akhnatun and Nefertiti are very much in love and they are soon able to drop the pretence that Nefertiti is Tadu resurrected. Akhnatun starts to talk about moving his capital from Thebes in order to escape the immediate influence of the priests of Amon-Ra and to develop his own religious ideas. He has his profound religious experience, although this— the most important incident in the play— is not handled dramatically.  

Act III is entitled 'In the City of the Horizon— Akhvatun'— the name of the new capital which Akhnatun sets up. This part of the play is the most dramatic in its movement and succession of actions. Bā-Kathir shows the economy of language and action which is hardly equalled in any of his other plays. This act commences quietly with

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1. See section on 'The Religious Plays', especially the comments on the difficulty of the dramatic representation of religious experiences.
the arrival from Thebes of Akhnatun's mother. She tells Nefertiti and the others in the court of Akhnatun of growing opposition gathering in Thebes against her son. Nefertiti tells her of her husband's strange ways since they moved to the new capital. Horemhab arrives with others, pays his respects to Ty and warns Akhnatun of specific rebellions in Thebes and Syria encouraged, no doubt, by the priests of Amon-Ra. Akhnatun rejects Horemhab's advice of a swift military action against Syria and the priests after which there would be peace. A messenger enters to say that there are some priests waiting to see Akhnatun. The subsequent meeting leads to the final break-up of relations with the priests of Amon-Ra. Once more Horemhab would resort to the sword but Akhnatun rejects the suggestion.

Act IV, called Death, opens with Akhnatun on his death-bed. Too late now he realises that he should have used force to support his revolution. He dies with the name of his God of Peace and Love on his lips. In a footnote about this last speech of Akhnatun, Bā-Kathīr says that he is quoting from what is written in letters of gold at Akhnatun's feet in his place of burial.

By the time Bā-Kathīr wrote this play he had moved another step forward in his search for a medium of expression. Concluding from the experience gained from translating Romeo and Juliet, he said that al-mutadārīk was the most convenient of the five single foot metres he had employed in his translation of Romeo and Juliet.

To quote Moreh with reference to this play:
Moreover he used al-mutadārik meter only, throughout the drama, and allowed himself to use more frequently an undetermined number of feet in the lines, according to the demands of sense, thus avoiding the hashy (interpolation) which the conventional line of verse with its prescribed number of feet requires, and enabling him to use a rhythm for dialogues which is nearer to ordinary speech and more suitable to theatrical performances.¹

As Koreh points out, these characteristics can be seen in the following lines:

‘In these lines the number of feet used is irregular. Lines 1, 2, 5 and 8 contain eight tarfālāt of the mutadārik, line 3 has nine feet, line 4 has seven, line 6 has four, and line 7 has five feet.’²

Despite the measure of success achieved in this play, Bā-Kāthīr abandoned verse for dramatic writing. There are some reasons for this decision.

To begin with, Bā-Kāthīr's efforts were received coldly and this did not encourage him to go on. The fact that his translation of Romeo and Juliet had to wait for ten years before it was published is enough evidence of this cold reception.

A second possible reason is the failure of Arabic诗 that

'no Arab poet in the first half of the twentieth century was able to write such a poem or drama in shīr mursal that its theme, diction, techniques and other musical devices could be claimed to have taken successfully the place of the monorhyme qasida. This failure to find the right techniques for Arabic blank verse led many poets to stop experimenting with blank verse.'

Perhaps most important to Bā-Kāthīr was his desire for realism in his plays. In coming to this decision Bā-Kāthīr recognises the use of poetry for drama by Shakespeare and more recently by Yeats. But he says that Yeats' example succeeds because he was attempting to re-awaken the spirit of the Irish. After Yeats no playwright of any note has successfully used poetry for drama. With this reasoning Bā-Kāthīr concludes that poetry may be used for opera but it has to be abandoned when it comes to realistic drama. Thus Bā-Kāthīr turned to prose for all his subsequent plays.

CHAPTER VII

The Comedies: Dr. Häsim

Gulfidān Hānem

Al-Za‘īm al-Auhād

Imbirāṭūriyya fi al-Masād

Mismār Juḥā

Not all are free who mock their chains
- G. Lessing
VII

To pin-point the subjective determinants of Bā-Kathīr's comedies, use has to be made of some of the writings of psychologists on the subject of laughter and the comic. Besides these, Bā-Kathīr's own comments on some of his plays are also useful. Thirdly, there is some internal evidence in the plays themselves which can be interpreted as furnishing insights into Bā-Kathīr's understanding of his comedies. There is, for instance, a scene in al-Za'īm al-Auḥad where some of the characters promise a poet that they will listen to his poetry if he tells them anecdotes about the life of the unique leader and also the life of his aide-de-camp. The poet accepts this condition and tells three jokes. When he has finished he brings out a sheaf of papers and proceeds to read some of his poetry. But the people refuse to listen to him unless he tells them more jokes, this time using fictional material instead of the political realities of the country. The poet replies that reality is the source of the joke par excellence. Nobody listens to his argument. At the end of the play he is left, alone on the stage, still coddling his poetry.

It is possible to interpret this scene in a number of ways. It may be said to show the lack of appreciation which works of contemporary poets suffer and which leads them to prostitute their talents in less reputable pursuits than the composition of poetry. Indeed, when one realises the neglect which the work of Bā-Kathīr has

1. Use is made here of Bergson, Henry - Laughter; Meredith, George - An Essay on Comedy, both published in one vol. under the title Comedy; Freud, Sigmund - Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious.
2. FM p. 21 and ff.
suffered, one may conclude that this scene is Bā-Kathir's dramatization of one of his own problems. It would seem, then, that Bā-Kathir summed up his situation thus: nobody listens to serious discourses. So if anyone wishes to be listened to, he must tell jokes preferably of an innocent, harmless fictional character. With this in mind Bā-Kathir wrote play after play using some of the basic techniques of this genre. It has turned out that the best-known plays of Bā-Kathir, such as Mismār Juḥā and Gufidān Hānem, are all comedies.

One of the subjective determinants of Bā-Kathir's comedies, therefore, is his desire to be heard. His train of thought may be said to be: since the theatre in Egypt is not prepared to listen to serious discourses, then he must make his audience laugh. To achieve this, Bā-Kathir usually takes situations out of the realities of everyday life. These situations are usually political and could be tragic in themselves; for instance, the alleged 'butchering' by Gāsim of thousands of Iraqians used as the starting-point of the comedy al-Za'Im al-Aḥad. Another is the unhappy situation in which a peasant cannot obtain redress within the judicial system, the theme of al-Fallāh al-Faṣidh.

Bā-Kathir seems to think that the writer can wield the quill rather than the sword as a weapon against these adverse situations and he can use his weapon by giving these potentially tragic situations a twist which reduces them to comedies. This has led Bā-Kathir to state,

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1. Two of the books found in the bookshelf of Bā-Kathir on this subject are: A Century of Humour, Modern Humour. As usual he does not borrow any material from these books for his comedy.
2. Introduction to al-Za'Im al-Aḥad.
3. This allegation is made in the introduction to al-Za'Im al-Aḥad.
in the short but important introduction to al-Za'im al-Aubad, that there is hardly any difference between Tragedy and Comedy. He says that events in Iraq have turned out exactly as he predicted in this play - the bloody overthrow of Qasim in 1958. He goes on:

'It (the play) was sent to the publishers now as it was written then (1955) without any alteration or change so that the reader can see and marvel at the fact that Fate had chosen for the unique leader in the world of reality the self-same end which the play had ordained for him more than three years before, with the difference that separates Tragedy from Comedy, if indeed there is a difference between the two.'

For Bā-Kathīr, then, what is tragic in reality may be turned to comedy on the stage, the sad part of it being the relentless march of the tragic reality compared with the easy solution found amidst laughter in the comedy.

Bā-Kathīr's acceptance of a rôle akin to that of a clown raises some questions. Having accepted the rôle and responsibility of a writer, is it necessary for him to pander to the vulgar appetites of the audience he has chosen to edify through his writing? Does he not, in this way, lose any opportunity of being taken seriously, if not by his contemporaries, at least by those who will come after him?

Bā-Kathīr seems to have assumed that he could gain both contemporary fame and future attention by making concessions which he considered limited enough to allow him to be a writer who influences the

1. al-Za'im al-Aubad, p. 3.
lives of his audience. He would give them characters and situations to laugh at. But he would present these to his audience, not in the colloquial language more suitable to their immediate assimilation of comedy, but in classical Arabic. In doing this - that is, using the classical language for comedy - Bā-Kathlr was going against the trend in the Egyptian stage. Thus one of the subjective determinants of Bā-Kathlr's comedy is his desire to bribe the audience so that they may be favourably disposed to pay attention to his more serious writing.

Perhaps more fundamental is the psychological determinant of Bā-Kathlr's comedies. It may sound obvious but it has to be stated that Bā-Kathlr did not believe in art for its own sake. He was a committed writer, and this is more so in his comedies. His comedies, like the hostile joke which Freud defines as 'serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defence' are designed to make anyone whom Bā-Kathlr considered the enemy of Muslims and Arabs 'small, inferior, despicable or comic'.

Bā-Kathlr has narrated the thought-process which brought him to writing comedies. He points out that by temperament he was not cut out to amuse others and that the first plays he attempted to write were tragedies. But the political situation in the Arab world with reference to the imperial powers in the region made him wish for some form of revenge, a means of having his own back on those powers. In

1. Freud, Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, p. 97.
2. ibid., p. 103. This approach may also be called 'humour of deflation'.
3. FM p. 26 and ff.
particular, the partiality of the first Secretary-General of the United Nations Organisation, M. Trygve Lie, to the Zionists angered Bä-Kathir. This was in connection with the Palestinian problem, 'as if M. Lie was their spokesman in the Organisation, being more Zionist than the Zionists themselves'. This anger drove him to 'seek revenge by means of his pen'.

Outlining the aims of making people comic, Freud says:

'One can make a person comic in order to make him become contemptible, to deprive him of his claim to dignity and authority.'

This is the use to which Bä-Kathir puts his comedies to achieve his revenge.

Having pin-pointed these two main subjective determinants of Bä-Kathir's comedies, it is necessary to make some comments on the reaction of the audience to some of his plays. Bä-Kathir seemed to have overlooked a basic element of jokes made at the expense of others. A person who laughs at a joke bears witness to the success of the joke and also compliments the teller of the joke. The same remark can be made in connection with comedy. But jokes which have a purpose run the risk of not being given attention by those who consider them in bad taste. This statement is again applicable to comedy. In the particular case of Bä-Kathir, his plays dealing with the Arab-Israeli

1. He was Secretary-General from Feb. 1946 to April 1953.
2. op. cit. FM p. 27.
3. ibid. p. 27.
5. Freud, op. cit. p. 103.
issue are considered in bad taste, among others, by Egyptians of Coptic origin. This view has had the effect of pushing aside most of the comedies of Bā-Kathir because of what has been considered his anti-Semitism. This neglect by serious critics has led to an interesting situation whereby the most voluminous critic of Bā-Kathir's plays is Bā-Kathir himself: 2

The comedies of Bā-Kathir may be divided into two groups — social comedies and political comedies. These two groups coincide with the two subjective determinants mentioned above. The social comedies are addressed primarily to Arabs with the objective of making them acknowledge the playwright, while the political comedies are a means of expressing his exasperation at the rôle of Western imperialism in the Arab world.

Dr. Ḥāzim

In an introduction to this play, Bā-Kathir points out that it revolves around two ideas 3 — 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. Ḥāzim, a hard-working young man; Bayyūmī the chief clerk; Sharif Bey, father of Dr. Ḥāzim, an unemployed spendthrift, dependent on his son's meagre earnings for running his household, and 'Abbās, Ḥāzim's


2. Mostly in FM and in introductions to reprints of his plays. There are at the end of Akhnātūn wa Nīfīrtītī detailed character studies of the play written by Bā-Kathir himself.

3. FM pp. 31 and ff.
half-brother, a perpetually drunk youth who is beyond the control of his parents. There is also Ḣikmat Hānem, the stepmother of Dr. Hāzim. The only action in this scene is Hāzim's unwilling surrender of ten out of his twenty-five pound salary. 'Abbās immediately takes two pounds and his mother eight. Other characters who are mentioned in this first scene are Iḥsān, Hāzim's sister, and Laylā, the sister of 'Abbās, betrothed to Amīr who is a friend of 'Abbās.

In scene two an argument ensues at table concerning the marriage of Laylā to Amīr Efendi. Hāzim is against the marriage. Sharif Bey is angry as a result of his son's rudeness to Ḣikmat Hānem, and accuses Šabīr Efendi, Hāzim's uncle and father of Hāzim's fiancée, of being the evil influence over Hāzim.

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

1. The same ring (usually gold) is used in modern marriages for both engagement and marriage in Egypt. As an engagement ring, it is worn on the fourth finger of the right hand and at the wedding it is transferred to the corresponding finger of the left hand.
In the next scene Hazim has turned drunkard. He stays away from home and will 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 apologised for his bad behaviour. Bayyumi telephones Sabri Efendi and he talks to Hazim. It is then arranged that Hazim should call at the house that evening. Hazim and Bayyumi pay their last bill at the Greek bar and go away.

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, formerly betrothed to Amir — we are not told how, why and when this change-over is effected — 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 beseech Hazim, but Hazim is adamant. Sharif Bey faints and Hazim has to give him medical attention. When he recovers, father and son are reconciled.

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. If she is not satisfied, she can stay away from their house. His mother-in-law is naturally angry at this. While the argument is
going on Hikmat Hānem, Ḥisān and Laylā come to see Hāzim and they get involved in the quarrel. Amīna Hānem, Wāhid’s mother, orders her daughter to pack her things and follow her home. Hāzim telephones his uncle Ṣabri Effendi. ‘Abbās has now changed to a decent young man and Hāzim helps him to open a drugstore.

Scene seven takes place in the house of Ṣabri Effendi. Hāzim is determined not to go there and bring back his wife since he did not drive her away in the first place. To make Hāzim come, however, Ṣabri Effendi telephones him to say that Wāhid is ill. Hāzim 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. For instance, it is Ṣabri Effendi who determines whether or not Wāhid is to marry Hāzim. 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 has led to many Egyptians, especially doctors, engineers and teachers, leaving Egypt to work in some African countries.¹

One of the weaknesses of this play is the unrealistic solution provided for the realistic problems raised within the play. ‘Abbās changes because Hāzim 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 Hānem’s

¹ For instance about 200 Egyptian doctors were given employment in Nigeria in 1970 (Nigerian Embassy, Cairo).
spending habits do not change. Neither are we told that Ḥāzin's salary increases. By ignoring the social situation which creates the basic conflict of this play, Bā-Kathir weakens its effect. The conflict is not caused by the particular trait of character in any of the dramatic 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 Sharīf Bey's house is not sold by auction because Ḥāzin undertakes to save it.

As for the technical aspect of this play, Bā-Kathir points out that the reason for its weakness is that it lacks unity of idea.¹ He says that the last two scenes virtually belong to another play altogether. This is not true because the same problem, insufficient money, which bedevils Ḥāzin in the preceding scenes causes the conflict with his mother-in-law in the last two scenes.

A basic condition for the successful production of a play which depends mainly on its verbal strength, as many of Bā-Kathir's comedies do, is an uninterrupted run-through. In this way, the mind of the audience is kept on the play. A break of ten minutes is not considered here as an interruption. But when a play has to stop every twenty minutes or so for the shifting of sets and the erection of new scenes, the interruption must undercut the concentration of the audience. In DR. Ḥāzin there are seven scenes in seven different settings. These are not scenes which easily lend themselves to quick shifting, as the stage directions in scenes three, four and five show. Scene three takes place in the house of Ṣabīr Efendi where Nāhīd is in the guest-room

¹ FM p. 31 and ff.
(well-furnished). She is standing in front of one of the windows which overlook the street. After about twenty minutes the scene changes to a bar run by two Greeks. There are empty tables and chairs when the curtain rises. These fill up as the action of the play goes on. About fifteen minutes later, we are in scene five in the consulting-room of Dr. Ḥāzin. These constant shifts in scenes weaken the audience's concentration, and they do not help a reader either. Besides this, they show a lack of economy of movement on the stage on the part of the playwright.

The dramatically commendable parts of this play are the two confrontation scenes -- scene three where Sharīf Bey and Šabri Efendi confront each other, and scene six where a changed Ḫikmat Hānem faces Amina Hānem.

**Gulfidān Hānem**

This is one of the most theatrically successful of Bā-Kathīr's plays. Madam Gulfidān is a rich, aging widow whose only delight is to run the lives of all those who come near her. She is caustic and sharp-tongued, and spares no one from her venom. When the play opens she is concentrating on running the life of her grandson Ḫiyā'. She wants to make a writer out of Ḫiyā' although the young man's interest is agriculture. She decides that he must go to the College of Arts even if he does not possess the required qualifications. When the College rejects Ḫiyā' s application, his grandmother wants to go and see the Minister of Education. While she is out we learn that Ḫiyā', who is eighteen, is in love with Āmāl, a girl from a poor peasant family. Everyone is sure that his grandmother will oppose their marriage, but she gives her blessing to it, thinking that the girl might inspire Ḫiyā' to write stories about the peasants of Egypt.
Five months after the marriage Madam Gulfidân is unhappy because her grandson's marriage has not produced the result she expected in the form of poems, plays, short stories, and novels. She drives Ra‘ûf, brother of ‘Amâl, out of her mansion. Ra‘ûf is a student in the College of Agriculture. He is a friend of ‘Udi’ and he smuggles books on agricultural subjects into the mansion for ‘Udi’, to the annoyance of his grandmother when she discovers this. She also stops ‘Âtif, an ambitious young writer and friend of ‘Udi’, from using her well-stocked library.

Her secretary advises her to send her grandson overseas to study Literature as so many Arab writers, such as A‘mid Shawqi, had done. Madam Gulfidân agrees to send ‘Udi’ to West Germany because her first love, a Turkish writer named ‘Udi’ Waqfi, studied there.

Five years later, ‘Udi’ and ‘Uthman, who has been his attendant while he was in West Germany, are back in Egypt. ‘Udi’ has a doctorate in Literature, his thesis subject being: 'The Short Story and its Relation to Rural Reform'. His grandmother is happy and decides to frame the certificate. ‘Udi’ conspires with ‘Âtif to buy a manuscript of his and publish it under his own name. ‘Udi’ also warns ‘Uthman not to tell anyone of their life-style while they were in West Germany. The way in which doubt is put in the claim of ‘Udi’ that he did a doctorate thesis in Literature is subtle and effective. ‘Uthman is talking to the secretary of Madam Gulfidân, wishing to confide in him the truth about their life in West Germany. At this point Ra‘ûf, ‘Âtif, and Fawziyya, ‘Âtif’s wife, arrive. They conclude negotiations with ‘Udi’ about the manuscript. Then ‘Udi’ calls ‘Uthman and warns him not to tell anybody of their five years in West Germany. ‘Uthman agrees, saying that silence is golden, not as a virtue but, in this case, because it brings him money from ‘Udi’.
Four months after the negotiations, Diya's book is published. His grandmother gives a big launching party. 'Atif regrets selling his work but Fawziyya, practical all through the play, dismisses her husband's regrets. She does not think much of the fame and noise which surround Diya'. She points to the suit her husband is wearing and asks him where he would have got the money for it if he had not sold his manuscript to someone who has the money to publish it. Moreover he could not have got three hundred pounds, the sum of money which Diya' paid for the manuscript, from the publication of one book. After the party Madam Gulfidan faints and the doctor has to be called. She confesses that she no longer fears death, now that Diya' has become a famous author.

Ten months after this party, Gulfidan Hânen is dead. But the problems she leaves behind keep her very much alive for the rest of the play. Nâmiq and his wife come from Istanbul expecting to claim half of the property of Gulfidan Hânen, while Râdiya, the mother of Diya', takes the other half according to the Shari'a. But a will is produced which stipulates that Diya' is to have half the property of his grandmother on condition that he continues to write about the fallâh and, in the process, becomes a world-famous author. Meanwhile, 'Atif forces Diya' to publish the true facts concerning the book published almost a year before. Diya' does this, but nobody is prepared to believe that 'Atif is the author. Diya' 's father, who had been separated from his wife because of Madam Gulfidan, is a famous lawyer. He is determined to secure the claim of his son against the counter claim of Nâmiq, who goes to court.

Diya' agrees to publish more of 'Atif's writing under his own name, since 'Atif cannot publish otherwise. This point is a little
difficult to swallow. It is not made clear why 'Aţif, if only to prove
the point that Ɂiyā' did not write the first book, should not have sought
a publisher for his other writings. The only possible explanation is
that the influence of his strong-willed wife Fawziyya completely dominates
him. Since she is in support of selling these manuscripts to Ɂiyā',
'Aţif has no other choice but to go along with her.

A year later Nāmiq wins the first round of the inheritance case.
'Adil, Ɂiyā''s father and lawyer in this case, gives notice of appeal.
While we await the result of this application, 'Adil sends queries to
Istanbul to investigate the background of Nāmiq. He discovers that
Nāmiq, rather than being the son of Gulfidān, as he claims, is the son
of Gulfidān's brother. When Nāmiq is confronted with this fact, he
renounces his claim. He and his wife are hurriedly packed off to the
airport for their return journey to Istanbul. 'Aţif comes to Ɂiyā' and
he is supposed to be coming to submit another story for publication under
the usual arrangement. He refuses, feigns madness and wins the con-
cession that his next story 'A Nation Comes to Life' be published under
his own name. The title of this story is a suggestion from Ɂiyā''s young
son who already shows signs of literary talent. It is symbolic that
the ambitions of Madam Gulfidān are finally to be realised through her
great-grandson. 'Aţif is satisfied with this arrangement. His long-
delayed rebellion against the domination of his wife is satisfying because
the audience expects it all the time. Lastly, Ɂiyā''s parents are
reconciled and reunited.

Gulfidān Lānem has been more successful than most of Bā-Kathār's
plays. Although the action of the play spans a period of seven years,

1. A news item in al-Abiram of 11/12/62 said that this play was being
filmed.
it is so well constructed around the heroine that attention is not unnecessarily divided. Moreover, the shifting of scenes noted above with reference to Dr. Zâmin does not occur. The action takes place in the mansion of Madam Gulfidăn. Other actions relevant to the plot of the play are reported, such as the mystery surrounding Diyâ’s stay in West Germany.

The relationship between Diyâ and ‘Ātif is difficult to take seriously. Yet one has to ask what is the purpose of it all. Is it an 'in' joke? Or does Bā-Kathîr take it seriously and so expect his readers and audience to do the same? In trying to answer these questions, it is necessary to look into some of the quotations from the books attributed by the playwright to ‘Ātif and published under the name of Diyâ’. In Act II scene ii Madam Gulfidăn asks her grandson to read to her from his book. Diyâ reads the following passage:

`There is no difference between this passage and the rest of the play as far as the style of Bā-Kathîr is concerned. He is not parodying the style of any particular Egyptian writer. Generally, when a writer does not favour something which he is supposedly quoting, he can inflate its style or produce a debased style to show that this is an inferior work. Bā-Kathîr does neither of these. It would seem, then, that he takes himself seriously with reference to the writer in the play. The play thus loses some of its comic effect.

There is the possibility that Bā-Kathīr is not aware of the necessity for a change of style when his character is supposed to be quoting. This is clear from the scene where Nāmīq is given a copy of the will to read in Act III scene i. This is a legal document, and one would expect that the language would be high-faluting and confusing as a result of legal jargon. What we have in fact is:

By not paying attention to such details of language usage, Bā-Kathīr has reduced the comic effect of this play whose main strength is its language.

Al-Za‘īm al-Auḥad

A review of this play in the popular press called it one of the shortest and most interesting plays of Bā-Kathīr. This was not a review of a production of the play but of a reading of it. As in some of the novels, Bā-Kathīr's target here is the enemy within the Arab nations represented by Zionist lackeys and tyrannical despots.

The Iraq of Qāsim (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 been made unreasonable. They demand the creation of a Kurdish state as against an Arab state. These young men and women are members of the Popular Front. The country is riddled with police

2. al-Akhbār, 26/2/62.
detectives and informers who use their positions against the people. 'Abd-al-Ma'mūn is betrayed to the police by his son Ḥusayn for hanging a picture of 'Abd an-Nāṣir in his café instead of the 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-Qurdāwī, seek a man who resembles the leader so that such a man could attend all public functions on behalf of the leader. A shoe-shine boy by the name of Quzman is found and brought to the presidential palace. His wife comes with him. It is soon clear that the leader is a pawn in the hands of al-Qurdāwī and the Jewish party which maintains him in power. But the leader does not mind his position as a prisoner as long as he can keep alive.

Quzman, the leader's double, is now set up in a mansion. But his wife does not take to the life here. She calls their house a brothel because a relay of girls from the Popular Front is always in the mansion to drink and whore with the person who they presume is their leader. Quzman's wife complains and starts to make trouble for al-Qurdāwī; she importunes the authorities represented by al-Qurdāwī 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-Qurdāwī 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 Quzmān. The leader, who has had the shoe-shining equipment of Quzmān brought to him, practises with it, at the same time wearing the clothes of the shoe-shiner. Both the British and the French military attachés come to see the leader to discuss a master plan to rid him of his 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 Quzmān, arms himself with a revolver, and disappears.

Act IV shows a revolution in full swing. ‘Abd-al-Ma‘mūn is released from detention but his son, the supporter of Kurdish nationalism, is killed. For once in Bā-Kathīr’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.¹

The leader shows up at ‘Abd-al-Ma‘mūn’s café pretending to be Quzmān, the shoe-shiner. The poet identifies him as not being Quzmān because of a snick in his left ear. The shoe-shiner does not have this blemish. The leader is then led away, presumably to be executed.

In this play, Bā-Kathīr uses situations to achieve comic effects. In Act II scene ii Quzmān’s wife, jealous of the numerous girls coming to see her husband, bursts into the reception hall. Sensing her approach, Quzmān asks the two girls with him to hide in an adjoining room. His wife enters, and the two argue for some time. The wife finally decides to search the adjoining room because she is sure that some girls had

¹ Cf. son-father relationships in Sirat Shujā’ and Ibirāṭirfiyya fi al-Wazād.
been with Quzmann:

As Mas'ūda says this she moves towards the adjoining room. Quzmann pulls her back and pushes her in the opposite direction, causing her to fall. While Quzmann bends down to help her up, his guard appears and rebukes him for his riotous behaviour, and arranges for his wife to be thrown into prison. For one who thought he was trying to prevent a riot, this was a painful reversal of terms. Such farcical developments from normal circumstances are many in this play.¹

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, Fājima, in her father's café. They parrot the accusations against her, little understanding what they are talking about. Then they demand that her father, 'Abd-al-Ma'mūn, hand her over to them for justice. The situation changes when 'Abd-al-Ma'mūn tactfully offers them drinks. They accept his 'hospitality' and forget about the sabotage accusations against his daughter.

¹. Al-Za'im al-Auḥad, Act II scene ii, p. 70.

². See also the meeting between the British and French military attachés, p. 99; the scene where Quzmann forces the guard, who despises him, knowing him to be an ordinary shoe-shine boy, to address him ceremoniously, using all his titles.
Imbirāṭūrīyya ff al-Mazād

In this political satire Bā-Kitār creates the atmosphere of the downfall of the British Empire. Despite some penetrating insights into the minds of those at the head of this Empire, the play 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. Also, Edward Stately, Conservative M.P. and holder of a knighthood, is addressed as Sir Stately instead of Sir Edward. These details are irritating if not corrected in a 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 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 as 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 Circle, a thin cover for Sir Winston Churchill. There is to be a celebration party.

In Act II, during the celebration party, the Prime Minister is informed of the danger posed by a resolution passed in the Conference of

1. Imbirāṭūrīyya ff al-Mazād, pp. 7, 27.
2. Ibid., p. 30.
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 as 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 confrontation between Henry and his father John Toilman in Act III is reminiscent of the same father-son antagonism in the novel Simta Shuja'. While the father is inspired solely by his personal interest, the son is inspired by the good of the state. The playwright leaves us in no doubt as to the person who is in the right.

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 reader swallow the wish-fulfilment revolution at the end.

**Mīsīr Jūḥā**

This is the most popular play written by Bā-Ḫathīr. It was played by al-Ḫasrāḫ al-Ḫarīrī al-Ḥadīth throughout the theatre season of 1951. Afterwards it was chosen to be filmed. The play is based on two ideas: one is:

'... the political aspect which shows in the struggle between Jūḥā 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 Jūḥā and the gross materialism of his wife Umm al-Ḫunān. This contrast is centered specifically around the marriage of their daughter Maymūna. While Jūḥā wishes her to marry his nephew Ḥamīd the fallāḥ, Umm al-Ḫunān 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.

The play is in six scenes. In the first scene, Jūḥā is dismissed from his post as Imam of one of the mosques of Kufa because of his criticism of the authorities. He escapes prison by pleading his preference for prison to the nagging of his wife. The Wālī considers him punished, then, by sending him to his wife.

1. FM p. 34.
2. Rizzitano, op. cit. p. 444.
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, Ba-Kathir 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 comes visiting, and advises 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. Juha makes a plan with Hammad. He 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 of 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 Chanim 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 Chanim. Chanim takes Hammad to court where Juha sits in judgement.

While the case is being heard, Umm al-Ghusn comes to complain against her husband's cruelty to her and her children. The case of
Ghanim v. Hammād is suspended and both Juṭā and his wife make statements
to the court. While this is going on the Resident Governor sends a
whispered message to Ghanim. Umm 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 Hammād can have it and be done with it. Juṭā is
suspicious of this move, knowing that it must have been suggested to
Ghanim by the Resident Governor. Juṭā 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 Hammād
should take his nail from Ghanim's house. But Hammād, as prearranged
with Juṭā, 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 Hammād is playing at, orders the arrest
of both Hammād and Juṭā.

In scene v Juṭā 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. Juṭā refuses to sign.
Later the leaders of a revolution that has taken place visit Juṭā and
offer him a ministerial appointment in their new government. The
Governor returns to Juṭā to negotiate. Juṭā and the others imprisoned
with him are released. The foreign occupation of Iraq ends. Hammād
marries Maymūna and Umm al-Ghusn is reconciled to her husband.
CHAPTER VIII

The Epic Drama of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb

If God had wished that there should have been another Prophet after me 'Umar would have been he.

- a ḥadīth of the Prophet.
Bā-Kathfr revealed, in a press interview, that the model for his epic on the life of the second Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is Thomas Hardy's epic drama on the Napoleonic Wars, The Dynasts.¹ Behind The Dynasts as ancestors in the epic form are The Iliad of Homer, Surand by Morris, Shakespeare's History plays, Sir Walter Scott's Waverley novels, Gibbon's Decline and Fall and Carlyle's French Revolution.²

Like Hardy's epic drama, Bā-Kathfr'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 Bā-Kathfr'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. Bā-Kathfr 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'.³ Nor does Bā-Kathfr use blank verse or any other verse form in his epic as Hardy does. The effect of all these differences is that Bā-Kathfr'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.⁴ These Phantom Intelligences are the expression of the characteristic fatalism which accompanies most of Hardy's heroes.

2. Thomas Hardy by Duffin, H.C., Manchester, 1916.
4. These Phantom Intelligences are: the Ancient Spirit of the Years, Chorus of the Years; the Spirit of the Pities, Chorus of the Pities; Spirits Sinister and Ironic, Choruses of Sinister and Ironic Spirits; the Spirit of Rumour, Chorus of Rumours; the Shade of the Earth, Spirit Messengers; and Recording Angels.
Characteristically, then, Bā-Kāthīr has modelled his work structurally on a Western example. But the idea, the world-view expressed in the epic of Umar, is Islamic through the choice Bā-Kāthīr makes of a period of pristine Islam and a personality who embodies all the Islamic virtues. Bā-Kāthīr defines his aim in writing this epic as being to rebuild 'our contemporary life on the strong, perfect foundations' laid down by the Prophet and his companions.

Orthodox Islam has built up the character of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb as next only to the Prophet. 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. It is no wonder, then, that he has been styled the 'St. Paul of Islam'. He was converted to Islam when he was twenty-six, four years before the Hijra. He was more of a councillor than a military man. All the 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 with this he had a simple life style which must have impressed Bā-Kāthīr 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' (sic) begin a new portion of history', then 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb - 'one of the most typical modes of all virtues of Islam' - is a fit subject for an epic.

3. Irving, Howe, Thomas Hardy p. 155.
Ba-Kathir was granted a state pension through the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance in 1962. This pension lasted two years while he worked on 'Umar. The epic as planned was to cover about one thousand pages and to boast one hundred lead characters. Like Hardy's The Dynasts it was to have nineteen acts. Of these nineteen acts only the first six had been published, each as a volume on its own, by the time Ba-Kathir died in 1969.

'Alā Aswār Dimashq

This play is prefaced with an introduction in two scenes. This introduction - entitled, appropriately, al-Fātiḥa - deals with the death of Abū Bakr and the choosing of 'Umar as his successor. Scene i opens with Abū Bakr on his death-bed. He sends for 'Umar and asks his opinion of the two Muslim generals, Khalid b. al-Walid and Abū 'Ubayda, as possible rulers of Islam. 'Umar cannot see either of these two being caliph. Abū 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 Abū Bakr consults the most important leaders of the Muhājirūn and the Ḍāhir on his choice of 'Umar as his successor. Abū 'Ubayda and Sa'īd b. Zaid are the main voices of dissent. While Abū Bakr accepts the fact that 'Umar could be ruthless, he points out that he would maintain order. While Abū Bakr again concedes 'Umar's late conversion to Islam, he convinces his listeners that 'Umar's enthusiasm would be of importance to the young religion. When they have all agreed to the choice, Abū Bakr summons 'Uthmān to write down his last statement. Abū Bakr faints at the dramatic point of mentioning the name of his successor. When he recovers he is informed that the statement is

1. It is difficult sometimes to identify characters since there is no list of dramatis personae in any of these six volumes.
complete as he would want it. Abū Bakr's family now gather round him. He asks to see his youngest son's spinning-top but he dies before it is brought. This shift from important state matters to such a simple family concern for his son's latest toy is an effective method of creating the atmosphere of the dual responsibility of the head of the Muslim state. Presently this contrasts with 'Umar's obsessive concern for order when he silences the family of Abū Bakr from crying over his dead body.

The public duties of Abū 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, Abān b. Sa‘īd is mortally wounded. His wife swears to avenge his death, but Abān is happy because he is dying 'ff sabîl Allah' and he will be one of the giants of Judgement Day - one of those who gave their lives for Islam. His wife fails to catch up with and kill the warrior who wounded her husband. She returns to his side to watch him die. She vows to avenge the death no matter where she has to go to do it.

Scene ii shows the antipathy of 'Umar for Khālid b. al-Walîd and the existence of this same feeling on the side of Khālid too. Khālid even parodies 'Umar speaking of Khālid before Caliph Abū Bakr. A youth of about twenty years of age is brought to Khālid on suspicion of spying. The youth tells a different story. He is in love with the daughter of the killer of Abān b. Sa‘īd whose name is Tūmās. This youth is escaping from Tūmās to run away and marry his sweetheart. When Khālid 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. Yūnus, the youth referred to in scene ii, tells Khālid that the governor of Damascus would be celebrating, that night, the birth of his son. Khālid suggests to the leaders of his army that they storm the town while this celebration is going on. They all take an oath of secrecy at the end of the meeting.

When the Muslim army takes Damascus in scene iv, Khālid is for ruthless measures against the Byzantines. Abū Ubayda, on the other hand, counsels caution. His suggestion that the Byzantine authorities be allowed three days to leave the city is accepted by Khālid and the other leaders. But since the whole issue had occasioned argument among them, Khālid suggests (out of ignorance of the death of Abū Bakr) that they should write to the Caliph Abū Bakr asking his opinion on the issue. Tūmās comes to complain against Yūnus who, he alleges, has taken away his daughter. Yūduqiyyah, the daughter, says that she has not been taken away by force but that she has followed Yūnus of her own volition. Tūmās argues with his daughter that her going away would sadden her mother. Moreover, she must know that Yūnus was a traitor to them since it was through his treachery that the Muslim army was able to enter the city. Yūduqiyyah recoils from Yūnus and rejoins her father.

In scene v, Yūnus wishes to follow the fleeing Byzantines to rescue Yūduqiyyah. Khālid desires to pursue them and ensure that they do not spring a surprise attack on the Muslims. Abū Ubayda once more opposes Khālid. He maintains that unless the Byzantines are first warned Khālid must not go into battle against them. Moreover, Abū Ubayda chides Khālid for not turning up for prayers. To which Khālid replies:

'I am your commander in battles and not in prayers.'

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1. ‘Alā Aswār Dimashq, p. 82.
Scene vi shows Khālid 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. Yūdūqiyya, in an attempt to cross the lines and join Yūnus, is shot by her father. Khālid demands that he surrender himself.

In scene vii Yūdūqiyya is dying from her wounds. Umm Abān is allowed to shoot Tūmās but she weakens. Yūdūqiyya becomes a Muslim and dies.

Scene viii shows Abū 'Ubayda, who had known of the death of Abū Bakr all the time (on the day of the treaty with the Byzantine leadership, to be precise), informing Khālid of the changed situation back in Medina. Naturally Khālid is angry that he has been kept in the dark for so long. Khālid's main reason for opposing 'Umar is that for six years 'Umar was the scourge of the Muslims before his conversion. Abū 'Ubayda tries to assure Khālid that he (Khālid) would still remain the leader of the army, but Khālid 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 organise their defences around Homs.

In scene x we are back in Mecca where 'Umar is given the title of amīr al-mu'minīn. 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.
Ma'rakat al-Jisr

Two battles take place on a bridge. The Muslims lose the first battle but win a decisive victory in the second.

In scene i al-Muthanna b. Ḥaritha and his wife Salmā discuss the recent appointment of Abū 'Ubayda as the commander of the Muslim forces. This appointment passes over al-Muthanna and displaces Khālid b. al-Walid. Al-Muthanna is not bitter against the Caliph for this. All Muslims, al-Muthanna muses, are fighting 'fi sabīl Allah'. Questions of personal ambition should not be allowed to cloud this supreme objective. At a party given by al-Muthanna, Abū 'Ubayda relates to him 'Umar's injunction that the new commander must work hand-in-hand with al-Muthanna. Abū 'Ubayda must consult him on all issues before taking decisions. Rumours of the enemy's approach circulate at the party.

In the second scene, Abū '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 Abū '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. The peasants sing a protest song which further annoys the chieftains. The peasants report to Abū 'Ubayda that they were flogged. After listening to both sides, Abū 'Ubayda gives canes to the peasants with which to avenge themselves. The chieftains protest their preference for death rather than to be caned by their own peasants. Abū 'Ubayda ignores this and orders the peasants to go ahead. The
peasants refuse and Abū 'Ubayda orders them away from his presence. Jābān, an officer of the defeated Persian troops, who has been in hiding, is brought before Abū 'Ubayda. A Muslim civilian who did not know his identity had given him protection. When Jābān's real identity is disclosed by another Muslim, Jābān's protector is still ready to continue guaranteeing his safety since this was his promise to him from the beginning. Abū 'Ubayda upholds this decision although Jābān is unrepentant. He boasts of the day the Persian leader Rustam will drive the Muslims 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. They have a son. Rustam proposes marriage so that the two of them can set up a new ruling house for Persia. Al-Fayrazān comes to report the general chaos of the Persian army crumbling before the Muslim forces. Al-Fayrazān 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-Fayrazān thinks that a change in the command might lead to a hurried change of tactics. The queen arbitrarily orders al-Fayrazān himself to take over the command of the army. When she asks Rustam for his view on her decision, Rustam suggests another Persian leader, Bāhāmān, a Goliath of a man.¹

In scene iv Ṣallīṭ, al-Muthannā and Bashīr are surprised at the change of behaviour they now see in Abū 'Ubayda. When he was made the

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1. The stage direction describes him as follows:

جُرِيج، ُضخم الجِلَة، طويل عريض، أشمع الشعر

Ma‘raka‘f al-Jisr, p. 48.
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. Al-Muthannā is of the opinion that Abū 'Ubayda is being misdirected by his wife. She is the one who tells him that he has no opinion of his own if he keeps consulting the other army officers. When Abū 'Ubayda arrives, these men suggest that the Muslim forces hold their ground and wait for the Persians. Abū '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-Muthannā saves a few soldiers by turning back and fleeing. The remaining soldiers are demoralised, but the encouragement of 'Umar through a letter and the news from Syria (where Khālid b. al-Walīd has been fighting) show the soldiers that Allah has been victorious and they are cheered.

In scene vi Shirīn, a Muslim of Persian origin married to the brother of al-Muthannā named al-Mu‘ annā b. Ḥāritha, 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 Shirīn against the Muslims. Shirīn is to spy on her brother-in-law al-Muthannā and other Muslim leaders. Her immediate duty is to convince the Muslim commanders to cross over the bridge to the Persians, a move which led to their tragic defeat in the previous battle. Shirīn 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-Muthannā consoles her and praises her for killing the spy whose master he will kill in due course.
In scene vii al-Muthannā 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'ūd 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 Bā-Kathir 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 a Christian or as a Muslim, but as an Arab. That Arabs are fighting 'īf sabīl Allah', an Islamic concept, does not bother Anas, thanks to Bā-Kathir, whom this does not bother either.

**Kisrā wa Qayṣār**

This is the shortest of the six published volumes of this epic. It 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. This lack of unity becomes a threat to the existence of Persia with the Muslim armies at their doors. While discussions are going on as to what to do in this situation, messengers arrive from Byzantium bearing greetings from Qayṣār. 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 Qayṣār's promise of co-operation is accepted.
In the second scene 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. Twice al-Muthanna falls asleep after his treatment. When the doctor has gone, Salmä, al-Muthanna's wife, comes and complains of being kept unaware of her husband's condition. A messenger arrives from 'Umar.

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 Abü 'Ubayda and Khalid b. 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.

1. His description is very contemporary. The stage direction says:

 وهو يحمل في يده صندوقا صغيرا من الجلد

Kisrā wa Qayṣār, p. 13.
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 b. al-Haritha dies; due, no doubt, to Shirin. 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.

Abū al-Yarmūk

This fourth volume of the series is important for what it says and shows of the humility and democratic attitudes of the leaders of the young Muslim state. It is also important in that Bā-Kathir emphasises the readiness of the Muslims to die 'fi sabīl Allah'.

In scene i the Muslims under Khalid b. 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.

Scene ii shows the prominence of women in the general war effort. Romanus, who has become Muslim, does not feel that he has become completely committed to the Muslim cause unless he marries a Muslim woman. This obviously implies that he must marry an Arab girl since there are few converted Byzantines and Persians available.

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: Abū 'Ubayda is to be left to hold the
camp while Khālid 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 to 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. He divulges the battle plan entrusted to him, to Abū 'Ubayda. We are not told what the nature of his message to Khālid could be. The man, Jurja, is sent back to his people to act as a spy for the Muslims. He would rather stay among the Muslims, but Abū 'Ubayda and Khālid 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 dissection 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 Bāhān, the Byzantine leader, suggesting a truce whereby both armies would withdraw, the Byzantines to Antioch and Caesarea, the Muslims to Damascus and Homs. Khālid rejects this. He chooses wing and section leaders and confirms his plans for battle. Women too are deployed. After some fighting, Khālid holds a hurried consultation with his officers and they reorganise their forces in the light of field operations. 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.

Turāb min arḍ Fāris

The 'earth' referred to in this title is the one the Persian queen 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. He goes for a walk. While he is out, a messenger brings good news from Abū 'Ubayda.

Qayṣār and his wife Mārtinā 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 Yarmūk was a sign of God's anger at Qayṣār for marrying Mārtinā; the second is that he is preventing Qayṣār from going to Constantinople so that the son of Mārtinā, Harman Haraclunas, might be done out of
what Maurice considers his legitimate right to the throne. This the priest is alleged to be doing to promote his rival, Constantine, as the sole heir. The priest denies both charges. He agrees with Qayshar that the true cross of Christ be carried from Jerusalem to Constantinople to prevent it falling into the hands of the Muslims.

In scene iii we are back in Medina where 'Amr intercedes for Tulayqa who has killed two people. The Caliph guarantees safety for Tulayqa before he knows what he has done. When he is informed of Tulayqa's crime he does not go back on his word, although he makes it clear to the criminal that he does not like him. This type of action has occurred before. It is to give support to the idea that a Muslim must not go back on his word, whatever the situation may be. There is a dramatic story in which 'Umar sees a youth eating with his left hand. The Caliph sends messengers to tell the youth to eat with his right hand. But he does not. 'Umar concludes that the youth is possibly left-handed.

He sends for him and questions him. The youth says that his right hand is busy. 'Umar demands to see it. The boy brings out the stump of the right hand. It had been severed at the last battle and the youth is, in fact, one of the heroes of Yammük. Once more one has to notice the readiness to suffer for Allah as shown in the behaviour of this youth.

In scene iv a marriage is being arranged between the widow of al-Muthanna, Salmâ, and Sa'd, 1 one of the leaders of the army. Al-Mu‘annâ and his wife, for ulterior motives, wish to marry her off to a particular army officer. Salmâ objects to this matchmaking, since she suspects that they are doing it as a means of establishing kinship with Sa'd and expecting to be rewarded by him. All the same, she agrees

1. This is Sa’d b. Abi Waqqas.
to marry him, mainly because he says he wants to marry her as a mark of respect for the memory of her former husband. The simplicity of the life style of the authorities in Medina is the focal point of the next scene. Jabala b. al-Ayham, the king of Ghasan, who has turned Muslim, comes to 'Umar. He pointedly demands to know what advantages 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 Hiraz. The true cross of Christ has arrived by sea. Sirjyūs, who has been sent for, arrives. Martina, still pushing the candidature of her son as heir to the throne, wants news from the capital, especially news concerning an army officer named Valentine. Martina wishes to know if he has been holding meetings with Constantine.

The action of scene vii has to do with the Persian earth episode described earlier on.

In scene viii the Persian earth arrives at 'Umar's house in Mecca. He is thankful to Allah. A man then enters, bleeding from the nose. He complains that he had been struck by Jabala because he stepped on his toes while they were going round the Ka'aba. The Caliph sends for Jabala, who confirms the man's story. When asked to apologise, Jabala does so under threat of imprisonment.

Rustam

This is the sixth volume of the epic. It deals with the leadership of the Persians under Rustam and his refusal to accept the Muslim 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, he soon finds out, is that his men were away in neighbouring villages passing the night in drinking and in the company of women. Soon 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. One of his officers warns him of the consequences of such an action.

We learn in scene ii that Sa'd does not discuss military matters with his wife Salmā as her former husband used to do. When Salmā complains of this, he tells her that this has been the enemy's source of getting at the military information about Muslim armies. Salmā does not understand. Sa'd says that Shirīn has been passing information to the Persians. It was for the purpose of safeguarding her source of information through the indiscretion of Salmā that Shirīn was anxious to have her marry Sa'd. Salmā is warned to be on her guard. When some army officers come to see Sa'd, Salmā leaves them. The men prepare the tactics for the coming encounter with the Persians.

In scene iii Rustam and his aides are expecting Zuhra b. al-Hūwayya, 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 Talīma b. Khwaylid al-Asadī, one of the Muslim officers, facing two problems from his wife. She complains that her

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1.  

2.  

عبه : نعم يا سيدى اسمه زهيره بن الحوية  

طلحة بن خويلد
husband leaves her alone to spend his evenings with Sa'd. She is also bemoaning her inability to have a child. It is difficult to see what this scene contributes to the epic. It could be interpreted as showing the caution of the military officers against providing material for the indiscretion of their wives. Since they no longer hold their top-level meetings with their wives in attendance, there is less likelihood that these wives will talk about what they hear to other people who should not know.

In scene v, al-Mu'annā and his wife Shirīn visit Sa'd and Salmā. Shirīn 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. There follows an exchange of gifts. Sa’d gives the horse al-Shams, which used to belong to al-Muthannā, to al-Mu’annā. Shirīn gives a necklace of pearls, sent to her by the Persian queen, to Salmā.

In scene vi Rustam is given the last chance 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 Mecca. 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. Nowhere else in the writings of Bā-Kathīr 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',¹ has been stretched by writers who have used the epic form for dramatic writing and for prose works.² 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.

The life of the Caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb definitely has heroic elements in it. In that, it satisfies the requirement of the subject-matter. The failure of the form is definitely that of Bā-Kathīr and his unwillingness to make concessions to the form. Unlike the example of The Dynasts which he had before him, Bā-Kathīr does not use poetry for his dialogues. Thus the plays lose the dignity and heroic dimensions of The Dynasts. As far as form is concerned, what Bā-Kathīr has written is not an epic. There is nothing to show that what is coming after these six volumes will be exciting, because the six volumes make no reasonable suggestion of things to come.

When it comes to the subject-matter, an interesting situation arises. As mentioned above, the life of the second Caliph of the Islamic state is part of Islamic legends. Not even the fact that ‘Umar died at the hands of an assassin, a slave who had despaired of fair taxation and justice,’³ sobers the Muslim imagination when it applies itself to the subject of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. When Bā-Kathīr deals

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Ed., vol. ix, p. 691. This is the definition of Voltaire and eighteenth-century critics.
2. Thomas Hardy, The Dynasts; Sir Walter Scott, the Waverley novels; Thomas Carlyle, The French Revolution.
with him in this epic, he does not show the imagination necessary to give the character the grandeur with which Islam has invested him. In two of the six volumes dealt with above, 'Umar does not feature; they are Abūl al-Yarmūk and Rustam. In the former we hear a lot about the humility of the early Muslim leaders. But we are not told that this is in fact due to the ascetic simplicity of 'Umar himself. As far as the reader knows, 'Umar is merely reflecting (and he is not alone in this) the general temperament of the times. One would expect the character of 'Umar to pervade these scenes of battles and camp fires. But this is not the case. One would expect 'Umar's world-view to be that of purpose which provides norms by which all the others measure their own conduct. Instead, all the Muslims are good, simple, straightforward soldiers. Their opponents, on the other hand, the Byzantines and the Persians, are haughty and arrogant, unjust and ungodly. Everybody behaves to type, including 'Umar himself. This is why these plays fail to form an epic as far as subject-matter is concerned. This is not the failure of the subject-matter itself but of the lack of imagination on the part of the playwright in the use to which he puts his subject-matter. Bā-Kathir fails to reconcile a form whose characteristics are dignity, magnificence, even pomposity to some extent, to a subject-matter whose main theme is humility.
CHAPTER IX

The Religious Plays

Evil should be recognised
Not for its own sake
But in order to avoid it,
For he who is ignorant of what evil is
Succumbs to it.

- Bā-Kathīr
Tragedy may be justifiably taken as the cream of drama and also as the most elevated of dramatic works. Writers concerned with man's lot on earth have attempted to use this medium to express this concern, especially the problem of evil. Few have succeeded. Many have failed. Those who succeed do so for different reasons. They are gifted; they are painstaking. They also know and understand the medium in which they are working. Those who fail may have failed because they are not as gifted and also because they have little understanding of the medium they are using. 'Ali Ahmad Bā-Kathīr must count among those who failed in their attempt to express the lot of man through the medium of tragic drama. It must be emphasised that Bā-Kathīr's failure in this case is not wholly due to his not being a gifted writer. His novels, poems and comedies show his talent as a writer of some imagination. His failure, like that of other contemporary Arab playwrights, is his limited understanding of the drama genre, a lack of comprehension of the meaning of tragedy and the inability to discern that drama as a literary form imposes limitations on what may serve as its subject-matter.

Bā-Kathīr's understanding of drama, especially tragic drama, was at times 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 have, however, been ignored and overlooked. Bā-Kathīr writes that the roots of drama are to be found in pagan religious rituals. Drama, he continues, became an independent art form when there was a break with religious rituals.¹

¹. FM p. 25.
But Bā-Kathīr does not provide a proper answer to a question raised by this statement: at what point in the life of a community does this break, which leads drama to independence, take place? He implies that this is a natural process and each community is bound to end up breaking with its pagan ritual past. In fact this break can only take place as a result of intellectual development in the community. It is when the community has developed enough intellectually to disbelieve the efficacy of its rituals that drama is set free as an independent art form. Without getting to this point, Bā-Kathīr moves on to his next point that, in some areas of the world, the death of paganism and therefore of pagan religious rituals eliminated the possibility of drama. Bā-Kathīr does not give any example of a place where such a thing has happened. He then goes on to deal with pre-Islamic Arabia, and says that Arab paganism was a paganism rooted in monotheism. Islam came to confirm and delimit this paganism. This paganism failed to produce drama because there was no system of elaborate religious rituals accompanying it.

Once again, Bā-Kathīr hovers around the main issue but fails to make the necessary connection between a predominant belief in one God and the effects of this on tragic drama.

In dealing with the types of dramatic experience available in Classical Arabic Literature, he mentions shadow plays in passing. But he deals at greater length with the ta'ziya. Characteristically, Bā-Kathīr does not realise, as Beeston has pointed out, that: 'The Shi'a 'passion plays' are certainly of Iranian inspiration and perhaps ultimately stem from an Indian tradition'.

1. Hunninghor, op. cit. p. 43.
Ba-Kathir says that the reason the ta'ziya never developed into an independent art form is that contact was made with the West and knowledge was acquired of an advanced form of drama which truncated the further development of drama out of the ta'ziya. If this contact had not been made and the ta'ziya had gone on for some time more, say for another two hundred years, it would have emerged as an independent art form. Ba-Kathir gives the analogy of European mechanical industries which have pre-empted the further development of Arab handicrafts. As mentioned above, Ba-Kathir thinks in period time rather than the more relevant intellectual development time.

Ba-Kathir mentions another experience of drama in Classical Arabic Literature in the activities of a certain Baghdadi sufi who used to go out of the city with a few boys, and these boys he would make stand in for each of the early caliphs of Islam while he passed judgement on them to the amusement of an audience standing around. 1 Ba-Kathir concludes that any attempt to defend Classical Arabic Literature for not producing drama is futile. One must accept that drama is a borrowed form just as the novel is. This acceptance is made with no feeling of inferiority. Rather it is with the knowledge that the signs of drama in Arabic experience would have developed to what drama is in the West. The contact with the West has made it possible to arrive at the same goal more quickly. This conclusion assumes that the goal of all human development is the same. It also ignores the influence of particular circumstances, environments and needs of different peoples on such developments and the whole relationship of these to their intellectual development.

1. There is an account of this in Ra'if Khurf's al-Ta'rif fi al-Adab al-Arabi, vol. ii, pp. 136 - 138.
When it comes to the practice of play-writing, Bā-Kathīr wants to stand apart from and independent of his plays because, as far as he understands, this is a demand drama makes on its practitioners. He mentions that Wordsworth has commented somewhere\(^1\) that while Shakespeare could express his personality in his poems, he could not do the same in his plays. It is not easy to define further this relationship which Bā-Kathīr talks about. Does it mean, for instance, that the playwright does not leave his mark on his plays? Or is it that the drama form does not permit such personalisation of the genre? It could not be that the playwright is unrelated to the fortunes of his plays once he has written them. It is therefore possible that Bā-Kathīr believes that, unlike the poem and the novel, the drama form does not permit self-revelation.

The only one of the classic unities of Aristotle which Bā-Kathīr accepts and makes use of in his plays is that of action. Others of time and of place he completely ignores, to the detriment of his plays. This leads to the lack of dramatic concentration to be found in some of them.

On the issues of comedy and tragedy, Bā-Kathīr is of the view that tragedy developed as an aspect of religious ritual while comedy emerges at the point the community loses faith in its religion.\(^2\) Once more, Bā-Kathīr does not pursue the implications of this statement on dramatic writing under monotheistic theologically oriented belief systems.

Compared with the views of other Egyptian contemporary playwrights, Bā-Kathīr's\(^3\) 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.

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1. It has not been possible to locate this comment in the works of William Wordsworth.
3. See Part One, Drama in Classical Arabic Literature.
of dramatic writing.

Nevertheless, Ra-Kathir'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 more glaringly problems of the conflict between form and content than any other literary form.

In her 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. What is of immediate relevance here is the third on the list—drama and the 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 outside Goethe's Faust and Milton's Samson Agonistes. There is the second

2. Milton considered but abandoned drama for Paradise Lost.
3. For the epic Ellis-Fermor takes Shakespeare's history plays as successful while Hardy's The Dynasts fails. For the dramatic representation of anarchy she chooses Troilus and Cressida by Shakespeare. For the religious frontier successes she picks Shaw's St. Joan and Milton's Samson Agonistes.
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:

'.. there seems to be a deep antagonism between religious
emotion and the needs of dramatic art. Nor is this
conclusion altogether unexpected, for the essence of
religious experience is that union... of man's spirit
with a spiritual reality beyond yet akin to him. The
mood, the condition of spirit, which is the climax of
this experience is beatitude, a condition free of conflict
within the mind and unconcerned by conflict without.
There is thus an elimination of that very conflict upon
whose tension and balance the significant form of drama
depends. This material refuses to drama one of the
fundamental conditions of its being and the dramatist
who attempts it is likely to find himself crippled, not
by the lack of passion in his subject, but, paradoxically,
by its dominance.'

If one considers the tragedies written by Bā-Kathīr 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.

1. Ellis-Fermor, op. cit. p. 5.
For two main reasons, only four of Bā-Kathīr’s tragedies are dealt with below. One is that ‘quantity does not always equal quality’ in the mass of Bā-Kathīr’s writing. It is therefore best to make selections representative of the best of his writing. The second reason is that some of those which one would like to look into in detail are out of print and unavailable. It would have been useful, for instance, to consider Faust al-Jadīd in this chapter if it had been available. The plays dealt with here are Sirr al-Ḥākim bi amrillah, Mā’sāt ʿUdīb, Iḥāḥ Isrāʿīl and Ḥārūt wa Mārūt.

Sirr al-Ḥākim

This play is based on the life of al-Mangūr Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥākim bi amrillah (ruling by the command of God), the sixth of the Fāṭimid Caliphs who ruled in Egypt between 996 and 1021 A.D. Bā-Kathīr’s aim in his two ‘sirr’ plays is to attempt to offer more rational and psychological explanations for some of the puzzling characters in Arab history and mythology. The alternative title of this play is Lughz al-Ṭārīkh. In Sirr al-Ḥākim, as in another play, Mā’sāt ʿUdīb, Bā-Kathīr’s explanation is that of a long-laid conspiracy. The history books present al-Ḥākim as a man of disordered intellect and his court as ‘a lunatic asylum’. His harsh measures against Christians and Jews, as

1. Rizzitano, referring to the plays of Bā-Kathīr in Historians of the Middle East, p. 444.
2. The other one is Sirr Shahrazād. There are also what might be termed the ‘jadīd’ plays: Mā’sāt ʿUdīb, which is subtitled Ḥārūt wa Mārūt al-Khalīda; Shayluk al-Jadīd and Faust al-Jadīd. Here the aim of Bā-Kathīr is to offer alternative explanations to ideas from the West.
well as his final declaration of himself as the emanation of the Godhead, are seen as the progress of a madman. Bā-Kathīr, on the other hand, presents a caliph who is momentarily misguided by one of his followers, the Persian Ḥamza. Ḥamza becomes in Sirr al-Ḥākim the instrument of all anti-Arabs as well as a protagonist in the 'asabiyya contest between Arab Muslims and non-Arab Muslims. The changes which come over al-Ḥākim take dangerous turns when Ḥamza arrives at his court preaching an extreme form of the bāṭiniyya doctrine.

When al-Ḥākim recovers from this straying from 'the straight path' and repents (tāba) it is too late to save him from the consequences of his former acts of cruelty. He is not afraid of taking punishment. When his wife comes to tell him in scene vi that his life is in danger and he is not to attempt to go out that night so as to save his life, he shrugs off the warning. He refuses to stay in simply to escape being assassinated. By this time he has recovered from the temptation of Ḥamza, accepted Allah and His Prophet once more and is no longer in conflict with himself. This is the weakest point of the play and, by extension, of plays written to bear out the correctness of a particular religion.

The optimism of Sirr al-Ḥākim is shown by the use of some symbolic scene-setting and by the aptness in the names of some of the characters. At the beginning of the play, al-Ḥākim sits and reads in the dark, saying that he has become as accustomed to reading in darkness as to reading with light. All the same, the curtains are drawn to admit light on to the stage. At the end of the play, when al-Ḥākim is going out for what is to be his last night wandering, he calls his slave Nasīm. The name Nasīm suggests (by its association with calm and freshness) that al-Ḥākim has accepted the fact of what is to happen
to him and considers it to be good. One can pursue this further by saying that the penance which al-’Akkim is going to suffer will be, in his own interpretation, comparable to a burnt offering, its freshness rising upwards to be accepted by God.

When the play is compared with Camus's play Caligula, its weakness as a tragedy becomes apparent. Both Ba-KathIr and Camus have created characters who are sensitive and who commit heinous crimes in the cause of truth and godliness. They (al-’Akkim and Caligula) are caught in the inescapable unhappiness of such people and have the sympathy of only a few likeable characters in the plays to support them. But Caligula does not retrace his steps after declaring:

'And yet - what is a god that I should wish to be his equal? No, it's something higher, far above the gods, that I'm aiming at, longing for with all my heart and soul. I am taking over a kingdom where the impossible is king.'

He does not retract. Al-’Akkim, on the other hand, repents and walks composedly to his death.

Sirr al-’Akkim is good in parts. The use of the off-stage area for the fight of the ten men at the end of scene ii while those looking on comment for the benefit of the audience, is effective. When the victor emerges to receive his prize, al-’Akkim condemns him to be beheaded, to show his power of life and death over all men. This demonstration, coming at the moment of victory for the fighter, is effective.

1. It is difficult to avoid this if one is familiar with Caligula. More so when one knows that Ba-KathIr's library contained a copy of the French edition of Caligula, though with uncut pages.

Most of Bā-Kathīr's plays present few problems to producers. But Sirr al-Ḥākim includes some pages of dialogue between al-Ḥākim and his conscience, named al-Shakhs.\(^1\) When Faṭṭāḥ Nasḥāṭī produced the play for the second part of the 1971 theatre season at the National Theatre, he did away with al-Shakhs and substituted a soliloquy. This was less effective than the whole part-scene reads in the play. This is because al-Shakhs convinces al-Ḥākim that he is wrong in following the dictates of Ḥamza. The conflict of mind is strongest here.

One of the most dramatic points of action in this play is scene v where, at the behest of Ḥamza, al-Ḥākim takes a dagger he offers him. He approaches Ḥamza as if he is going to stab him. Slowly the audience sees the countenance of Ḥamza change as he dreads that al-Ḥākim might take him seriously and stab him to death. Slowly al-Ḥākim relents and throws away the dagger. Ḥamza's courage returns, but the audience now knows him for what Bā-Kathīr wants him to be known - a coward. It is in moments of action such as the two recounted above that Bā-Kathīr shows some liveliness in his serious plays, moments when he permits his characters to do something rather than repeat mechanically the long and tedious dialogues which he writes for them.

Generally speaking, Sirr al-Ḥākim has never caught on in Egypt. Records of performance show this. From 1952 to 1956 there were seven productions with an average of one hundred and seventy people in attendance.\(^2\) This is the lowest among the few plays of Bā-Kathīr which were put on stage in his lifetime. By comparison, during the 1955/56 season, when Sirr al-Ḥākim had two performances with a total attendance of

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1. Sirr al-Ḥākim, pp. 140 - 142.
2. al-Kasrah, special no., July 1966, on Egyptian Theatre 1952 - 1966, which includes statistics for various items of play-production during this period.
one hundred and eighty-five, Mismär Juhā, one of Bā-Kathīr's political satires, had one thousand, one hundred and twenty-five people at two performances. The producer of both plays was the same person - Zakī Ṭulaymāt.

Mā'sāt Īdīb

The reason why the pattern of scene-to-scene summaries cannot be continued in this section is that so much of these tragedies depends on lengthy explanations of what happened before the time of the play. So much of Mā'sāt Īdīb, for instance, goes to explain the ingenious plot and conspiracy of the High Priest Lucius against the ruling house of Thebes. More than the comedies, these tragedies are narratives with few dramatic actions. To do a scene-to-scene summary would not be as explanatory as to take the whole play and explain the basis of the story and then point out scenes which are of critical importance.

The influence of a religious ethic in the plays of Bā-Kathīr can hardly be better illustrated by any play other than Mā'sāt Īdīb where Bā-Kathīr uses the age-long theme of Oedipus Rex of Sophocles. This theme is being used more and more by cultures which are not basically European.¹ In Modern Arabic Literature the story has deeply affected some writers.² Tawfiq al-Ḥākim has also used this theme for a play.³ In none of these adaptations mentioned does one find such an elaborate explanation for the tragedy of King Oedipus as that provided by Bā-Kathīr in Mā'sāt Īdīb. The fact that, as usual, Bā-Kathīr does not ask questions but simply supplies answers, makes the play unsuccessful.

1. For instance a play The Gods Are Not To Blame by Ola Rotimi, a Nigerian playwright who writes both in English and Yoruba.
2. al-Āyyām, vol. 1, p. 147.
3. al-Malik Īdīb.
Bā-Kathīr's explanation of the life of Oedipus is as follows: The two city-states of Corinth and Thebes are rivals. When the king of Corinth is told that Jocasta, the wife of the king of Thebes, is expecting a child, he bribes the chief priest of Thebes to do all in his power to dispose of the child as soon as it is born. The high priest invents his elaborate plan. He tells the king of Thebes that should the child be allowed to survive he would kill the king and marry the queen, his mother. Because of his position as high priest, Lucius is believed. The child Oedipus is handed over to him so that he can kill him.

Lucius, having succeeded in the first part of his plan, now starts to work to make possible the whole idea of having Oedipus kill his father and marry his mother. He keeps the child in the court of Corinth where the king and queen grow to love him as if he were their own child.

When Oedipus is old enough Lucius makes one of his playmates taunt him about his parentage. Oedipus, who has grown up believing that the king and queen of Corinth are his parents, is unhappy when he learns that they are not. Lucius has him sent to Thebes where, he warns Oedipus, he might have to defend his life in the process of discovering his true parents.

Meanwhile, the aging king of Thebes is told that he must go out and meet a threat to the city-state. When the two men meet, Oedipus kills his father. He then becomes the king of Thebes.

Meanwhile, the queen has refused to come out as a result of the death of the king. Lucius now sets to work on making Oedipus marry his mother. In fairness to the evil genius of Lucius, it has to be said that Oedipus has come across part of the story of his life and the prophecy of the high priest. But it is hidden from him that the king he has killed is his father. All the same, Oedipus doubts the reasonableness of marrying the queen. But when the two meet, they fall in love and
marry. For seventeen years they live happily together until the land is plunged into suffering. Lucius immediately points out that some crimes have been committed for which there must be penance before the land can prosper again. He reveals to the people that Oedipus is the sinner. Jocasta commits suicide, and Oedipus leaves his castle for the last time, singing:

Where are you Hurair of Corinth?
0 companion of my youth where?
Together we used to walk the road!
Come now, let us together complete our evening stroll!¹

Bā- Kathīr’s play commences in the seventeenth year of the reign of Oedipus. When one realises that most of the story took place long before this, one sees that the play is full of flash-back narratives. The condition created in this play is not that of a gradual movement towards self-knowledge as is the case with the Greek original. The mood at the end of the play is that of beatitude - 'a condition free of conflict within the mind and unconcerned by conflict without'.² Therefore it fails as drama. There is no record of the play ever having been produced.


أين أنت يا هرير كورنت؟
يا رفيق الصبا أين أنت؟
قد مشينا معا على طريق!
فلنتم السري يا رفيق!

2. Ellis-Fermor, op. cit. p. 5.
Ilāh Isrā'īl

Bā-Kathīr quotes a verse from the Qur'ān 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.'

The 'they' of this quotation is supposed to refer to the Jews. Where Bā-Kathīr's other political satires have been basically anti-Zionist, Ilāh Isrā'īl is anti-Semitic. It is a very illogical play, and in extremely bad taste.

The play is divided into three one-act playlets. Since it has never been put on stage, it has not been particularly important to determine whether it is one play or three one-act plays.

Act One, subtitled 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 labour of the Israelites). Moses orders the gold to be returned to the Egyptians. The Israelites, whose leaders have met Iblīs (the Devil) and pledged their devotion to him, disobey Moses. On instruction from Iblīs they take the gold from Hārūn and fashion a golden calf, which they worship. For this idolatry the children of

1. The ancient Arabs always lit a beacon fire as a proclamation of war, or a notice of the approach of an enemy.
Israel are to 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 Harum, 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 Magdalen. But Mary falls in love with Jesus and repents of her past 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 Jews already control 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. Ba-Kathir 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 most odious part of this play comes towards the end of this act where Iblis instructs his devils to go into the loins and the wombs
of Jews so that they will breed a new race of devils to carry on the work of Iblis on earth.

Once again another of Ba-Kathir's plays fails as drama. There is complete absence of dramatic concentration as a result of the distance in time and space between the three parts of the play.

The rôle 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 ideals 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 Ba-Kathir lacks such understanding. But he has allowed it to be completely clouded over by his religious and Arab nationalist priorities. This has contributed in no small measure to the failure of Ilah Isrā'il.

Hārut wa Mārūt

It is in Hārut wa Mārūt alone among the tragedies of Ba-Kathir that there is the smallest trait of sympathy for the plight of humanity. Even this sympathy is not of his own creation. It is found in the myth on which this play is based.¹ In heaven some angels make derisive remarks on the inability of man to avoid committing sins. God is

angered by this attitude and asks them to select two of their number to go and live on earth under the same conditions as those of men. Mārūt and Mārūt are chosen to go.  

Bā- Kathir’s play commences at the point where the city-state of Babel, rival to another city-state, al-Ru’āh, needs a new ruler and a new judge. The king has died and his two daughters, Al-lāt (the elder) and al-Uzza, are rivals for the throne. The people of Babel worship physical beauty. 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’āh, is the lover of Al-lāt, but his father will not consent to his marrying her.

The criterion for choosing a new judge is also the physical beauty of the person and not his legal qualifications. Mārūt and Mārūt are given this job as joint judges of Babel.

When Mārūt and Mārūt have been established for some time, they are resting in their house expecting a visit from Tāmarā. She and her husband have brought a case before the judges. Though Mārūt and Mārūt are conscious of Tāmarā’s resemblance to Al-lāt, who has succeeded her father as ruler of Babel, they refuse to believe that she is Al-lāt. They use her beauty as the sole evidence of her rightness, and decide the case in her favour. They have already failed to resist the charms of so many other women. Both of them are anxious to chalk up another victory. At this point a little bit of comedy:

1. Thā’alīb gives three: Āsīyāʾ, Mārūt and Mārūt, in Qisāʾ al-Anbiya’.

2. Bā-Kathir gives three names, the third repenting of their statement at the beginning of their stay in Babel and returning to heaven.
intrudes to lighten up the atmosphere of flash-backs. Mārūt has been dreaming of Tāmārā when Hārūt wakes him up. While they wait for her they argue as to who should have her first. The following dialogue takes place:

Mārūt: Listen, Hārūt, we must not argue in front of her since that will ruin all our chances with her. So I'll be first.

Hārūt: And why should you be first?

Mārūt: Part of what you deprived me of in the dream.

Hārūt: Do you want to monopolise her in your dream as well as in reality? What selfishness!

Mārūt: No, in fact I didn't get anywhere in the dream and it is your fault!

1. Hārūt wa Mārūt, p. 49.

Mārūt: أسمع يا هاروت لا يعجبني
أن خالف أثناها في جمع معا كل
شيء أنا الأول.

Hārūt: ولم أن أنت الأول؟

Mārūt: جزاء ما حرمتني في الحلم

Hārūt: تريد أن تثأر بها في الحلم وعي
الحقيقة؟ يا الله من أنا.

Mārūt: كلا أنا لم أند شئا في الحلم,
وأنت كنت السبب.
Whenever there is a knock on the door after some characters on the stage have been talking about another event in anticipation of that character's entry, it is the character who is knocking and who comes in when the door is opened. But for the first time in any of the plays of Bā-Kathir, the knock on the door does not belong to the expected Tāmārā. When Hārūt 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 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 realisation of his potentialities. This would seem to be a positive affirmation of Bā-Kathir's faith in man and his eventual salvation through his trust in God.

When Tāmārā arrives Hārūt and Hārūt fall over themselves to make her welcome. They give her a copy of the judgement in her case with her husband. While Hārūt is away in the court-house bringing the document of the judgement, Hārūt gives Tāmārā some magical powers in return for the promise that she will allow him to kiss her. When he demands this payment, Tāmārā calls her husband Ba'al, who enters immediately. Hārūt is embarrassed and does not know what to say or do. To his relief and surprise, Tāmārā, now self-revealed as Al-lāt, upbraids Ba'al for spying on her and asks him to leave her presence.

Later, in the palace of Al-lāt, Ba'al attacks Hārūt and Hārūt 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-lāt puts them in prison.
Hārūt and Mārūt 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, Hārūt and Mārūt are taken away and given punishments which bring to mind that of Tantalus.

Nowhere, with the possible exception of Juḥā and Madam Gulfidān, does Bā-Kathīr create a memorable character in his plays. Even in the case of Juḥā, Bā-Kathīr uses him — a character already established in Egyptian folklore — as a nail on which to hang his exasperation against British imperialism in the Middle East. While this hangs well in a comedy such as Mismār Juḥā, it fails completely in his tragedies, which are merely religious plays of the poorest category.
PART THREE

THE MAIN IDEAS OF ‘ALĪ AHMAD BĀ-KATHĪR
AND THE RELATION OF THESE IDEAS TO LANGUAGE IN HIS WORKS

'The role of the writer is to be so inspired as to divine dangers which ordinary people cannot see'

Bā-Kathīr Interview - al-Jīl
'Ali Ahmad Bā-Kathîr can be identified with the conservative aspect of the intellectual movement generally in the Arab world and specifically in Egypt. It is true that he was not born or brought up in Egypt; in fact, he did not come to Egypt until his intellectual attitudes had been formed. All the same, both the literary and intellectual movements in Egypt made such deep impressions on him that when he decided to leave Hadramawt after the death of his first wife, Egypt was his objective. His case is not unlike that of the Syrian immigrants who came to Egypt during the latter half of the nineteenth century because it offered them a freer atmosphere for the expression of their intellectual bent. Bā-Kathîr found the atmosphere of Hadramawt at this time very restrictive. The authorities there did not admit of any criticism. Yet Bā-Kathîr had heard of the group of Muslim intellectuals who were followers of Jamal al-Dîn al-Afghâni (1839 - 1897). It is therefore of some relevance here to give a short historical sketch of the trends in Egyptian intellectual ideas and social thought after 1905, the date of the death of Muhammad 'Abduh.

Louis 'Awad, in 'Cultural and Intellectual Developments since 1952', his contribution to Egypt Since the Revolution, says:

1. See Dr. P.J.E. Cachia's comment in 'Themes related to Christianity and Judaism in Modern Egyptian Drama and Fiction', Journal of Arabic Literature, vol. ii, 1971, p. 188.
... Egyptian cultural and intellectual movements, regardless of their shade, scope and guise, have always tended, at least since 1798, to follow two streams, one major, the secular, which is nationalistic and moderate both in its conservatism and its radicalism; the other minor, the theocratic, which is extremist and terrorist.¹

One or two observations have to be made on this statement. The first is that intellectualism as conceived in this statement, and as it took place in Egypt, was not a dry, philosophical, ivory-tower preoccupation of one individual or group of people with no relevance to the life of the society at large. Rather, it was an engaged approach to their way of life which was changing as a result of new forces, especially external ones. Instead of accepting the time-worn wisdom of the ages, a group of people, powerful although in the minority, set out to fashion anew the belief system that must govern the life of their society in the new situation. The second observation is that Louis 'Awad's distinction between the secular aspect and the theocratic aspect of the intellectual movement is valid with some reservations. His analysis of these movements displays the usual brashness of hindsight. It is impossible to talk of these two main streams of Egyptian intellectual ideas and social thought until after 'Abduh. This is because Muhammad 'Abduh 'more than any other man gave Egyptian thought a centre of gravity'.² It was after him that these movements can be said to have split into two main streams.

The streams were not so distinct in the period before the arrival of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in Egypt and the work of Muḥammad ‘Abdūh, his disciple.

This is not to say that there was no intellectual life before the arrival on the scene of these two people. But the rôle of the intellectuals of this period was different. It did not consist of the conflict of East and West, the virtual spring-board of these new intellectuals. The ‘ulamā’ (the intellectuals of this period) occupied official positions in the religious hierarchy, such as the Rector of al-Azhar, the muftis of the four madhhab, the Marshal of the Notables, as well as the heads of the two Sufi orders.¹ These people were trusted by the common people, and many times during the nineteenth century they rose to eminence by using their positions to the advantage of the people against their oppressive foreign rulers. Napoleon gave them a place of importance in the government which he set up at the time of the French Expedition in 1798. The success of Muḥammad ‘All against all other rivals owed much to the ‘ulamā’, especially ‘Umar Makram.² For many reasons, this position of eminence was lost during the century.³

One of the most important policies of Muḥammad ‘All as ruler of Egypt was the educational missions which were sent to European countries to learn various arts and sciences. Between 1813 and 1919 about 1,715 Egyptians are said to have been sent to Europe on educational missions.⁴

1. Safran, Political and Social Change in Egypt, p. 264.
2. ibid., p. 273 ff.
4. Makarius, La jeunesse intellectuelle d’Égypte au lendemain de la deuxième guerre mondiale, p. 82.
These people formed a new élite which became more and more important in the running of the state as well as the social set-up of Egypt.

According to Vatikiotis, the concern of these intellectuals was the need to acquire European methods of education which were essential to the emergence of a modern state.¹ They did not concern themselves with the implementation of socio-political values which underlined European culture and society or political systems. Men such as Shaikh Rifā‘a Rāfi‘ al-Tahṭāwī (1801 - 1871) and ‘Alī Pasha Mubārak (1824 - 1893) worked within the Islamic ethos under the rule of foreigners who were, however, Islamised at a time when religious loyalties counted for a great deal. Thus they were not faced with a totally foreign occupation as later Egyptian intellectuals were. But this situation was not to continue for long. The Ottoman Empire was disintegrating, and many parts of it were falling into the hands of European powers. In Egypt the extravagance of Ismā‘īl (Khedive, 1863 - 1879) led to the financial control of the country by France and Britain. The failure of the ‘Urābī revolt of 1882 brought about the occupation of Egypt by Britain.

Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī was another in the line of activist Muslim intellectuals to call attention to the changes taking place in the lives of Muslims all over the world and the consequences of these changes on the religion of Islam and the way of life it had fostered. Others before him include Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the Grand Sanūsī, and to some extent ‘Uthmān dan Fodio in Nigeria. Al-Afghānī was born

and brought up in Iran and not in Afghanistan as it is commonly believed.\footnote{The early life of Afghānī is shrouded in mystery, some of it just being cleared by the work of Nikki Keddie and Elie Kedourie. For more detailed material on al-Afghānī's life see Nikki Keddie - 'Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī's First 27 Years - The Darkest Period', Middle East Journal (Autumn 1966) pp. 517 - 533; 'The Pan-Islamic Appeal: Afghānī and Abdulhamid II', Middle Eastern Studies III (1966) pp. 46 - 67; 'Afghānī in Afghanistan', M.E.S. I, 4 (July 1965), pp. 322 - 349; An Islamic Response to Imperialism.


What is of immediate importance here is that Afghānī came to Egypt briefly for the first time in 1869. He came back again in 1871 and stayed on until he was compelled to leave because of his alleged incitement of the young against the government. He went to Paris where he started to publish al-'Urwa al-uthqa, الحروة الوثقى, a magazine that was to have widespread influence on the growing generation of Arabs.

Ba-Kathīr came across copies of this magazine while he was still in Hadramawt. Afghānī spent the rest of his life in Constantinople. Wherever he went he left behind him a trail of political activities. It must be on this basis and the influence he had in the Arab world that his life must be judged, rather than whether or not he was a good or a bad Muslim as Keddie and Kedourie have been at great pains to decide. While their studies have thrown much more light on the life of Afghānī, they have not added much to the evaluation of this man's influence on the intellectual development in the Arab world.

In the face of European political and military success the Muslim world was forced to search itself and find reasons for its inability to withstand this assault. Schools set up on the Western
models and overseas universities produced a group of educated Muslims who 'set a higher value on the new ideas than on the traditional ones'.  

Al-Afghānī saw the danger to the belief system of Islam in this new class of Muslims. He took it upon himself to persuade Muslims 'to understand their religion aright and live in accordance with its teachings'.  

Besides his *Refutation of the Materialists*, a reply to a lecture delivered by Renan on Islam and Science, Al-Afghānī did not produce a set of ideas in book form. But he had around him many men on whose shoulders was to fall responsibility for their people. When Al-Afghānī came back to Cairo in 1371, he took up residence at Khan al-Khalili near the Azhar. One of those who attended his lectures on theology, jurisprudence, mysticism and philosophy was Muhammad 'Abduh. To these eager followers Al-Afghānī also pointed out the danger of European intervention in the affairs of Muslim countries and the need for unity among Islamic peoples. He encouraged them to form and inform public opinion by writing and publishing newspapers.

The most important concept and perhaps the one that had a far-reaching effect on his followers, especially 'Abduh, was his concept of Islam first as a religion and then as a civilisation. This concept was to explain the backwardness which had overtaken the Islamic lands. He said that their stagnation was due to the fact that Muslim rulers had deserted the truth of Islam. There was no difference between this truth of Islam and the achievement of Science in the West. The essence of Islam and of modern rationalism was the same, and he went to great lengths to prove the validity of this statement. This he did by quoting

and, where necessary, bending passages in the Qur'ān to make them concur with this rationalism. In as much as

'what the prophet received through inspiration was the same as what the philosopher could attain to by the use of reason',

there was nothing wrong with the truth of Islam. It was still relevant to the new situation if only Muslims understood it aright.

Thus by the time al-Afghānī was expelled from Egypt in 1879, he had sown the seeds of the ideas which were to dominate the intellectual scene in Egypt during the following half century. These ideas were still to be worked out into a more consistent and intelligent philosophy of life by al-Afghānī's greatest disciple Muḥammad ʿAbduh.

Muḥammad ʿAbduh was born in 1849. He had his early education in the traditional Islamic kuttab. He came to the famous University of al-Azhar in 1866. Three years later he met Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī who was on his first brief visit to Cairo. When al-Afghānī came back in 1871, this time to stay, ʿAbduh was one of the students who attended his lectures both at the Azhar and at his place of residence. This contact brought ʿAbduh face to face with Western scientific thought and technological achievement. Kedourie quotes ʿAbdī Ibāḥī (1856 - 1885) as saying that under the guidance of al-Afghānī ʿAbduh 'delved deeply' into the traditional sciences of Islam as well as the rational sciences of the West. He also began to deliberate on the state of Islamic countries. Al-Afghānī's ideas got ʿAbduh involved in the 'Utrābī movement. Al-Afghānī had formed a delegation to the French Commission in Cairo demanding the deposition of Khedive Ismāʿīl and his replacement by Tewfīq, his son.

1. Hourani, ibid., p. 126.
2. Kedourie, Afghani and ʿAbduh, p. 16.
Al-Afghānī was compelled to leave Egypt in 1379 and for a while ‘Abduh was made to retire to his village. But the seed of ideas which al-Afghānī had sown bloomed into the unsuccessful ‘Urābī revolt of 1382. ‘Abduh, who had been recalled in 1381 to edit the government paper al-Waqa‘ī al-Misriyya, was exiled for his implication in this revolt. He spent his exile in Paris helping al-Afghānī to publish the magazine al-‘Urwa al-Wuthqā. Later he went to Beirut when the magazine was banned. In Beirut, ‘Abduh started to teach. He was allowed to return to Egypt in 1888 and appointed a judge in the national courts and then counsellor in the Court of Appeal. In 1899 he was appointed the Grand Mufti of Egypt, a post he held until his death in 1905.

While under the direct influence of al-Afghānī, ‘Abduh had been involved in revolutionary political ideas, but his attitude seemed to have changed after his exile. As Nadav Safran puts it:

'... he became convinced of the futility of impulsive and violent methods and began to see the problems facing Egypt and the Muslim countries not so much in terms of a threat of the material power of the West as in terms of a challenge of the intellectual, social and ethical dynamism underlying that power to an Islamic superstructure no longer suitable to the present age.¹ It may also be that he was just being wary of personal involvement.² ‘Abduh saw the existence of two ways of life within the Egyptian educational system: the traditional and the Western. How was the natural

2. See How We Defended Arābī and his Friends, by A.M. Broadley.
gulf between these two ways of life to be bridged? The first thing to do was to accept the changes which the Western way of life brought. Then these changes must be linked with the principles of Islam. His task was to restate what Islam really is and then show its implication for modern society.

For this task, he conceived religion as having two aspects: 'ibādāt, which had in it the eternal elements of the religion and thus was not subject to change; and mu'amalāt, which contained general principles for human conduct. This second part of religion allows for change and in fact must be subjected to change if society is not to decay. He saw the most urgent work of the Muslim states as the creation of new ulama knowledgeable in both the Islamic sciences and the ideas coming from the West. The duty of this group of people would be to refashion the laws of Islam to conform with the modern way of life.

In the matter of law in society, 'Abduh advocated the use of talfiq, which meant the employment of all the four schools of legal opinion in any particular case instead of restricting judges to any one of these. On education, he recommended the introduction into the Azhar of a new syllabus which would include some of the Western sciences. He also recommended for each social group an education that agreed with its rôle in the society.

The area where 'Abduh's ideas were to influence Egyptian society most was that which dealt with the relationship between Islam and the modern scientific age. His idea was that true civilisation was in conformity with Islam. Since Western civilisation was a product of reason, it followed that Islam was not against reason being used in the search for knowledge. Islam is a rational religion. 'Abduh thus
endorsed the acceptability of reason in Islam. But it must be realised that this endorsement only applied to the second aspect of Islam – *mi‘amalat* – which contained the general principles for human conduct.

To show that reason had always been given a role in this aspect of Islam, ‘Abduh went on to identify certain traditional concepts of Islamic thought with ideas of modern Europe. Examples of these are his equating *shari‘* with parliamentary democracy and *ijma* with public opinion. He threw open the gates of *ijtihad* and extended the sources of Muslim law not only to the generation of people who knew the Prophet but also to all those who had at one time or another during the history of Islam contributed to its development.

From these ideas of Muhammad ‘Abduh flowed the two streams of Egyptian thought. The first stream was of those who held to his idea of the unchanging nature of Islam, and this can be called the theocratic trend. The second is of those who stressed the legitimacy of social change as a *de facto* division between religion and society. This may be called the secular trend.

Before following the development of these two trends, it is relevant to mention that ‘Abduh advocated the restoration of the Caliphate to one Arab country while the other Muslim areas under European influence became national states under it.

Rashid Riḍā became the advocate for the spread of the ideas of Muhammad ‘Abduh after the latter’s death. But he was to modify these ideas to such an extent as to be wholly conservative. Rashid Riḍā was born in Tripoli (of Syaria) and had his early education within the Islamic tradition, obtaining his diploma of *‘Alim* in 1897. He had come across copies of *al-‘Urwa al-Buthār*, and he devoured them. He sought out all available back copies and read them. This contact made him wish to meet
al-Afghani, but this was impossible. He came to Egypt in 1897 and immediately attached himself to Muhammad 'Abduh. He started to publish a weekly, al-Manār, in 1898 on the same principles as 'Urwa al-Wuthqā. It was in this paper, which later became a monthly, that Rashīd Riḍā expanded his ideas and those of 'Abduh.

One basic difference between the times of 'Abduh and those of Riḍā was that while 'Abduh had been mainly faced with what he considered the antagonism of the Christian outside thinkers, Rashīd Riḍā had to contend with Egyptians who had imbibed the ideas of the outsiders and now demanded the adoption of these ideas within Egypt. This change explains why 'Alī Ahmad Bā- Kathīr, who could not stay on in the restrictive conservatism of Hadramawt because he was radical within that society, finds himself labelled as conservative in Egypt. His ideas were those of a generation which was already on the decline by the time he arrived in Egypt in 1934. In this connection one must remember that Rashīd Riḍā died in 1935 almost in obscurity. The nearest group of people to think the same way as Rashīd Riḍā did, and with whom Bā-Kathīr could identify, were the Muslim Brotherhood.

As far as religion was concerned, Rashīd Riḍā believed that pristine Islam contained both general principles governing civil relationships and moral principles underlying all legal and government regulations. Thus Muslims only had to go to their religion and refer to the salaf for all the ideas they would need for this modern age. The salaf meant to 'Abduh the creators of the central traditions of Muslim thought from the Prophet to al-Ghazālī; to Rashīd Riḍā it meant only the first generation of companions who knew the Prophet. Rashīd Riḍā and the Manarists agreed with 'Abduh on the question of the relationship between Islam and modern technology. This was to show in the contribution of Riḍā to the al-Manār
commentary on the Qurʾān. In politics Rashīd Riḍā was violently opposed to the Egyptian Nationalists. He advocated the restoration of the Caliphate where each Muslim state would occupy relations to the central government akin to the position of the states in the United States of America. For him the bonds of religion were stronger than those of race, and it was on this basis that he advocated Pan-Islamism. As will be shown below, the whole of Bā- Katbar’s creative capability was devoted to proving the possibility of such political arrangements. As with Riḍā, so with Bā- Kathir. The growth of Nationalism in Egypt and Turkey made both of them turn into uncompromising conservatives. Under the Muslim Brotherhood this conservative trend employed violent means to gain their political ideal of a Pan-Islamic state.

Nationalism was the medium through which the secular trend of ʿAbduh’s thoughts was expressed. In an unpublished article entitled ‘The Assumptions and Aspirations of Egyptian Modernists’, Dr. P.J.E. Cachia has expressed the problem these intellectuals faced thus:

‘It was obvious against whom zeal was to be roused; but the occupiers were British, were Europeans, were Westerners, were Christians. Was it round an Egyptian, an Arab, an Oriental, a Muslim core of consciousness that the opposition was to take shape?’

The British occupation which followed the ‘Urābi revolt and the amelioration of the financial condition of the state staved off nationalist political agitation for some time. But a ‘ferment of political ideas’ was created as a result of five main factors, according to J.M. Ahmed.1 These factors are the growth of Pan-Islamic feeling, the Dinshawai incident of 1906, the economic and security crises, the

Russo-Japanese war which showed the potential latent possibilities of a so-called relatively weak nation; and, maybe most important of all, the growing opposition to foreigners. These factors gave rise to a spate of nationalism which found expression in newspapers and on rostrums. It is convenient to see the whole of the Nationalist Movement in three stages. The first may be called the journalistic stage from the formation of political parties in 1907 to the beginning of the First World War. It must be pointed out, though, that the political parties grew around particular newspapers. The second stage is the period when Nationalism was under the leadership of Saad Zaghlul and the Wafd. The last stage can be called the search for the idea of the Egyptian nation. Obviously the third stage of this nationalism is opposed to the ideas expanded by Rashid Riga and the Naharists and supported by 'Ali Ahmad Bā-Kathīr. More important still for his literary career, this last stage of Egyptian nationalism was predominant in the years following Bā-Kathīr's arrival in Egypt.

By 1909 there were 84 daily newspapers in Egypt, 59 of them in Arabic.¹ It was around these newspapers that the political parties grew. Three political parties were formed in 1907. These were the Umma Party which grew around the newspaper al-Jāridah, the Nationalist Party which grew around the charismatic personality of Mustafa Kamal (1874 - 1908) and the newspaper al-Liwa', and the Constitutional Party which grew around the newspaper al-Mu‘awad. All these parties disappeared with the declaration of the British protectorate over Egypt in 1914.

When the war ended, Saad Zaghlul became the focus of Nationalist yearnings. He was born in 1857, and had his education first in the kuttab and then at al-Azhar. He then went to the Law School. He met al-Afghani and worked with Muhammad 'Abduh. He formed a delegation in 1918 to demand

¹ Ahmed, op. cit. p. 66.
the independence of Egypt at the peace conference in Paris. This
delagation became the nucleus of his party, the Wafd. The incidents
around the 1919 revolution are well-known and need not be recounted
here. In 1922 the protectorate over Egypt was ended, and in 1923 Egypt
became an independent monarchy. The constitution reserved questions of
foreign affairs and the Sudan for the office of the British representa-
tive in Egypt. From the time of this constitution, the three-cornered
pattern of political struggle among the British, the Crown and the
political parties, which before had been concealed, became apparent. Of
these parties the main one, apart from the Wafd, was the Liberal
Constitutional Party, formed in 1922. Sa'id Zaghlul and the Wafd led
the country until Zaghlul died in 1927.

What were the ideas, and who were those who formulated these ideas,
which were behind the Nationalist Movement? One of them, Ahmed Lutfi
al-Sayyid, was connected with the politics of al-Jarida and the Umma
Party. He was born in Lower Egypt in 1872, the son of a Pasha. He
had his early education in a Qur'anic school, but at the age of thirteen
he was sent to Cairo to a modern secondary school. From there he went to
the Law School. He edited al-Jarida until 1914, after which date he
devoted the rest of his life to scholarship as Rector of the University
of Cairo, lecturing in Philosophy. He was a member of the Wafd of
Sa'id Zaghlul of 1919, but little by little he withdrew completely into
academic life. He was one of the few who formulated any clear ideas
about Nationalism in Egypt. He was well-read in European liberal thought
of the nineteenth century, and the influences of these writers show in
his work. His starting-point on the question of Nationalism is that
there is a separate Egyptian nation. For him the flourishing and
decaying of society have not much to do with religion. Islam is equated
with any other religion and he concludes that it could not be suitable as
a basis for political action in the twentieth century.

'Our Nationalism must rest on our interests and not on our beliefs.'¹ Lutfi as-Sayyid did not subscribe to Pan-Islamism as a political force because he saw it as an imperialist principle to counter Egyptian Nationalism. He also saw the importance of assimilating the philosophical ideas which underlay modern progress. In speaking of modernisation, Gibb says:

'It was not the technological revolution in itself which determined the way in which the Western societies evolved, but the philosophy, the rationale of the West which gave direction to the manner in which the new discoveries and new techniques were exploited.'²

It seems to have eluded former Nationalists that it was necessary to accept the basic philosophic ideas of the West in order to be able to make use of its technology. 'Without this, it would be impossible to assimilate European technology.'³ Tāhā Husayn was to emphasise this same point years later in his Future of Culture in Egypt. Lutfi as-Sayyid dealt with other problems in Egypt such as the family and the problem of marriage, and the problem of the Arabic language. He saw the solution to these problems in the light of national independence which would generate the virtues of freedom and representative government.

Raoul Makarius has put forward the theory of the three stages of the evolution of Egyptian ideas, an evolution seen in the context of

economic development in Egypt.\textsuperscript{1} The first stage is the period of newly introduced capitalism ending with the declaration of the protectorate in 1914. This period he sees as dominated by the ideas of Muḥammad ʿAbduh. The second is the period between the wars - a period dominated by the ideas of such writers as Tāhā Ḥusayn (1889- ), al-Māzni, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal (1888-1956), and others. Haykal and his associates in the Liberal Constitutional Party formed as an opposition to the Wafd in 1922, supported neither the return to the past of the conservatives nor the complete cutting adrift from the past advocated by the secularists. Rather they were in support of a policy of a slow process of education and reform. Theirs was to be a cautious adaptation of European methods to the existing level of general education in Egypt. Through their newspaper ḍīrāsāt, edited by Haykal, they began to promote this slow revolution. Their greatest success must be their organisation of the Egyptian University. On the negative side, their attitude provoked first the establishment of the newspaper al-Fath, which attacked them as a group which saw all Egyptian questions in terms of European ideas. Later still, this opposition led to the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1927. The third stage of this evolution is given by Makarius as beginning towards the end of the Second World War when capitalism was in full force with all its attendant problems. This period was dominated by the adherents of Socialism and Marxism.

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood challenged the fundamental assumption of the historical development of modern Egypt: the assumption that there is a unified modern civilisation called into existence by Western Europe and that Egypt must form part of this modern civilisation.

\textsuperscript{1} Makarius, op. cit. p. 21.
The Muslim Brotherhood claimed the right to speak for the people and demanded the establishment in Egypt of an Islamic state. Hasan al-Bannā, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood, had been educated in the Azhar and was influenced greatly by the Manarists. The Brotherhood was well-organised, and its influence was soon evident in every facet of Egyptian life. It was characterised by an intense faith in Islam and a readiness to support this faith with violence. It had a lot of investments, and it established schools and mosques not only in Egypt but also in other Arab countries such as Syria. Hasan al-Bannā was assassinated in 1949, and Nuṣaibī became the leader of the Brotherhood. Because of its violence and involvement in politics, it was suppressed after the Revolution of 1952.

Writing in *What Is Our Message?*, Hasan al-Bannā says:

'It is the culture and civilisation of Islam which deserve to be adopted (in solving Egyptian social problems) and not the materialistic philosophy of Europe.'

But the man who set down the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood was Muḥammad Ghazzālī. He wrote many books such as *Islam and Economic Conditions, Islam and Political Despotism*. In 1950 his book *Min Runā Na‘īlam* was published to refute the ideas put forward in a book by Khālid Muḥammad Khālid(1920–), *Min Runā Nabda*. Khālid had restated the thesis of Ḥalīl ‘Abd al-Rūfīq about Islam having nothing to do with politics and the general ordering of society. In *Min Runā Na‘īlam*, Ghazzālī preached a return to the Qur’ān and the traditions of the Prophet. He asserted that it was necessary to have an Islamic state which would defend Islam, command what is good and prohibit what is evil. He emphasised the importance of *jihād*. The problems of the country could be solved through

Islamic socialism which would be based on monotheism and the brotherhood of men. Besides these assertions and pious declarations, the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood were vague and completely out of touch with the realities of the historical development of Egypt.

By the time 'Ali Ahmad Bār-Kathīr arrived in Egypt in 1934, the ideas of Muslim Brotherhood had been silenced (but not completely destroyed, since it was the inevitable movement of historical development), stemming from the ideas and attitudes which underlay the publications of 'Ali 'Abd al-Rāziq (Islam and the Basis of Political Authority) and Tāhā Ḥusayn (On Pre-Islamic Poetry). 'Abd al-Rāziq had been educated in al-Azhar and Oxford. He maintained in his book that the mission of Muhammad was purely spiritual and not political. Abū Bakr created the Islamic state and tainted it with religious undertones. This interpretation of Islamic history led him to answer in the negative his major question 'Is the Caliphate necessary?' and, growing out of this question, another one 'Is there an Islamic system of government?'. As would be expected, he was condemned by the paper al-Fath just as Tāhā Ḥusayn was because of his book On Pre-Islamic Poetry. The uproar which arose around these two books 'was a turning-point in Egyptian thought'.

The violent reaction to his book made Tāhā Ḥusayn proclaim his philosophy of the dual nature of man - as a rational philosopher and a sentient believer in Islam. But in another book published in 1933 Tāhā Ḥusayn seems to have returned to his original revolutionary self. The publication of this book, Safran says,

'was intended to stop what he (Tāhā Ḥusayn) considered to be a drift into intellectual chaos and in which he pleaded once again the case for an unequivocal Western orientation.'

2. Safran, op. cit. p. 175.
In the book entitled *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Taha Husayn propounded his theory of the Mediterranean mind of Egypt. Egypt's rightful place was with Europe. Thus, in accepting Westernisation, there could be no discrimination. Egypt must take both the good and the bad. As for those who talked of the spirituality of the East and the materialism of the West, it was either that they did not understand the West or else they overestimated the East.

The social situation referred to above in connection with the theory of Makarius was soon to alter the intellectual demands of the society. The death of Sa'id Zaghloul in 1927, the repeal of the 1923 Constitution, the failure of the Wafd in the 1936 Treaty, the humiliation attendant on the British imposition of an unpopular government in 1942 and the problems of capitalist industrial expansion after the Second World War - all these now demanded national liberation and social justice.

Before continuing the discussion of the solutions offered on both sides of the intellectual movement to the problems of liberation and social justice, it is necessary to pause briefly to consider the problem of women in the new Egypt. This is because it touched both the radicals and the conservatives, since they had wives and daughters. Whereas their pronouncements on politics and social justice might be accepted as possibilities with little scope for immediate implementation, any pronouncements they made on the subject of the liberation of women from ancient Muslim customs such as the veil might be tested against their own family and relations. One may note that the process of secularisation continued despite the opposition of conservatives while the position of women remained, with few exceptions, as it had been long before the contact with the West in spite of the wishes of the radicals. The problem of the liberation of women in Egypt was a pointer
to what was wished as against what really was allowed to be.

*Neither* both the secular and the theocratic trend in the Egyptian intellectual movement did *not* ever take sides strictly according to their public postures on other issues.¹ Centuries of Islam had locked up woman and restricted her to the kitchen or the harem. Qāsim Amin wrote a book in 1899 entitled *Tahri al-Mar'a*. He was born in 1865, of Kurdish stock. He had a French education, and was much influenced by French writers. In this book Qāsim Amin attributed the cause of decay in Islam to the disappearance of social virtues. This disappearance of social virtues stemmed from ignorance which began in the family. The role of woman was to form the morals of the society, but she was not free. To restore social virtues and revive Islam, woman must be set free. This was to be done through her education. If she was educated she could be economically free and able to earn her keep. Ba-Kathir deals in his play *Cats and Mice* with the implications and complications that could result from having an economically independent woman for a wife. The second suggestion which Qāsim Amin made was that polygamy must be abolished and the political rights of women asserted. In a second book, *al-Maṣāḥ al-Jadidah*, published in 1900, Qāsim Amin strengthened his arguments by incorporating Western social thought, especially the writings of Herbert Spencer. As would be expected, these books were roundly condemned by Rashid Riḍā and his Manarists.

By the end of the Second World War this issue of the position of women in the Egyptian society, as well as many other issues on which the secularists and the conservatives were in disagreement, had been overtaken

¹ Dr. F.J.E. Cachia has given the example of 'a leading modernist like al-'Aqqad' and his attitude to the problem of women in Egypt. 'Assumptions and Aspirations of Egyptian Modernists', p. 24.
by social change. Industrially, Egypt had taken over as much of Western technological advances as possible. The Sharifia had long before been sidetracked in favour of Western legal systems. Moreover, the social problems attendant on an industrial state called for social justice. Egypt's problems after the war were twofold: the achievement of social justice, and the achievement of complete independence. As stated above, the solutions which the Muslim Brothers offered, and which they backed with violence, were out of touch with the realities of the extent of secularisation in the Egyptian society.

As for the Leftists, they were an amalgam of genuine Marxists, half-baked socialists and unemployed anarchists. They felt strongly both the urgency of doing away with the British presence and bringing about social justice in Egypt. Like most intellectuals from the Afro-Asian states, these people were attracted by Marxism and saw the salvation of their country in terms of a socialist revolution. But they were not united in one single body. Instead, they clustered around a number of ephemeral newspapers, disbanding whenever the authorities struck and re-clustering when the authorities relaxed. It is therefore difficult to enumerate what the ideas of these intellectuals were except that, like the theocratic Muslim Brothers, they too were opposed to the British presence and appalled by the gap between the rich and the poor. It is possible to say that the ideas of these Marxists might have crystallised into parties and groups but for the Revolution of 1952.

The Free Officers, under the leadership of 'Abd an-Nasir, staged a successful coup d'etat in 1952. In his Philosophy of the Revolution, 'Abd an-Nasir gives a picture of the confused state of ideas in Egypt at the time of the coup:
"Every idea we listened to was nothing but an attack on some other idea." ¹

The leaders of the Revolution refused to come into the arms of either the Muslim Brotherhood or the Marxists. The Muslim Brotherhood was later banned and the leaders gauged or hanged. The Marxists were suppressed at the very time 'Abd an-Nāṣir was being welcomed in Communist countries. Political and intellectual freedom was suppressed during the period of 'Abd an-Nāṣir's leadership. He satisfied neither the Marxists nor the conservatives. While his banning of the Muslim Brothers might have pleased the Marxists, his involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict had the complete support of only the conservatives. For everybody his image of dynamism in the face of European powers, especially Britain, was a welcome substitute to much-needed social reforms at home.

This, then, was the intellectual background against which 'All Ahmad Bā-Kathīr lived and worked for thirty-five years before he died in 1969. The following exposition of his main ideas will show that he was always on the side of the conservatives. Moreover, and with all the awareness of his family's denial of his ever being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, his work can be read as a literary apologia for the ideals of that Brotherhood. What is more, Bā-Kathīr is the only writer of note who consistently dealt with themes which can be associated with the ideas of the theocratic trend of the Egyptian intellectual movement.

It will not be too much to say that Bā-Kathīr's exasperation at Western imperialism in the Middle East fed his creative powers all his life. His continuous attacks on these Western powers in his plays form the bulk of his writing. Naturally he saw beyond the exit of Western powers from the Middle East. This led him to the more difficult problem

¹ 'Abd an-Nāṣir, Egypt's Liberation (translation of Falsafat al-Thawrah), p. 34.
of criticising Arab governments who might not feel too well-disposed to tolerate him. In later years he had to resort to themes from mythology and history to conceal his criticism of these countries. But on both the problem of Western powers in the Middle East and the state of weakness of the Arab countries, his call was to everybody to rally round an Arab-Islamic flag. While it is easy to say that anyone who professes Islam as his religion might be invited to join, how does one define an Arab? As far as Bā-Kathīr is concerned, he does not seem to have had much trouble in doing this. One of his characters declares indignantly to another one:

'You ignorant thing . . . Arab nationalism is not based on races, and anyone living in the land of the Arabs is an Arab although he might by race be a Chinese. Take Salah al-Dīn al-Ayyūbi, who was of Kurdish origin. Was he not one of the heroes of the Arabs and of Islam? And Nūr al-Saʿīd, said to be of Kurdish origin too, is he more than a traitor among traitors to the Arab cause?'

The reference to Kurds in this speech is explained when one knows that this particular play, The Unique Leader, deals with Iraq under Qāsim.

In the two novels Wā Islāmāḥ and Sirat Shujā' one finds statements to the effect that someone has betrayed the country and Islam. Bā-Kathīr

1. The Unique Leader, Act I, p. 10.

يا جاهل ١٠٠ ان القومية العربية ليست عصرية
فكل من يقيم في الوطن العربي فهو عربي ولو كان أصله من الصين . هذا صلاح الدين
الآباري من أصل كرد فهل كان الا بخلا من أبنال العربية والإسلام ؟ وهذا نوى
السعود يقال انه من أصل كرد فهل
كان الا خائنا من خونة العرب ؟
uses bilād for country in this context, and this is supposed to cover all the Arab lands.\(^1\) Other terms used to designate the same idea besides bilād al-"Islām are dīn wa wāsān,\(^2\) Ṣumāh wa dīn,\(^3\) bilād al-"Arab wa al-"Islām,\(^4\) bilād al-"Arab wa al-Muslimīn,\(^5\) al-Dawla wa al-Wāsān wa al-"Arab wa al-Islām.\(^6\) These terms occur so profusely that it is not possible to list all of them. What is of major interest here is that words denoting territorial limits go hand-in-hand with religion.\(^7\)

There is nothing particularly original in this idea of BR-Katīf. The concept of religion being the boundary to be recognised rather than national boundaries is a centre-piece in the ideas of the Muslim Brothers. His addition, that the whole history of all the countries in the Middle East, pre-Islamic as well as post-Islamic, is the heritage of all Arabs and Muslims, is not original either. In the furtherance of this idea he chose themes from the history and mythology of different Arab countries.

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1. WA Islāmāh, p. 142.
2. ibid., p. 192.
3. ibid., p. 260.
4. Sirat Shujā', p. 27.
5. ibid., p. 237.
6. ibid., p. 293.
7. ibid., p. 265.
Bâ-Kathîr quotes two lines from al-Mutannâfî at the beginning of his historical play Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti to support his concept of the unity of all the aspects of the history of Arab countries:

ابة أبي يوم التاخر يعرب
وجدكم فرعون أضحى بر جدن

Writing much later in Fann al-Masrahiyya, he asks:

"Is Egypt not an Arab country in the first rank of Arab countries? Is its ancient history not part of its whole history and so has to be part of the history of Arabs whose heritage ought to be dear to everyone: the Pharaonic civilization in Egypt, the Babylonian civilization in Iraq and the Phoenician civilization in Syria? What is the difference between these civilizations and the Sabaean civilization in Yemen? Are all these not connected with the inhabitants of these ancient regions who are the ancestors of the Arabs of to-day in these parts?"

This concept is not completely unlike al-‘Aqqâd’s concept of equating Arab with Semite.

Like his idea that opposition to Western imperialism and internal reform must be organised around a 'Muslim core of consciousness', Bâ-Kathîr’s concept of Arab history was not particularly original. The interesting thing is that it ties up with that of the Muslim Brothers.

1. Akhnatun wa Nifirtiti, p. 11.
Another point of agreement between Ba-Kathir and the Muslim Brotherhood is the readiness to use violence to achieve their political aims. While the Brotherhood used violence in reality, Ba-Kathir employs it in the only area he controlled, his writing. A revolution ends the following plays: An Empire for Sale, God's Chosen People, The Unique Leader, The Simple Fellah and Judah's Kail. It would seem as if Ba-Kathir believed during the period he wrote the comedies that a few coups d'état and a few executions would solve the problem of the Arabs. In none of the five plays listed above are we told of what follows the coups d'état. What we get is a euphoric feeling that, since some people have been shot dead, there will be peace.

Much later, Ba-Kathir seemed to have changed his opinion from this simplistic attitude to a more realistic attempt to imagine what best to do. In The Red Revolutionary he seems to come to the conclusion that, even when violence is on the side of justice and fair-dealing, it is still necessary to concede to the authorities the chance of putting things right. It may also be said that, by the time Ba-Kathir wrote this novel, he had lost his feeling that he had all the answers to all the problems which plagued the Arab countries, especially since the imperialists, who had been the ready whip-dogs, were now no more.

Ba-Kathir's Arab-Islamic unity was propped up by his reading of the history of those countries of the Middle East which are Arab, and was to be secured through the violent overthrow of governments. How did his use of language further his literary as well as his political aims? It would seem unusual that political aims are to be discerned in the language of literature. Generally, it is unusual, but Ba-Kathir considers the political implications of his language as well as the literary.
Language has always been a major problem for the Arab writer. One of the reasons for this situation is the dual nature of language in the Arab world where people have an ancient allegiance to the classical language while, at the same time, they express their day-to-day wishes, aspirations and ambitions in the colloquial language of their region. Each writer has had to make his own decisions as to which of these two he would use for his literary works. One writer has even used both in the same work! In discussing the problem of language, Ba-Kathir asks two questions: What type of reality is language supposed to serve - artistic reality or social reality? Must each region of the Arab world use its own colloquial language in drama? To begin with the problem of reality, a fellah is not supposed to speak like a professor of Arabic. But Ba-Kathir calls this a superficial, simplistic approach. Art, he says, is not a photographic recording of life. Art is an attempt at reproducing and expressing a critique of life. Othello speaks of Italy in Elizabethan English. Why is this accepted or acceptable? Ba-Kathir thinks that the Egyptian stage had been pampered into accepting colloquial language and the audience would not make the effort to follow a play in classical Arabic. Ba-Kathir goes on to say that no writer has ever recorded the speech of everyday life. It would bore his audience and his readers. The artist has had to embellish language to make it appeal to his audience. It is Ba-Kathir's belief that it is not possible to embellish colloquial language. The writer can only quote it. He therefore concludes that there is no artistic room for the writer to manoeuvre.

1. Tawfiq al-Jakim in his play al-Safqa.
Another consideration of Bā-Kathīr’s against use of the colloquial is that there is no generally accepted or acceptable colloquial for any particular region. Cairene colloquial is different from the colloquial used in Upper Egypt. Bā-Kathīr again concludes that since language is living and since, according to him, no writer can make the colloquial language grow, the classical language which he thinks is more responsive to individual writers is the language to use.

Besides all these literary reasons, Bā-Kathīr gives another reason, which is political. He believes that for the good of Arab-Islamic unity, writers must use the classical language of the Qur’ān so that they can address an audience larger than they would normally address using the colloquial of their regions.

It would be difficult to say categorically which of these two main reasons is more important in his decision to use the classical language in his works. In the section on Language in Fann al-Masāriyya Bā-Kathīr seems to give the impression that both literary and nationalistic considerations are important in making his choice.¹

Bā-Kathīr does not use a particularly striking style. One could read a page or two and recognise the style of Tāhā Husayn or Najīb Mahfūz. But there is nothing striking in the style of Bā-Kathīr except for the intrusion sometimes of phrases that could be of English origin. It could be said that he writes Arabic with ‘unrelieved good sense’. Sometimes this style is plain, clear, repetitive, for example:

¹ op. cit. FM, pp. 76 - 82.
At other times, his sentences are long-winded, as in the following sentence:

1. *Sirat Shujāʿ*, p. 16.
Even when Bā-Kathīr uses short sentences, they are often cliché-ridden.

In those plays which are not poetic drama, the plainness of the style of the novels can be seen. The characters seem to speak as if they were all one and the same person. The only time Bā-Kathīr makes any attempt to differentiate his characters is when he is consciously portraying social stratification.

1. Wā' Islāmīh, p. 103.
2. al-Dunyā Fawdā, p. 12.

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In the above dialogue, Bā-Kāthir resorts to Cairene colloquial Arabic to show the social positions of Ḫaṭṭah and Sonia, his doctor employer. Bā-Kāthir also differentiates the two characters in a second manner. He does this by making Ḫaṭṭah, a simple peasant of Upper Egypt extraction, wonder in astonishment at his mistress' refusal to use sugar in her coffee despite the fact that, thanks to Allah, they have sugar in abundance in the house. This second manner of characterisation is Bā-Kāthir's answer to those who insist that a playwright must use the colloquial on the stage in order to effect social stratification. One must notice, all the same, that this is a manner of character representation better suited to novel-writing than to writing for the stage.
The other feature of al-Kathîr’s style which brings in some variation is the phrases which could be of English origin. There are a few examples of these in the novels, such as:

1. وَأَنَّهُ فَوَزَّ ذلك والد سِيَّة
   (and above that, he is the father of Saniyya)

2. وَيَقَفُ مِنْ قَدْمِيهِ
   (and he stood on his two feet).

But it is in the plays that these examples are multiplied. This is especially so in the collection of plays Maṣrubaʾ as-Siyāsah, where the presence of English characters makes this a convenient character-identity. A few of the examples which can be found in the plays are:

3. هَبَ انَّ النَّفَرْقَ قَد عَدَلْوَا
   (Given that the Europeans have been fair . . .)

and

4. اِبْنَ آدم يَمْوت وَعَمْهُ يَقِيمُ بَعْدَهُ
   (Man dies but his work remains behind him).

While the first example is not uncommon in Arabic, the second echoes the Shakespearean lines from Julius Caesar:

'The evil that men do lives after them;

The good is oft interred with their bones.'

1. Sirat Shujâ‘, p. 146.
4. Ibid., p. 137.
5. Act 3, Scene 2.
Sometimes Bā-Kathīr makes use of more than just the phrase which might recall an English equivalent. He uses an idea which might not necessarily have an Arabic equivalent. For instance, some men are labelled in Sha'b Allāh al-Mukhtar as:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{انهم جميعا طابور خامس} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(They are all fifth columnists).

The conclusion one can reach from all this is that, when writing prose passages, Bā-Kathīr took hardly any pains with his style. He was more concerned with communicating his ideas than with making an attempt at elegance. But in his poetry, especially as shown in the poetic dramas, he was more careful, and this is why these plays read better and are more interesting stylistically than the other plays.

1. *Sha'b Allāh al-Mukhtar*, p. 34.
"It is a pity that one cannot see the learned entrails of authors so as to discover what they have eaten."

- Freud
The foregoing, then, has been an attempt to see how Ba-Kathir solves the problem of the conflict implicit in drama between an alien literary form and the Islamic content of his plays. It must be obvious by now that Ba-Kathir was not conscious of this conflict between form and content in drama. Because Ba-Kathir was not conscious of this conflict, he did not work towards resolving it. One may temper censure of a playwright or a novelist for being ignorant of the basic features of the form in which he is working, especially if such a form has evolved from a literary and cultural experience different from his own as is the case of drama in Arabic Literature. But the critic must carry full blame for such ignorance. The role of the critic is not only that of helping the public to a better appreciation of an artist but also aiding the artist to a greater realisation of his potentialities by way of giving him a deeper comprehension of his work. The Arabic critic of drama has not shown any deep comprehension of the drama form and he has therefore not been of much help to the Arab playwright.

In the particular case of Ba-Kathir, who was aware of some of the historical development of drama in the West, his lead was not pursued because of two main reasons. The first is that his politics alienated those who could have benefited both themselves and Ba-Kathir from such a follow-up. Time and the changes it brings to political questions will erase this basic antagonism. More and more, literary questions are likely to transcend political bickerings in the consideration of the careers of literary men. It means, then, that Egyptian critics will redeem the name of Ba-Kathir and give him his proper place among contemporary writers. Should they fail to do this, it would seem that non-Egyptian critics interested in Arabic Literature of the modern period will have to continue to call the attention of Egyptians to him.
This is already happening, especially with more work being done on Dā-Kathîr’s contribution to the blank verse and free verse movements in Modern Arabic Literature. Perhaps this is good in that a much-needed historically critical perspective not easily achieved from within may be applied to Arabic Literature in Egypt.

The second reason for the neglect of the work of Dā-Kathîr is the feeling that he is a bad writer anyway. Nobody until now has attempted to justify or refute this statement. Taking into consideration the amount Dā-Kathîr published—about seventy plays, five novels and contributions of poetry to magazines and anthologies (although quantity does not guarantee quality)—this feeling may not be altogether true. Others with a similar record have found for themselves places in the history of contemporary Arabic Literature.

Dā-Kathîr’s historical novels are still read and reprinted. For a writer given to discursive and long-winded reportage, Dā-Kathîr might have been better advised to stick to prose narrative. He is almost incapable of making anything happen on the stage. His dramatic points are made in dialogue, rather than in action. Moreover, he either lacked the artistic courage to explore the possibilities of language, or else he had no patience for it.

As for his poetry, the situation is a little different. Those poems written in the tradition of classical Arabic poetry arouse hardly any interest in critics of modern Arabic poetry. On the other hand, his experiments in blank and free verse (Dā-Kathîr does not distinguish between these two) are of importance to those movements in Modern Arabic Literature.

More than any other contemporary playwright, Dā-Kathîr worked towards reversing the history of the theatre in Egypt. He had before
him an audience which had been pampered with buffoonery and raised on local jokes. He decided to lift it to the level of sophistication nearing what would be expected in a modern society. More drastic still for the history of the theatre in Egypt and for his literary career was Bā-Kathfr's decision to use classical Arabic for his comedies. But in both endeavours he failed.

One reason is that he was not a cynic by nature, nor was he cut out by upbringing to amuse others. For one who wished to write comedy, he took himself far too seriously and too earnestly. That some of his comedies succeeded was in spite and not because of himself. One can almost picture Bā-Kathfr waiting impatiently for the audience to stop clapping for Juḥā and listen to his political hand-out.

A second reason for Bā-Kathfr's failure is that he dealt with social and political realities in his comedies. He should either have dealt with both problem and solution realistically or else he should simply have satirised both social and political situations without overburdening his material with once-and-for-all-time solutions. But Bā-Kathfr was too committed a writer to avoid providing answers, answers which were unrealistic, and he had nothing of the cynic to take joy in simply making fun of others. By mixing realistic problems with unrealistic solutions, prescribing answers rather than provoking questions, Bā-Kathfr contributed in no small measure to the failure of the bulk of his comedies.

If

'in comedy we see the petty vices laid bare and in tragedy (we see) the royal evils which 'teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weake foundations guilden roofes are builded'.'

then orthodox Muslim society cannot nurture tragedy any more than another monotheistic society can. Bā-Kathīr would have had to go outside himself and outside his own society in order to produce a tragedy worthy of that name. Here too, as in the comedies, both Bā-Kathīr and Muslim society must share the responsibility for the inability to nurture tragedy in Modern Arabic Literature. It is not as if any other Arab playwright operating within the same conditions as Bā-Kathīr has been able to produce a worthwhile tragic play.

While some of Bā-Kathīr's comments on drama in Arabic Literature are sometimes deeply discerning, such as the relationship between ritual dance drama and the ultimate development of drama as an independent art form, others are superficial and not fully explored. The reference here is particularly to Bā-Kathīr's suggestion of the monotheistic nature of pre-Islamic paganism. Pre-Islamic paganism had a religion 'qa'im 'alā al-Tawḥīd'. This was the religion of Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl. Because the religion was monotheistic, says Bā-Kathīr, no deep ritualistic system evolved comparable to that which produced Greek religious drama. By refusing to pursue the logic implicit in his statements, by stopping halfway to make convenient conclusions, Bā-Kathīr makes it impossible for himself to understand the drama form he is using. Always, he seems impatient to get on to his political and social message.

As has been noted in this thesis, many of Bā-Kathīr's comedies end in revolutions overthrowing the regime which is not friendly to his political ideas. This has led to facile articles in the Arabic press about the works of Bā-Kathīr and the place of revolution in them. As far as one can make out, Bā-Kathīr's revolutionary solution is nothing

1. FM p. 31.
more than a military take-over of power and an immediate handing-over of such power to a group dedicated to a return to pristine Islam.

Ba-Kathir was too keen a propagandist to allow his artistic talent to take its natural course. He was too conservative an artist to venture beyond the confines of the form. He was too much of a Muslim to subject his material to the directives of his borrowed form. He was too set in his ways to sympathise with the march of events, especially the process of secularism in Egypt. He was too egocentric to change his opinions. No wonder, then, that he was out of step with most of his contemporaries, since:

'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us — and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket'.

While the present generation might object to Ba-Kathir, future generations are likely to turn to his work to see how a Muslim of conservative disposition treated imaginatively the social and political conflicts of his age. His solutions are not likely to be of interest to them, but his approach, his experiments and even his failures will have something to say to them.

APPENDIX

Critical Summaries of Some Other Plays of Ba-Kathir
Mentioned but not Dealt with in Detail
in the Body of the Thesis
This is one of the few plays of Bā-Kathīr which have lists of dramatis personae. However, as if to offset this advantage, the acts are conventionally numbered but the scenes are numbered independently of the numbering of the acts.

The Sultan is ill and on the verge of death. The French Crusaders are at the doors of the Islamic Empire. The Mamluks, who form the bulk of the Egyptian army, refuse to obey their commander Fakhr al-Dīn when he orders them to face the enemies of Islam. When Fakhr al-Dīn complains to the ailing Sultan, he is angry with them and orders some of them to be executed. But these are later pardoned. The Sultan refuses the request of the soldiers that Fakhr al-Dīn be relieved of his post as commander of the army. This refusal angers the Mamluks. But Fakhr al-Dīn tells them of his plan to depose the Sultan and take his place in spite of his oath of allegiance to the Sultan.

The Sultan's wife, Shajarat al-Durr, is in sympathy with the Mamluks. Her own son had died, and another son of the Sultan, Tūrān Shāh, left the palace long ago when he was young. Shajarat al-Durr plans that, when the Sultan dies, the news shall be kept secret so that the French will not exploit the disorder that may follow uncertain succession. It becomes more difficult to place Shajarat al-Durr's sympathy when she sends Ahmad to tell Fakhr al-Dīn to beware of the Mamluks.

At the court of Louis IX of France, the women exchange gossip. But they are of little importance to the action of the play generally and to this scene in particular. Bā-Kathīr's use of the wife of Louis IX as the defender of Islam and all things Islamic is unsatisfactory and savours of the apologetic literature of many Muslim writers at the
beginning of this century. There is the special example of al-‘Aqqād, who quotes the opinion of European Orientalists extensively in support of Islam on the grounds that the praise of an enemy is worthy of the notice of Europeans.  Ahmad, who is a honey-maker, escapes and flees the Sultan’s palace because he is not allowed to marry his cousin Na‘īsa. The Sultan dies; and, while Egypt awaits the return of Turān Shāh, Fakhr al-Dīn deputises for him. He sends messengers to the French King offering him Jerusalem, Ascalon and Tiberias if he refrains from attacking Egypt. Some of the courtiers of the King advise acceptance, while others counsel rejection. Ahmad, who is now at the court of the King, is called to give his view, partly to test his sincerity to the French. He advises the French to reject the offer on the grounds that Fakhr al-Dīn is in no position to defend himself against the French. The King takes this view, and prepares for war with Egypt. Ahmad goes away to a lonely spot to cry for betraying Islam on account of a peasant girl.

But we are also told that Ahmad’s rôle is that of an agent provocateur in the French court. When the French attack Egypt they are defeated. Fakhr al-Dīn dies in the first battle when the Manluks abandon him. Ahmad comes under suspicion of being a Muslim spy against the French and is put in prison. Two reasons lead to his final release and acquittal. One is that, while the battle was going on, he saved the life of a French officer. He has him put in a safe place in the palace of the Sultan. When the fighting is over they go together back to the French, and the officer testifies to Ahmad’s sincerity. The second reason is that Margaret, the French Queen, supports Ahmad and, no matter what he is accused of, she defends him. Fortunately for Ahmad, the King accepts her views. Ahmad is interrogated about his activities on the day of the battle.
The ease with which Ahmad deceives the French is unacceptable. They have to be morons to accept such excuses as he gives for his actions. He is not particularly intelligent, either. One wonders how he is able to sway monarchs and experienced courtiers. Za-Kathir loses the concentration of the play by going into the problems of Louis IX and his wife.

When the French are defeated the King is captured with most of his court. This is made possible by the work of Ahmad. To the annoyance of intelligent readers, the Queen continues to defend not only Ahmad but Muslims in general.

Conveniently, Ahmad is made (by the playwright) to avoid encountering his erstwhile friends whom he has betrayed, and nobody raises the question with the Queen who, we are suddenly told, is nine months pregnant. Turan Shāh becomes the Sultan of Egypt, but he is very rapacious and so alienates Shajarat al-Durr and Ahmad, the latter because of his interest in Na‘īsa.

The agreement between the French and the Muslims is that the French should ransom their King and his family. But the French delay in paying the ransom. Meanwhile, Turān Shāh has been killed, and Shajarat al-Durr becomes the Sultāna. Through her kindness, the prisoners are treated well. Margaret goes away to raise the ransom. While she is away, the Muslims attack the town of Demiæ where the French King has his army. Margaret pays part of the money, and the King and his court are set free. Ahmad is able to marry Na‘īsa at last.
This is the first of a trilogy dealing with the French invasion of Egypt in 1798. The other two plays were never published, if ever they were written. There are too many characters, possibly as a result of the intended length.

Nothing happens in the first act; it merely describes the situation of Egypt at the time. The focus of attention is a group of blind beggars who are apparently very rich and who are trusted by leading citizens of Cairo. The head of this group is Shaykh Sulaymān. Sulaymān nourishes a private ambition, known to his followers, of ruling Egypt since he is an Egyptian in flesh and blood. He does not believe—and in this he seems to represent the view of the playwright—that the Mamluks will defend Egypt against the French, because they do not belong to the country. They are not dependable in the fight for Allah. The best course of action at this point is to organise a people's army.

‘Umar Makram does not agree with Shaykh Sulaymān's solution. He incites the people to riot and to disobey the French. Many rich people, in the face of the French victory, come to deposit their wealth, mostly jewellery, with Shaykh Sulaymān.

Napoleon is now settled in Egypt. There still exist some pockets of resistance to his rule, but he fears the English and the Turks rather than the Egyptians. He is highly-strung, unhappy and restless. He writes a letter and then tears it up. In a discussion with one of his aides, he reveals his aim of coming to Egypt as the liberator of Egyptians from the Mamluks and the Turks. When Shaykh Sulaymān comes to see him, they discuss the possibility of creating companies of soldiers made up of fellahs and other Egyptians. Napoleon is intelligent
enough to see through this, especially the possibility of such a force being deployed against him. After Sulaymān leaves with nothing positive from Napoleon, the wife of Murād Bey, a prisoner of Napoleon, comes to see the Emperor. When Napoleon makes passes at her, she walks out. Napoleon moans that, despite his being conqueror of Italy and victor over the Mamluks, the traitor Murād Bey is happier than he is in that he has a faithful wife. We learn from his soliloquy that he has received a letter that day informing him of the unfaithfulness of Josephine in Paris.

Back in the house of Shaykh Sulaymān, there is a meeting of leaders from the whole of Egypt. The revolution against Napoleon is planned, and an opportunity is awaited to spring a surprise on the complacent French and the Mamluks.

Napoleon visits Shaykh Sulaymān, and offers him the Sultanate of Egypt. Shaykh Sulaymān refuses, and this refusal angers Napoleon. Shaykh Sulaymān suspects that Napoleon is only interested in using him. Dā'ūd, Sulaymān's half-wit of a son, has his wife in the fifth month of pregnancy. We have been told in Act I that she is pregnant. Thus, all the incidents recorded in Acts II and III have taken place within the last five months.

The revolution fails. After seven hundred and twenty-nine people have been interrogated and executed, the French still cannot find the leader of the revolution. One would have expected Napoleon to know or suspect that it is Shaykh Sulaymān. Bā- Kathir's aim seems to be to make the point that none of the people interrogated feared to die 'fi sabīl Allah'. Napoleon has both Shaykh Sulaymān and his associate, Shaykh al-Sādāt, arrested. They are interrogated and both refuse to admit responsibility for the leadership of the revolt. Napoleon promises Shaykh Sulaymān his safety on condition that he co-operates with him.
'After you have killed my wife, Umm Djstl?' asks Sulaymān. Napoleon replies that she is alive. She comes out and Shaykh Sulaymān is happy. When Napoleon stretches out his hand to seal their newly made understanding, Shaykh Sulaymān spits on him. Napoleon orders his immediate execution along with Shaykh al-Sādāt. Both of them go to their deaths heroically defiant of the French.

Qīṭṭa wa Firān

There are only five characters in this play - 'Ādil, the well-read son of Dr. Rāqī, a gynaecologist; Ramzī, the friend of 'Ādil; Nafīsa Hānem, mother of Sāmiya and a widow who later marries Dr. Rāqī, himself a widower, 'Ādil's mother having died some time earlier. The continuous working hours of Sāmiya threaten to break her marriage. Sāmiya saves all her money. 'Ādil is dissatisfied as a result of his wife's neglect of him. He talks of murdering her. Nafīsa Hānem 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. Rāqī tries to reconcile the young couple, and takes their children to live with him so that they will not witness the tension in their parents' home. Also, Dr. Rāqī gives money to the couple to ease the financial strain on 'Ādil's twenty-five pound salary. Sāmiya does not contribute to the housekeeping.

Dr. Rāqī is alarmed when his son kills a cockerel in order to get practice in taking lives. He takes 'Ādil to his house to look after him. Both Nafīsa Hānem and Sāmiya also come to stay in Dr. Rāqī's house. Together the two parents work to reconcile their children. Later 'Ādil and Sāmiya are reconciled, Sāmiya giving up her work. Both 'Ādil and Sāmiya find themselves opposed to the proposed marriage between Dr. Rāqī and Nafīsa Hānem. Later they accept it.
'Adil's friend, winning the hand of Qamar, a girl we know nothing about save the name, the number of happy couples rises to three. The only dark shadow is the news that Ramzi's former wife and her new husband have died on their honeymoon in an accident in the Lebanese mountains.

al-Dunyā Fawḍā

La Femme Moderne is a club run by the emancipated women of Egypt headed by the masculine woman president, Sonia. Dr. Ghandūra, another emancipated woman, is a biologist who has been carrying out sex change experiments on guinea-pigs. She now 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 her request to the executive committee of the club. The club's ideal is the complete liberation of women from the bondage of men. But they spend most of their time in the club discussing clothes. Aḥmad, cousin to Sonia and formally her future husband, calls at the club to see her. From this time to the end of the play, Aḥmad ironically becomes the centre of the action of the play instead of the women. Sūsū, an effeminate man, takes to Aḥmad. Later he drinks some of Dr. Ghandūra's potion and becomes a woman with the name of Susan. Susan now pursues 'her' desire and declares 'her' love for Aḥmad. 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. Ghandūra and Aḥmad 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. Far-fetched as this dream may seem, Dr. Ghandūra 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. Hasan is angry with Ahmad for taking his girl-friend. Dr. Ghandara storms off the stage (or page) calling curses on Ahmad for betraying her. Hasan and Susan console one another by deciding to get married. The play ends with Hasan and Ahmad discussing the possibility of forming a society for the protection of the rights of men.

Sirr Shahrazad

Shahrayar is in his Queen's bedroom. As usual in the beginning of many of Ba-Kathir's plays, there is no action. We learn that Shahrayar has sacked his wazir Nur al-Din and replaced him with Rukn al-Din who seems to be making a royal mess of everything. The people of the country are discontented. When his Queen is disappointed that Shahrayar is unwilling or unable to go to bed with her, she decides to hurt him. She brings a negro slave into her bed and then encourages one of her servants to tell on her. Shahrayar is enraged and he kills the slave. In further discussions between Budur, the Queen, and Shahrayar, she calls him a eunuch. So he kills her. In the National Theatre production of this play, Ba-Kathir writes in Fam al-Hasrahyya, the play starts from Act II 'so as to avoid any feeling of racial prejudice innocently apparent in Act I'. It would seem more reasonable to say that Act I can be ignored without doing any visible damage to the play. Act II begins three months after Act I. Shahrayar has been taking maidens one for each night and killing them the following morning. Now it is the turn of Nur al-Din's daughter Shahrazad. A friend intervenes, and Shahrayar puts Shahrazad off for seven days and orders the daughter of their neighbour, an old widow, to be taken to his palace. Meanwhile
two men, leaders of commerce, come to Nūr al-Dīn disguised. In a scene reminiscent of Macduff's visit to Malcolm in Macbeth and Cassius' to Brutus in Julius Caesar, these two men urge Nūr al-Dīn to save the country from the ravages of the King. Luckily for him, he is not as enthusiastic in his response as they are in their incitement, because they are in fact agents provocateurs from the King. When the old widow comes crying to Nūr al-Dīn for help, the King enters with armed guards. He 'plays back' (from the verbatim report he has been given) the words of Nūr al-Dīn, and orders his execution. He rescinds his seven-day grace for Shahrazād and orders her to be taken to his palace.

Rūqān, the wise tutor of Shahrazād, has taught his pupil something which might be useful for her. She is confident that everything will end well. Everybody believes, and the King encourages them to do so, that his action of taking one woman for one night only and killing her in the morning is the result of his disappointment when his wife betrayed his bed with a negro slave.

Shahrazād's secret is that she gives the King the impression that she is fearful of his ardour and finds it difficult to yield to him especially since his fame as a lady-killer frightens her. She also uses her talent for story-telling to her own advantage. She brings her sister with her, and both of them dance for the entertainment of the King. Soon Shahrazād cures Shahrayār of his impotence. But his mind is sick, and he sleep-walks, remembering his crimes, like Lady Macbeth. To cure this malady Shahrazād prepares a re-enactment of the circumstances of Budur's death. She puts a negro woman in her bed instead of a male. When Shahrayār sees what he thinks to be a man, he is furious, and gets his sword to kill again. Just in time it is revealed to him that he is wrong. He repents, and pays compensation to all who had lost their
daughters during the period of his madness. Furthermore, he endows all young girls getting married that year. With this, everything ends happily.

Sha‘b Allāh al-Mukhtar

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 Bā-Kathīr: the young are not in agreement with the policies of their elders. They therefore organise 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 an 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 the 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 an-Nāṣir. A resolution in the United Nations Organisation says that all Jews in former Israel must go back to their countries of origin.
This is not only a simple play, it is sometimes very simplistic. It exemplifies Bā-Kathīr’s unrealistic political wishful thinking. A peasant in ancient Egypt, on his way to the market with his harvest, is robbed of both the harvest and the donkey carrying it. He complains to the minister of the king, but the minister takes no action. Khanūm, the peasant, goes to the king. The king does nothing. Khanūm is in fact flogged and imprisoned for his impertinence in lodging complaints against the minister of the king. But he later becomes a member of the king’s court when he is released from detention. This gives him the opportunity to discover that the king is just and good but is powerless in the clutches of his unjust and bad minister. Khanūm further discovers that the minister has his eyes on the throne and is deliberately pushing the king to adopt unpopular policies so that there may be a revolution against the king and, in the confusion following it, the minister will take complete control of the country. The king becomes the only power standing between this tyranny and the people.

Khanūm organises the revolution. The people besiege the palace. The minister, his wife, and the man who had robbed Khanūm on his way to the market are all arrested. Khanūm makes a speech to the people to spare the lives of the king and his queen. This is done, and the revolution succeeds.
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THE MAIN WORKS OF BĀ-KATHĪR:

Plays

Akhnātūn wa ḫifīrtītī

Rūmīyū wa ḫīlīfīt (translated from Shakespeare)

Humām

Sirr al-Ḥakīm bi-amrillah

al-Daktūr Ḩāzmīn

Mismār Ḥudūd

Maʿsāt Ūdīn
Imbirāṭūriyya ff al-Mazād
Ilāh Isrā'īl
Hārūt wa Mārūt
al-Za'im al-Āḥad
Gulfidān Ḥānem

Epic Drama
‘Alā Aswār Dimashq
Ma'raka‘al-Jisr
Kisrā wa Qayyār
Abtāl al-Yarmūk
Turāb min Arḍ Fāris
Rustam

Novels
Salāma al-Qass
Wā Islāmāh
Sirat Shujā‘
al-Thā‘ir al-Āḥmar

Criticism
Fann al-Masrahīyya min khilāl tajārib fī al-shakhṣīyya